

**THE RELIGIOUS MINDSET INFORMING THE BIBLICAL
AUTHORS: THE BOOK OF JUDGES AS A CASE STUDY**

By

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DEDICATION

To Charlie and Shayah

DECLARATION

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I declare that this thesis, 'The religious mindset informing the biblical authors: the Book of Judges as a case study,' is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

I further declare that I submitted the thesis to originality checking software and that it falls within the accepted requirements for originality.

I further declare that I have not previously submitted this work, or part of it, for examination at Unisa for another qualification or at any other higher education institution.

Halima Sha



31 January 2024

Signature

Date

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis is a work of love to my Saviour God, YHWH who by His infinite love and wisdom set me on a path of discovery and revelation of Himself.

I wish to thank Prof. Magdel Le Roux for her invaluable support. I would also like to thank my family. I love you all very much.

ABSTRACT

Biblical archaeology primarily aims to describe, in this case, the history of the early Israelites using only rationalistic reasoning while disregarding the revelation that informs the biblical text on which the archaeology is based, leaving only a fragmented image of the early Israelites in Judges. This study has endeavoured to illumine the mindset informing the authors of Judges as a legitimate worldview. This was done by an examination of the lived experiences of the people who brought about the events in the Book of Judges that were perceived as authentic by them and the author/s responses to these occurrences. The examination encompassed an account of individuals, locations, eras, and holy edifices, such as those that contribute to gaining understanding of the perspective held by the author/s of Judges. This perspective primarily revolves around the revelation of God through a distinct covenant, religion, and way of life that He intended for the Israelites to perpetually uphold.

Thus, in the Book of Judges, a mindset becomes evident that was supposed to lead to a way of life which was distinct in the polytheistic setting of the ancient Near East. It is a religious perspective that is consequently always polemical because it insists that there is only one true God who requires sole worship within a covenantal relationship. The Israelites had the divine mission of presenting the Sinaitic covenantal lifestyle to the ancient Near Easterners. Thus, the religious mindset presented by the authors/ of Judges, ideally abolished polytheistic religious attitudes, the all-encompassing aspect of divination and associated lifestyle, ancient Near Eastern hierarchical social, economic, and religious structures and way of worship. It is perhaps because of this radical transformation of religious worship and life that mono-YHWH worship had to be opposed and ironically by the idolatrous Israelites themselves.

The themes within the narratives of Judges reveal much of what the mindset of the author/s of the Book of Judges is all about: a promotion of covenant and covenant loyalty, idolatry, judgment, and ultimately redemption. It is a mindset based on the love of YHWH who seeks to have a relationship with a people who frequently abandons Him and breaks His heart. The *multi-disciplinary approach* used was intended to bring to light the world and people and thus the mindset behind the text. Judges follows the pattern of the rest of the biblical narratives offering a mindset based on both logic and revelation. The people presented in the narratives are free to choose YHWH's revelation and redemption or not. Ultimately, the worldview held by the author/s of Judges expresses the concept that people may live holy and successful lives but that this is only possible if they exclusively worship and serve the God of the Israelite covenants.

Keywords

the Book of Judges; religious mindset; worldview; author/s; covenant; Sinaitic Covenant; monotheism; mono-YHWH; Angel of YHWH; Spirit of YHWH; Shema; idolatry; divination; prophecy;

prophet; inequality; ancient Near Eastern gods; Asherah; Baal; sacred space; sanctuary; Tabernacle; Shiloh; festivals; priesthood; sacrifice; offering; burnt offering; statue; warfare; Ark of the Covenant; theophany

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

There is a hidden worldview¹ embedded in the narratives of the Book of Judges that may be discerned predominantly through the author/s' criticism of Israelite idolatry (see Jdg 2:1-2; 6:8-10; 10:10-14) and allusions to general public lawlessness (Jdg 17:6; 21:25). It is a mindset inherited fundamentally from Deuteronomy² as well as earlier texts in the Old Testament that delineates YHWH's interactions with His people (cf 2.2.1.1; 2.2.2.1; 2.2.3-2.2.5). It is a worldview, therefore, that can be understood as a religious ideological framework that emerges from a distinct chronology of YHWH's historical interactions with the Israelites which is essentially based on YHWH's

¹ In addition to the word mindset, this study will use various other terms including, religious mindset and biblical worldview with a preference for worldview to refer to the mindset informing the author/s of Judges (see also 1.1.2).

² The history of the early Israelites developed from their theology. The close association between the two, theology and history as depicted in the Book of Deuteronomy is referred to as the Deuteronomic 'theology of history' since the course of early Israelite history was entirely dependent upon their fidelity to their covenant and YHWH (see Encyclopedia Britannica 2022. The Deuteronomic 'theology of History').

It lies beyond the scope of this study to discuss the distinction made between the terms 'deuteronomistic' and 'deuteronomic' (see Mullen 1984:33n1). Suffice it to say that Mullen (1984:33n1) defines the term 'deuteronomistic' as referring to the author (in the post-exilic period, after 536 BC) who compiled 'the final form of the history-like work' that covers Joshua to 2 Kings. Mullen specifically dates this author after circa 560 BC. The term 'deuteronomic' refers to the author/s of the preexilic period of Israelite history and is dated to the 7th century BC (see also Finkelstein and Silberman (2002:13-14).

Much of the refutation of the veracity of the history in Deuteronomy and its Mosaic authorship is based on the purported lack of evidence for a writing system at the time of Moses. According to the Documentary Hypothesis the early Israelites did not exist in an age of writing (Wellhausen 1885:393). Scholars conform to the Documentary Hypothesis based on the idea that archaeological evidence for an alphabetic script in the Hebrew language does not exist prior to the 10th century BC (Paton 1913:141). Archaeologists are convinced that Moses did not write the Pentateuch because the paleo-Hebrew script came into existence at Byblos only after 1050 BC while scribal schools emerged circa 800 BC (Gertoux 2016:144).

This study will avoid the use of both terms 'deuteronomistic' and 'deuteronomic' since certain archaeological evidence proves the aforesaid assumption of the Documentary Hypothesis to be erroneous. Albright (1938:186) in an article about several writing scripts extant in the ancient Near East at the time of the biblical patriarchs, notes that 'writing was well known in Palestine and Syria throughout the Patriarchal Age (Middle Bronze Age 2100-1500 BC). Albright observes that:

No fewer than five scripts are known to have been in use: Egyptian hieroglyphs, used for personal and place names by the Canaanites; Accadian [sic] cuneiform; the hieroglyphiform syllabary of Phoenicia used from the 23rd century or earlier (as known since 1935); the linear alphabet of Sinai, three inscriptions in which are now known from Palestine (this script seems to be the direct progenitor of our own); the cuneiform alphabet of Ugarit (used also a litter in Palestine), which was discovered in 1929. This means that Hebrew historical traditions need not have been handed down through oral transmissions alone.

Gertoux (2016:144) argues that scholars are aware that the Semites who came to Canaan from Egypt knew the proto-Canaanite script, the ancestor of the Old Hebrew language. It does appear that a writing system existed that was adapted to the Hebrew language contrary to its refutation by earlier scholars such as Paton (1913:14) and more recent scholars such as Finkelstein and Silberman (2002:13-14). Gertoux goes on to list the proto-Canaanite inscriptions discovered in Egypt and 'Palestine' that demonstrate clear Hebrew meanings. The oldest paleo-Hebrew epigraph, (found at Lachish in 2018) is dated to 1550-1480 BC (Gertoux 2016:144). See also Wiseman (1974:705); Jackson (1982:32); Free and Vos (1992:103). There was also a 'city of writers/books' Debir or Kiriath Sepher that the Israelites conquered (Jdg 1:10-12).

sacred covenants as narrated in the Old Testament (see Table 2.1). It is, however, important to note that this study is not concerned with matters related to the historicity of Judges but rather concentrates exclusively on reconstructing the worldview of the author/s of Judges. The reconstruction process primarily relies on the existing text of the Book of Judges which is further informed by insights gained from ancient Near Eastern archaeological discoveries of the Late Bronze Age and early Iron Age.

Given the aforesaid, the author/s of Judges³ hold to a religious mindset (see also 1.1.2) characterized by certain subtle motifs of covenant and monotheism (see Chapters Two and Three) that are present in Judges, and as demonstrated in the text, through the recurring theme of divine redemption (Jdg 3:7-10; 15, etcetera; cf Jdg 2:10-19; see Habel 1971:53; Kaiser 2009:112; cf Tweeddale 2019:104).⁴

Indubitably, the large-scale destruction of the Bronze Age cities and people created a power gap that allowed the Israelites to appear on the ancient Near Eastern political stage (Schwartz 2010:2-5; Stiebing 2001:16-19, 22-26).⁵ The Israelites brought with them a religion that redefined the

³ Although the author/s of Judges remain unknown, Jewish tradition as well as the *NIV* assign the penmanship of Judges to the prophet Samuel. According to the *NIV*, the phrase ‘in those days, Israel had no king...’ indicates that the Book was written during the pre-monarchic period and thus it was written during the lifetime of Samuel when Israel had no king (see also Talmon 1969:1-10). This study also acknowledges the scholarly opinion that the Book of Judges may have had numerous authors/editors with different redactional layers. In addition, the dating of the text, according to scholars, is associated with the scribes of period of the Exile. In light of the aforesaid, scholars hold that Judges is part of the Deuteronomistic history of Israel (Deuteronomy – 2 Kings) which dates from the early 7th to late 6th century BC although some parts were written after the fall of Jerusalem (for example 2 Kings 25:27-30; Hamlin 1990:3; cf Talmon 1986:39-52).

Hamlin (1990:4) remarks that some scholars believe that the Book of Judges was authored or edited by a single person while others think it was the work of a group or school of authors who held the same viewpoint as Deuteronomy. Hamlin (1990:4) opines that the Book of Judges demonstrates ‘evidence of careful composition by an individual member of this group with a particular point of view and purpose in mind.’ There is no evidence to date the Book of Judges. However, Hamlin (1990:4) proposes that the author of the Book of Judges whom he calls the Scribe likely wrote the text in the period after the death of king Josiah (cf Talmon 1986:39-52). The office of scribe became prominent at the reign of king Josiah (640 BC; see Hamlin 1990:4 and Van der Toorn 2007:9-233).

Scholars hold that the Exilic scribes are the main figures behind the writing of the Hebrew Bible (see Van der Toorn 2007:9-233). The Book of Judges seem to fit the period of king Jehoiakim and the period of the prophet Jeremiah about five hundred years after the events recorded in the Book of Judges itself, according to Hamlin (1990:3-4; cf Talmon 1986:39-52). Nevertheless, it is not the intention of this study to discuss the redactional layers and dating history of the Book of Judges.

⁴ This context emphasizes the profound symbolic significance of the mindset informing the author/s of Judges as it pertains to the redemption of both the Israelites and all other nations (cf Gn 12:1-3) within the setting of covenant and monotheism. Cf See Bible Hub 2022. zera.

⁵ At the end of the Bronze Age (ca 1200 BC), the great empires in North Africa, the Near East, and the Eastern Mediterranean were destroyed (see Schaeffer 1983:74-75; Drews 1993:33-48; Stiebing 2001:1-19, 22-26; Nur and Cline 2001:31-36; Finkelstein and Silberman 2002:87-89; Kaniewski, Guiot and Campo 2015:369-382).⁵ Tubbs (1998:85-106) provides a detailed description of the collapse of major Canaanite cities along the coastal region including inter alia, Gaza, Acre, Ashkelon and Ashdod, and inland, the cities of Hazor, Debir, Bethel and Beit Shemesh. Numerous causes for the end of the Bronze Age civilizations have been proposed; earthquakes, famine, droughts and war. The collapse of the great Bronze Age empires, however, remains a curious mystery (see Kaniewski, Guiot and

cultic and cultural landscape of Canaan at the end of the Bronze Age (ca 12th century BC) as evident in the archaeological record of that period.⁶ By means of the Sinaitic Covenant, the Israelites, understood that they were YHWH's elect people and asserted ownership of territory in Canaan where they instilled a mode of worship and lifestyle that was distinct within the context of the ancient Near Eastern polytheistic systems.⁷ The transformative power of the religious worldview held by, for example, the authors/s of Judges is demonstrated by the physical reshaping of Canaan into monotheistic places of worship (cf 1.1.1). Polytheistic ritual space/s are replaced with the

Campo 2015:369-382; Finkelstein and Silberman 2002:87-89; Nur and Cline 2001:31-36; Drews 1993:33-48 and Schaeffer 1983:74-75).

⁶ Contrary to the Biblical narrative of a 15th century settlement of Canaan (Wood 2005:475-489), some archaeologists, such as Ussishkin (2016:226) date the Israelite occupation of the highlands of Canaan to the 12th century BC. Ussishkin (2016:226) describes the 'conquest and settlement' of the Israelite tribes as historically, archaeologically and chronologically complex and problematic. Archaeology does record a definite 12th century Israelite presence on the highlands of Canaan (Ussishkin 2009:226; see 4.2.1.1a-b). Accordingly many scholars hold to a more traditional dating in the 13th century and some as late as the 12th century BC. Millgram (2018:503-506); Redmount (2001:58-89) present a discussion of the Israelites' settlement in Canaan. Millgram (2018:505) proposes that the biblical account of the origins of the Israelite in Canaan to be 'more persuasive' despite alternative scholarly views (see Meyers 2006:245-254; Lemche 2004:236-237) that state the Israelite occupation in the Iron Age I to be unrelated to the time period in the Biblical narrative.

An in depth discussion of the different 'conquest' models, dating and settlement theories falls outside the parameters of this study. Suffice it to say that various theories, in addition to the biblical 15th century BC Exodus-Conquest account have been proposed by scholars for the origins of the Israelites in Canaan. These theories are grouped into two categories: the internal and the external origins of Israel. External origins include the later 13th century date for the arrival of the Israelites in Canaan (Hargus 2000:6-8; cf Meyers 2006:245-254).

For proponents of a 13th-12th century BC Exodus date see Kitchen (1998:65-131), Hoffmeier (2012:1-20); cf Wood (2003:256-262), also Redford (1987:137-138; 1992:408-422) arguing against the authenticity of the Biblical Exodus, dating the event to the late-monarchic and later historical periods. At this time Canaanite memories of exile by the Egyptians were adopted and transformed into the Israelite Exodus by the Bible composers. Finkelstein (2015:49) expands this theory into that of an ancient memory that remained throughout the course of Israelite history finally to be expounded and redacted by the Priestly writers to suit the traditions and purposes of their time frame. See also Hendel (2015:65-80); Finkelstein and Silberman (2002:48-71); Van Seters (2001:255-257). Malamat (2012:21-30) believes that Egyptian records show a long and continuous Exodus over a period of centuries. For evidence of an Israelite presence in Egypt and sojourn to Canaan see also Bietak (2003:40-42, 44-47, 49, 82; 2015:17-37).

For a discussion of the Peaceful Infiltration theories which belongs to the external origins category see Dever (2003a:37-53); Hess (1999:495).

Internal origins include the Peasant Revolt (Hess 1999:497-498) and Pastoral Canaanites theories (Hess 1999:493). See also Rainey (2007a:41-64); Gottwald (1999:212-214, 219, 225) and Fritz (1981:70-71) on the origins of the Israelites.

Finally, for a short inclusive summary of all the dates and theorems pertaining to the Exodus, see Geraty (2015:55-64); cf Shea (2003:236-255); Longman (2009:67-81).

⁷ These statements may be viewed as problematical since there is no corroboration for the biblical account of the history of the Israelites in the archaeological record of Israel prior to circa 1200 BC. However, this would have been the mindset of the Israelites and the author/s of Judges. This was particularly a supernatural mindset that had as an impetus a belief in a God who determined their history and designated a homeland in which to establish their own independent culture and identity after being delivered from Egyptian slavery. In modern times, analogies for a similar mentality may be found in the history of the Voortrekkers of South Africa, who in their own 'struggle' for independence from British rule, set out to find a 'promised land.' Parallel to the Israelite tribes, the Voortrekkers had a strong (Calvinist) faith in a Supreme Being who would show them the way on their exodus into the interior country and with whom they made a covenant (see Meintjes 1975; Binckes 2013; Petzold 2007:115-131 who interprets the Voortrekker exodus as myth-making by Afrikaner history writers – similar to the accusations launched at the Book of Judges). Whatever one's point of view about this event might be, it is considered to be a valid part of South African history.

establishment of the Tabernacle at Shiloh and other areas settled by the Israelites (see Chapter Four) where Yahwistic rituals of worship constitute life as YHWH intended it to be (see Chapter Eight). Divine contact is now directed towards YHWH alone as determined by the laws and stipulations of the Sinaitic Covenant (see Chapter Five). However, after their arrival in Canaan, the early Israelites exhibit a startling tendency to turn away from YHWH and worship the gods of the Canaanites.

1.1.1 Cyclical times

The author/s of Judges describe cycles of idolatry when what is constituted in their worldview as adverse divine contact and anti-covenantal practices led the Israelites towards periodic confrontations with YHWH. Times of oppression and war and times of peace in which the covenant was probably restored typify the pre-monarchic period in the Book of Judges (Jdg 2:14-23, *NIV*; see Table 2.2).⁸ During the periods of oppression and warfare several judges were appointed to deliver the idolatrous Israelites from tyranny and usher in a period of peace and a restored covenantal lifestyle (cf Jdg 2:10-19; see Table 2.2).⁹ A few decades ago, Yadin (1975:250) discovered that the city of Hazor underwent two destructions. One of these destructions is believed to have occurred at the time Deborah and Barak, circa 1258 BC,¹⁰ went to war against the Canaanite general Sisera (see Figure 1.1). According to certain scholars, including Wood (2005:475-489), this destruction is evidence that confirms the biblical account. Yadin holds that the first of these devastations was caused by Joshua as recorded in the Book of Joshua (11:10-11) (Yadin 1975:250) which he dates to 1230 BC (Provan, Long and Longman 2003:179).

The history of Hazor from the Middle to the Late Bronze Ages has always been important since the dating of the Exodus is very closely associated with the date of the destruction/s of the city. Archaeologists are divided into an early date (15th century BC) and a later date (13th century BC) Exodus-Conquest Theory (see Figure 1.1; see Sha 2017:33; see also Petrovich 2008:489-512; see also Footnote 2).

⁸ Scripture references are taken from the *New International Version* (NIV) unless otherwise indicated.

⁹ Some question the word 'Palestine' as a proper designation for the area known as Israel and Gaza. It is generally held that Judea was renamed 'Palestine' by the Roman emperor Hadrian in 135 AD. Hadrian used the term in an attempt to destroy Jewish national identity which was tied to their land, Israel (Jacobson 1999:69; Feldman 1990:1-23. See also McCall 1997). This study will utilize the term Canaan to refer to the region known in modern times as the state of Israel since the word Palestine was not used in the Old Testament. The designator ancient Israel (or Israel) will at times be used although it is understood by some that the Israelites were not a political entity at the time of the Judges (despite the indication of 'Israel' as an entity on the ca 1200 BC Merneptah stele).

¹⁰ Judges does not record the actual destruction of Hazor by Deborah and Barak. However, Horn (1963:31) opines that 'undoubtedly Hazor was destroyed' to indicate that the destruction of Hazor is accepted as self-evident. See Wood (2005:475-489) supporting this view based on his interpretation of the archaeological data. Hoffmeier (2008:244), on the other hand, argues that the text gives the Israelites victory over Canaanites 25 miles from Hazor which implies that Hazor itself remained unscathed. See a discussion of Hazor and the scholarly debate surrounding the city's various destructions by Provan, Long and Longman (2003:179-181).



Figure 1.1 Layer of ash at Hazor. Indicative of Hazor's destruction, this layer of ash is dated to Joshua's destruction of the city (Chandler 2010)

Provan, Long and Longman (2003:181) note that the material record indicates Hazor to have been destroyed at four different times in its history. The dilemma created thus 'is which, if any, of these destructions' can be attributed to Joshua (Provan, Long and Longman 2003:180).

It should also be noted that additional research and recent findings from excavations have raised questions about the accuracy of the Exodus-Conquest theory (see Smith & Bloch-Smith 2021).

Nevertheless, Judges describes the idolatry (Jdg 3:5-6; 4:1; 6:1, 25-26; 8:27), apostasy (Jdg 2:10) and the syncretism of the Israelites (Jdg 17:3-5; 18:3-31) that evoked much criticism from the author/s of the book (cf Jdg 2:1-3; 6:8-9; 10:10-14). This situation would have been a shocking state of affairs since the landscape either reverted back to polytheism or a hybrid form of religion in which it may be said that the Israelites shared their domiciles and sacred space with both YHWH and the Canaanite gods (cf Jdg 6:25-26; 8:27, 33; 17:5).

Discovered, in the midst of destruction and ruins of Iron Age cities were cultic artefacts that indicate the idolatrous practices of the Israelites. At Tell el Far'ah (north) an Israelite site,¹¹ for example, a bronze plaque of the Egyptian goddess Hathor was found as well as a couple of terracotta chalices. Archaeologists believe that a cult 'incorporated into domestic life' was practised by the household to which the building belonged (Chambon 1993:439). As previously indicated, domestic religious worship would have consisted of a hybrid religion (Jdg 8:27; 17; 18:30-31; see Albertz 2008:90; cf Zevit 2001:81-123; 267-438, etcetera; Albertz and Schmitt 2012:75-84, 87-91). Stern (2001b:20-29) records the cult figurines discovered throughout Israel. Although primarily dated to the Iron Age II, the type of worship (syncretism) indicated by these relics would have been the same as that practised by the Israelites in the previous era (cf Jdg 17:3-5).

Archaeological corroboration for Israelite occupation of Tell el Far'ah (north) includes the discoveries of the four-room house (ca 1200 BC), collared *rim pithoi* or storage jars, water cisterns and terracing that are generally regarded as seminal markers of Israelite settlement in the central highlands (cf 6.2.1.1; Albright 1961:328-362; Finkelstein 1989:117-183; 2007:78, 88; Esse 1992b:81-

¹¹ Ancient/ biblical Tirzah – northeast of Shechem (Albright 1931:241).

103). However, Finkelstein (2007:77-78) remarks that the collared rim pithoi appear in lowland regions as well as in Iron Age I sites in Moab and Ammon (see also Mazar 2007b:85-90; see Footnote 221). Apparently, this situation could be the result of a shared preference for a specific pottery type reflecting the intermingling of the Israelites and Canaanite groups as reported in Judges 1:21-36; 3:5-6. Finkelstein (2007:76) also mentions that the water cisterns connected with the ethnicity of the Israelites are from earlier periods and only appear in a few settlements identified as Israelite (cf Mazar 2007b:88). However, the Israelites appropriated Canaanite sites with their high places intact and utilized the installations that came with them (Jdg 2:2; Jdg 6:25-26). Similarly, they would have made use of existing water cisterns as well as constructing their own (see Scheepers 2010:287). The early Israelites would have invented new technologies to develop, devise and improve their agricultural terrain and land management methods (Scheepers 2010:281-301) which allowed them to be identified as a distinct ethnic group.

Periods of Israelite idolatry were marked by oppression and tribal conflict (Jdg 8:2; 12; 20). In a late Iron I stratum at the unwalled village at Lachish, excavations reveal houses that were 'built along the crest of the tell... in order to form a line of defense' (Daviau 2003:42). However, the material record of Iron Age Israel also shows the remnants of fortification walls and towers (Daviau 2003:42- 45).¹² The strategic location of housing for defence purposes as well as fortification walls and towers illustrate militaristic and perilous times such as those described in the Book of Judges.

It is probable that during periods of idolatry, there were societal imbalances that diminished the value of the code of equality inscribed in the covenant (cf Jdg 6:15; 8:2; 10:4; 12:9, 14; see also Chapter Seven). An excessive focus on anti-covenantal divination practices was likely a sign of idolatrous interaction with the Canaanite gods during these periods. (see Chapter Five). As a result, the aforesaid brought about the direct manifestation of the YHWH in the world of the Israelites to restore His covenant and redeem His people (see Chapter Six). Given the aforementioned, it is evident that the worldview held by the author/s of Judges was significantly affected by a supernatural perspective that evokes the early Israelites' past interactions with YHWH and His covenants and their recurrence to a certain extent in the domain of the Israelites (cf Jdg 2:1-3; 5:4-5; 6:11-20; 7:22; 13:3-20).

In light of the abovementioned, the worldview of the author/s of Judges is intricately entwined with the supernatural. The spirit of YHWH indwells the early Israelites since they are the image

¹² Daviau (2003:42-43) reports that the unwalled Tell Jawa village was not a unique occurrence in the Iron Age I particularly in the aftermath of the collapse of the Bronze Age urban areas. She finds parallels for the lack of defence walls in the various unfortified small settlements located in the highlands with special reference to the unfortified settlements at Hazor and Lachish after the fall of the Late Bronze Age city centres. In lieu of fortification walls the houses at Lachish were built in the strategic position uncovered in the material record, to serve as a protective measure against attacks and possibly invaders (cf Footnote 26). The development of the unwalled settlement at Lachish, however, is dated to the late Iron Age I instead of the early Iron Age II.

bearers of YHWH. However, when the Spirit of YHWH come upon certain Israelite judges they may also obtain divine qualities allowing them preternatural strength to defeat the enemy (cf Jdg 3:10; 6:34; 11:29; 14:19; 15:14; see Chapter Six). These same divine characteristics of YHWH (judge and warrior [Jdg 2:1-3; 7:22]) are shared by the (human) judge, in the Book of Judges, who serve as ‘magistrate’ and leader (Jdg 4:4) and as ‘warrior’ (Jdg 3; 7; 8; 11; 14). In light of the aforesaid, within the polytheistic context of the ancient Near East, the monotheistic worldview of the author/s of Judges is polemical, confrontational, and non-conformist. It is a worldview which serves as the basis for the pervasive censoring tone of the author/s of Judges observed in the narratives within the Book of Judges, as will be shown throughout this study. It is a tone that is reinforced by the author/s explicit denunciation of the Israelites’ idolatry. However, the early Israelites did, as pointed out before, experience periods of tranquility and probably covenantal restoration.

The concept of monotheism as expressed by means of the covenantal lifestyle emphasizes the profound symbolic significance of the messages conveyed by the author/s of Judges. In light of the above, there is attached to the mindset expressed by the author/s of Judges a rich numinous belief system and this study is entirely dedicated to investigating and illumining that mindset through an exploration of the associated belief system.

1.1.2 The worldview

The term mindset in this present study pertains to a collection of convictions and notions that mold people’s perspective of the world (see 1.10 for a definition of mindset and worldview). Consequently, the term (religious) mindset refers to the perspective or worldview that the author/s of the Book of Judges had about their world that was a direct result of a resolute commitment to YHWH and His covenant. Nevertheless, there is still uncertainty regarding whether the term worldview sufficiently characterizes the viewpoint upheld by the author of Judges. Furthermore, the validity of the knowledge and experiences that shaped the mindset of the author/s is also in question.

The English term worldview is derived from the German word *weltanschauung* (see Berger and Luckmann 1966:80, 91). Sire (2004:24-50) presents a concise history of worldviews (see also Malan 2016).

Sire believes that the definition of worldview as ‘a fundamental perspective from which one addresses every issue of life is vague’ (see also 1.10) Sire goes on to say that this definition of worldview ‘leaves open such questions as whether this worldview is universal, abstract philosophy or an individual, personal vision; whether finally there is one worldview or many; whether the issues addressed can be understood or not; whether a worldview is pre-theoretical or theoretical,’ and finally Sire (2004:24) opines that the definition of worldview poses the question ‘whether it is what you say you think or what you show by what you do.’ (This section of the study cannot

address all the previously mentioned issues and will focus only on providing a definition of the term worldview and its validity or legitimation in its use in this study.)

Issues of legitimation of that worldview also present itself when the question of ‘what is real (the reality and validity of that worldview) and how is one to know’ (the validity of the knowledge transmitted by that worldview to future generations)’ (insertions mine; Berger and Luckmann 1966:1-3). Regarding the aforementioned contemporary ideas about what constitutes a legitimate or valid worldview rely on applying a 21st century contextual epistemology to an ancient mindset that requires events to be verified solely through a scientific and rationalistic¹³ means. Consequently, orthodox academics often dismiss the supernatural elements in the religious worldview presented in the Book of Judges as unreal (that is, not legitimate) and irrelevant to the historical narrative of the Israelites (cf 1.1).¹⁴

1.1.2.1 What is a worldview?

Sire (2004:25) remarks that life itself is the origin of a worldview and the basic function of the latter is to present the relationship of the human intellect to the enigma of the world and life. Consequently, a worldview resolves ‘inescapable lived realities’ of death, ‘the cruelty of the natural process, a general transitoriness.’ Sire argues that a worldview initially starts as a broad cosmic perspective, but gradually develops into a more intricate understanding of our identity and the nature of the world through the intricate interplay between human consciousness and the external

¹³ ‘The doctrine that physical matter is the only reality and that everything including thought, feeling, mind and will can be explained in terms of matter and physical phenomena’ (The Free Dictionary.com 2023. Evolutionary materialist).

¹⁴ The result is that ‘there is a distinction between modern historiography and the religious historiography of antiquity’ (Fox 1996:178). The distinction is that modern historiography is empirically based while religious historiography was ‘not meant to be empirical’ (Fox 1996:178).

Conventional academia displays a proclivity for a scientific understanding of intricacies in the history of the Israelites in the Book of Judges that dominates all other perspectives (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:209-212). It fails to recognize the validity of a religious worldview that is fundamentally centred on the supernatural (the theophanies in Judges, for example) from the perspective of the pre-monarchic men and women (Shanks 1995:24-35). An understanding of the worldview as expressed by the author/s of Judges emerges that diverges from what the people in the Book of Judges would have believed about their physical and non-physical realities.

Modern biblical archaeologists and bible scholars understand that the veracity of the history in the Book of Judges is questionable and that the author/s of the Book of Judges created a false version of Israelite history that suited their purposes at the time. For these reasons, the author/s created a less than truthful mentality for a people and fictional characters and events to promote their worldview. As a matter of fact, one can say that they created a people that never really existed. Yet, earlier writers record YHWH as maintaining that He cannot lie (Nm 23:19) and therefore, His spokespeople cannot bend the truth to suit them. To argue from a theological point of view, the veracity of the history in the Bible may be debatable. However, the Bible writers have consistently recorded the unchangeable character of YHWH. Consequently, it does not follow that they would lie about the history of His people.

Scientific (archaeological) investigation is only one epistemological method to establish biblical historical truth (Wenning 2009:1-15). For archaeologists usually the ‘absence of evidence’ means an event did not occur in the Bible but this does not mean ‘evidence of absence.’ However, given the criteria for modern epistemology (to which archaeologist hold, or are these criteria different for them?) – the observation ‘law’ for example is it possible to *definitively* declare the history in the Bible a myth? It is, however, not the purpose of this study to prove or disprove the history recorded in the pages of the Bible.

environment. This evolving worldview is further enriched by the cultivation of values. As consciousness deepens and expands, it eventually reaches its pinnacle, where one discovers a supreme level of practical behavior – a comprehensive life plan, the ultimate good, the highest standards of action, and an ideal for shaping both personal and societal existence.

Shared worldviews can often be attributed to the similarities we have with others. However, it is important to acknowledge that there exists a multitude of worldviews that arise due to varying circumstances such as different cultural backgrounds, nationalities, and historical influences. These factors contribute to the development of diverse perspectives on life and the world around us (Sire 2004:26). Worldviews, although intricate, are rooted in a singular conception that serves as the foundation for the entire worldview. Contrary to popular belief, theoretical thought does not form the basis of an individual's worldview. Instead of being philosophical systems, worldviews are pre-theoretical commitments that are closely connected to the heart, personal experiences, and the way life is lived (Sire 2004:34-35). According to Sire (2004:45), the heart was considered by the ancient Hebrews as the essence of the human personality. In the Hebrew Scriptures, the term itself (*leb/lebab*) is mentioned 855 times. It signifies not just the physical organ, but also the fundamental aspect of a person's identity. Essentially, it is viewed as the center of intellectual, emotional, volitional, and spiritual life in a human being (cf Prov 2:6, 10; Ex 4:14; 1 Chr 29:18). Consequently, a *weltanschauung* is created by the 'heart and its content as the center of consciousness' (Sire 2004:46).

In short, a worldview answers the following questions: 'What is? – Ontology (model of reality as a whole), Where does it all come from? – Explanation (model of the past), Where are we going? – Prediction (model of the future), What is good and what is evil? – Axiology (theory of values), How should we act? – Praxeology (theory of actions) and What is true and what is false? – Epistemology (theory of knowledge)' (Vidal 2008:4).

Upon considering the aforementioned points, it becomes evident that the term 'worldview' is a suitable concept to describe the mindset of the author/s of Judges in relation to their religious beliefs. This worldview serves as a framework through which the author/s comprehend God and His expectations for a specific way of living and behaviour. It is a religious worldview that endeavors to address all the aforementioned inquiries based on the revelations of YHWH.

1.1.2.2 Legitimation of worldview

Berger and Luckman (1966:2) attribute a sociological interpretation to the notions of reality and knowledge. They argue that the sociology of knowledge should focus on whatever is considered knowledge within a society, regardless of its ultimate validity or invalidity (according to any criteria) (see Berger and Luckmann (1966:2-17). According to Berger and Luckman (1966:19) the 'world of everyday life' is guided by knowledge that directs everyday life and which 'is taken as

reality by the ordinary members of society in the subjectively meaningful conduct of their lives. It is a world that originates in their thoughts and actions, and is maintained as real by these.’ Berger and Luckman (1966:38) also maintains that language which has the ability ‘of transcending the reality of everyday life.’ Language can create abstract symbols and also ‘make real and meaningful these abstract symbols in everyday life.’ ‘In this way symbolism and symbolic language become essential constituents of the reality of everyday life and of the commonsense apprehension of this reality’ (Berger and Luckmann 1966:38). Berger and Luckmann (1966:54) relates that individuals form institutions by performing repeated actions. Institutions are brought to life through role-playing within individual experiences. When individuals engage in their designated roles, they actively contribute to a shared social reality that requires meaning and subjective plausibility for all participants. This is accomplished by a process known as legitimation, which explains and defends reality. Meanings that are already associated with institutions are created and integrated through legitimation (Berger and Luckmann 1966:85-95).¹⁵

The necessity for legitimation arises when the established meanings of the institutional framework need to be passed on to a new generation. When institutions can no longer rely on an individual’s memory and routine to be sustained, the continuity of history is disrupted. Legitimation repairs this rupture by providing explanations and justifications. It provides explanations by attributing cognitive legitimacy to the institutional structure and justifies by bestowing normative significance to its practical requirements. Legitimation not only informs individuals why they should choose one course of action over another, but also provides them with understanding why things are the way they are thereby imparting knowledge to them (Berger and Luckmann 1966:94; see also Pretoria University [sa]).

Berger and Luckman describes four levels of legitimation: pre-theoretical (simple traditions affirm how things are done), theoretical (theoretical propositions in rudimentary form used to explain reality), a third level of explicit theories (the institutional order is legitimated in terms of a differentiated body of knowledge) and lastly, a symbolic universe.

In light of the above, we see how the symbolic nature of the lived experiences of the author/s of Judges and the early Israelites gain an undeniable legitimacy and reality. The author/s of Judges demonstrated a comprehensive comprehension of their world through their observations and experiences of it that fit into the ‘categories’ outlined above. Moreover, the author/s of Judges possessed the skill to express the sacred aspects of life through language, thereby incorporating them into their everyday reality. This highlights the significance of their understanding and the integration of the sacred into their ordinary existence (see Berger and Luckman, 1966:38).

¹⁵ See also University of Pretoria [sa].

Regarding a symbolic universe, Berger and Luckmann (1966:95) describe it as a collection of theoretical traditions that bring together various realms of meaning and include the institutional structure within a symbolic whole (see Berger and Luckmann 1966:88-95 for an in-depth description; see also 1.10). While some may argue that the term ‘symbolic universe’ is a better fit for elucidating the perspectives of the author/s of Judges compared to the word ‘worldview,’ Malan (2016) points out that there are substantial similarities (from a social-scientific perspective) between the ideas of worldview and symbolic universe (see above description). These similarities are significant enough to justify favoring the term ‘worldview,’ as it has the capacity to encompass many of the features of a symbolic universe including symbolism and symbolic language (cf Sire 2004:25-26, 85-95).

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Currently, there is no comprehensive and current analysis available on the worldview presented in the Book of Judges. Given the foregoing, the following questions, which are based on the most important features of the worldview informing the author/s of Judges that will be examined in this study, arise:

- What important factor predisposed the author/s of Judges to adopt a particular religious perspective and what was the significance of this worldview?
- What distinguishing feature of the mindset of the author/s of the Book of Judges renders it as revolutionary?
- In what ways does the recreation of sacred space in Canaan emphasize the religious worldview in Judges?
- What was the nature of divine communication in the Book of Judges and what does it reveal about the mindset of the author/s of Judges?
- What may be learned about the mindset of the author/s of Judges from the theophanies and miracles that occur in the Book of Judges?
- Could the criticism against the Israelites have included the subtle motif of societal imbalances thereby emphasizing the particular worldview held by the author/s of Judges?
- Can an examination of the Yahwistic festivals, priesthood and common people’s worship practices provide us with additional insight into the author/s of Judges’ worldview?

1.3 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

This study aims to investigate the religious mindset that defined the interactions of the early Israelites with their God, YHWH, in the Book of Judges and to present equitable assessment of this worldview (see 1.1-1.1.1). In light of the aforesaid, the religious mindset of the author/s of Judges will be examined by means of the following:

- A discussion of the covenants of YHWH and monotheism.

- Further demonstration that there were two worldviews and lifestyles operative in Canaan. An examination of the religious sites of the early Israelites will demonstrate these disparate worldviews and lives.
- A juxtaposition of monotheism with the prevalent polytheistic worldview.
- A discussion of ritual space in Canaan with a major emphasis on Israelite sacred spaces. Israelite sacred space will be compared to ancient Near Eastern ritual space.
- Divine communication will be investigated not only as a method of contact between the Israelites and God or the Canaanite gods but also as a way of life as represented by people's ritualistic behaviour. People's interactions with the divine in the Book of Judges will thus be examined.
- The religious worldview of the author/s of Judges will be looked at through the lens of theophany: what theophany was, where it occurred, the participants in the theophany and why theophany occurred in Judges.
- Another objective is to discuss societal abnormalities in the early Israelites community during their cycles of idolatry. A description of the Canaanite lifestyle and the land itself will be presented with the aim of providing information on the possibility of a parallel lifestyle experienced by the idolatrous early Israelites, among others, during periods of oppression.
- An analysis of the Israelites' ritual activities, with a particular focus on the three annual pilgrimages made to Shiloh, will be discussed. The duties of the priesthood and those of the ordinary people will also be investigated. It is very probable that Yahwism was practised during those periods of covenant renewal mentioned in the Book of Judges.

1.4 HYPOTHESIS

The Book of Judges lends itself to interpreting the text through the lens of an ancient religious mindset. A multi-disciplinary approach which will include disciplines such as *historical criticism*, *biblical archaeology*, *theology* as well as *comparative studies* applied to an analysis of this unique mindset might serve to illuminate the religious mindset held by the author/s of Judges by means of an investigation into the sacred beliefs and practises of the Israelites in the period of the Judges.

1.5 METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

1.5.1 Approach

The numinous mindset of the author/s of Judges and its associated religious practices in the Book of Judges will be examined by means of a *qualitative approach* which is the most appropriate method to apply to the topic. Morse and Richards (2002:8-9) describes the qualitative methodology as involving research that 'constitutes an attempt to understand people in terms of their own definitions of their worlds.' The qualitative methodology, thus, requires the analyses and inferences of

how ancient people understood and participated in their world and how they fashioned their lives, centring it on their system of beliefs (Morse and Richards 2002:8-9).

Additionally, the qualitative method delivers data about the human qualities of history as it effectively recognizes those imperceptible features such as the social standards and customs, socio-economic positions, gender roles and religion that are not obvious on the surface of history (Ulin et al 2005). The aforementioned attributes of the qualitative methodology are apposite illustrations of the method in this study to gather information about the religious mindset of the author/s of the Book of Judges.

Since the religious mindset informing the author/s of Judges will be explored from, inter alia, the perspective of the Israelites' religious actions a *multidisciplinary qualitative approach* is an essential requirement that may serve to bring forth a further and more insightful illumination of the worldview held by the author/s. It is presently a topic that may not be available in investigative studies such as in the form, scope and level to which this study attains. Contemporary scholars, such as Carol Meyers and William Dever, incorporate a *multi-disciplinary approach* to their research and archaeological undertakings. In this study, the example of these investigators will be followed in order to illuminate the religious worldview that is expressed in the Book of Judges. The integrated methodology to the subject of this study will incorporate *historical criticism, biblical archaeology, theology* as well as *comparative studies* from the ancient Near East.

Although this is not an exegetical investigation, the *historical-critical maximum method* will be applied. The *historical-critical maximum method* is 'limited' to the area of biblical interpretation which aims to understand the ancient text in the context of 'its historical origins, the time and place in which it was written, its sources if, any, the events, dates, persons, places, things, customs,' and so on which is 'mentioned or implied in the text' (Soulen and Soulen 2011:89). Soulen and Soulen further remark: 'Its primary goal is to ascertain the text's primitive or original meaning in its original historical context.' Its secondary goal may include reconstructing the historical situation of the author and recipients of the text and reconstructing the true nature of the events which the text describes.' The present research does not aim to delve into the historical background of the period of Judges or the veracity of the narrative. The *historical-critical maximum approach* was chosen to primarily illuminate the events, individuals, locations, and traditions depicted in text of the Book of Judges and to portray these elements as a way to emphasize the perspective of the author/s of Judges.

A modern *biblical archaeological method* comprises, archaeology, history, theology, comparative studies. This is to integrate and construe interpretations in the broader context of information presented by all these diverse disciplines. The superior data collected by archaeologists when they incorporate an integrated approach to the material culture of ancient Israel (see Dever 2002:64)

enables a rebuilding of people's activities and an examination of their roles and identities in antiquity (see Eastman and Rodning 2001:3-5).

Within the field of biblical archaeology, the biblical text's significance (and its theology) play a significant role in transmitting cultural history in both a direct (cognizant) and oblivious manner (Faust and Bunimovitz 2014:50). Accordingly, a *theological approach* to the study of the religious mindset of the author/s of Judges will play an important role in this study. Hedges (2013:40-42) describes a *theological approach* as looking into the religion which 'seeks to understand what it means to believers within its own terms, and how that system work as a rational worldview to those within it.' By contrasting and comparing different historical periods, places people, and events, an ancient Near Eastern *comparative studies method* enables comparisons and associations that can be both favourable and unfavourable (see Ouro 2011:6).

1.5.2 Structure of the thesis

Chapter Two: Sacred pledges and lifestyles

This chapter will discuss an important religious aspect that informed the mindset of the author/s of the Book of Judges. The subsequent investigation necessitates an analysis of the historical background of the Israelites together with a chronological framework that prominently features the recurring motif of covenant. A similar theme of covenant is also present throughout Judges. It will be examined in relation to the Abrahamic and Sinaitic Covenants, including their divine promises and stipulations. The Sinaitic Covenant will be compared and contrasted to the ancient Near Eastern treaties. Judges reveals an alternative, disparate worldview and lifestyle operative among the Israelites. This chapter will examine possible reasons for early Israelite idolatry. Early Israelite sacred sites will be investigated as markers of the ideal (covenantal) worldview of the author/s of Judges and the associated lifestyle that they are advocating. By means of the aforementioned discussions, this chapter aims at illuminating the mindset espoused by the author/s of Judges.

Chapter Three: Monotheism: Mono-YHWH worship

Monotheism is promoted by the author/s of Judges through the lens of idolatry. Both covenant and monotheism are embedded narratives throughout Judges. This chapter will consider monotheism as the fundamental tenet of the Sinaitic Covenant and which serves as the cornerstone of the worldview embraced by the author/s of Judges. This chapter will demonstrate that monotheism, presented people in the ancient Near East with a novel perspective on their identity, their role/s in the world and relation to deity. Monotheism also revealed transformative concepts of the covenant God of the Israelites, YHWH. Long-held scholarly opinions regarding the character, the name/s and purported 'origins' of YHWH are also prominent themes in this chapter that will be examined in order to showcase these redefined ideas of deity in the ancient Near East. The idea that biblical

monotheism as expressed in Judges was superior to polytheism will be examined by means of the aforementioned premises.

Chapter Four: The (re)creation of sacred space in Canaan

Monotheism brought a profound redefinition of sacred space to Canaan. This chapter will investigate the sacred space/s of the early Israelites that may grant further insight into the worldview held by the author/s of Judges. Israelite sacred space will be compared to the ritual space/s of the Canaanites in terms of people's perceptions of deity and the function of sacred space. The Israelite's main sanctuary at Shiloh will be discussed in depth. In this chapter, Shiloh and the Tabernacle will be described in terms of Zevit's (2002:74-75) category of sacred elements that defined sacred space in the ancient Near East and in the Israelite community: sacred cosmology, sacred alignment, sacred geometry, and sacred sanctuary. The archaeology and analogs in the ancient Near Eastern material culture will be looked at in order to shed more light on the themes discussed in this chapter.

Chapter Five: Divine communication

This study makes a distinction between theophany (see Chapter Six) which is YHWH's direct appearance to the Israelites and other forms of divine communication which occurred by means of divinatory techniques such as prophecy (uttered by human prophets), the casting of lots, the *Urim* and *Thummim*, etcetera. The author/s of Judges frequently utilize certain methods of divine communication in the Book of Judges to critique the idolatry of the Israelites. This chapter will demonstrate that divine communication was not only a message delivery system between YHWH and the Israelites but also a way of life; that is, the Israelites interaction with YHWH or other deities consistently impacted upon their sacred and secular lives. The Israelites were given proper methods of ascertaining the divine will which is discussed in this chapter. Prophecy is a significant leitmotif in Judges which will be examined as an approved divinatory method. In addition, the world of divination in the ancient Near East will be explored, in particular, necromancy, celestial divination, and extispicy in order to shed light on possible parallel activities among the idolatrous Israelites in Judges.

Chapter Six: Divine manifestation

YHWH's immanence, His direct presence and involvement in the world of the Israelites as depicted in the Book of Judges play an important role in providing a meaningful understanding of the worldview of the author/s of Judges. Monotheism, embedded in Judges' narratives, declare that YHWH as the sole sovereign Deity may be present in the form of the Spirit of YHWH and the Angel of YHWH to save His idolatrous people from their oppression and reinstitute the covenant. The religious mindset of the author/s of Judges will be examined in this chapter through the prism of theophany as it is presented in the Book of Judges.

Chapter Seven: Opposing values: equality and inequality

The abnormal society extant in Judges during periods of cyclical idolatry probably gave rise to the social imbalances alluded to in Judges. The Israelites often emulated their Canaanite neighbours by participating in the veneration of their gods and adopting their cultures which was characterized by hierarchical social structures that fostered socio-economic imbalances in these societies. The presence of similar disparities in the Israelite community would have eroded the principle of equality that was enshrined in the Sinaitic Covenant, rendering them as evil since they devaluated people's lives and most importantly denigrated the character of YHWH who valued the lives of all people equally. These imbalances, would have been subtle motifs in the messages of reproof delivered against the Israelites in narratives such as Judges 2:1-3; 6:8-10 and 10:10-14. These messages were presented in a manner consistent with the worldview of the author/s of Judges, reflecting their covenantal and monotheistic tone. The aforesaid context serves as the basis for the discussions in this chapter.

Chapter Eight: Festivals, priests and people

Yahwistic ritual space at Shiloh was characterized by the three annual pilgrimage festivals which presumably would have taken place at the Tabernacle during periods of peace and covenant rejuvenation. During the festivals of YHWH, the Israelites celebrated their God and gave thanks to Him for another successful harvest and abundance. The three annual festivals of YHWH removed such celebrations from their ancient Near Eastern counterparts which were centred on fertility rites and unrestrained revelry and directed them towards expressing gratitude towards YHWH and commemorating the abundance of YHWH within the covenantal relationship. Similarly the priesthood and worship of the common people, although moments of joy, were toned by reflection of the covenant, self and community. An examination of the festivals of YHWH, the priesthood and associated rites as well as the worship practices of the common people will provide further insight into the worldview of the author/s of Judges.

Chapter Nine: Conclusion

1.6 LITERATURE REVIEW

1.6.1 Primary sources

The principal textual sources on the pre-monarchic period remain the *Hebrew Bible* and more specifically the Book of Judges. The Book of Judges is the only textual source of information about the settlement or period of the Judges and more specifically about the mindset informing the author/s of Judges. I am aware of the view of scholars of different editorial and redactional layers and dating problems in the Book of Judges and therefore will try to use the texts with caution keeping in mind the aforementioned issues (see Footnote 3). Analyses and consideration of the Biblical texts that precede and those that come after the Book of Judges are a necessary

requirement to grant a fuller understanding of the narratives in the Book of Judges. Accordingly, texts including Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Zephaniah will be used as sources.

Archeological reports will be consulted, among others: Aharoni, Y (1963), *Excavations at Tel Arad: preliminary report on the Second Season*; Avner, U (1984), *Ancient cult sites in the Negev and Sinai desert*; Biran, A (1989), *The collared-rim jars and the settlement of the tribe of Dan*; Finkelstein, I (1989), *The land of Ephraim survey 1980-1987: preliminary report*; Bloch-Smith (1992a), *The cult of the dead in Judah: interpreting the material remains*; Borschel-Dan, A (2020), *At Shiloh, archaeologists find artifacts hinting at biblical Tabernacle*; Bourke, SJ (2004), *Cult and archaeology at Pella in Jordan: excavating the Bronze and Iron Age temple precinct (1994-2001)*; Kleiman, S et al (2019). *Late Bronze Age Azekah – An almost forgotten story*.

The following artefacts will be referenced, among others, stone cenotaphs; rock reliefs such as the *Rock relief at Firaktin*; the *Babylonian Map of the World*; the *Gabal Barkal Stele* by Nederhof, M-J (2009), *Gebel Barkal stela of Thutmosis III; the Judean pillar figurines*; seals: the *Seal from Acco*; inscriptions and other epigraphic sources: the Ebla texts by Pettinato, G (1980), *Ebla and the Bible – Observations on the new epigrapher’s analysis; the inscriptions from Kuntillet Ajrud*; the Mari texts by Fleming, DE (2004), *Prophets and temple personnel in the Mari archives*; Smith, MS (1994), *The Ugaritic Baal Cycle*; the *Enūma Eliš* by Dalley, S (2000), *Myths from Mesopotamia: creation, the flood, Gilgamesh and others, revised edition*; the Lachish letters in Cross (1997a), *Canaanite myth and Hebrew epic: essays in the history of the religion of Israel*; Albright, WF (1966), *The Amarna Letters from Palestine, Syria, the Philistines and Phoenicia*; the Egyptian Execration Texts in Finkelstein, I and Na’aman, N [eds] (1994), *From nomadism to monarchy: archaeological and historical aspects of Early Israel*; the Ugaritic *Ras Shamra tablets* in Huehnergard, J (2012), *An introduction to Ugaritic*; the *Merneptah Stela* in Ahlström GW and Edelman, D (1985), *Merneptah’s Israel*, the *Lugalbanda Epic* in Walton, JH, Matthews, VH and Chavalas, MW (2000), *The IVP Bible background commentary: Old Testament*; the *Legend of King Keret* and the *Song of Ulikummis* in Pritchard, JB [ed] (1969), *Ancient Near Eastern texts related to the Old Testament with supplement*; the Ugaritic *Tale of Aqhat* in Pritchard, JB and Fleming, DE [eds] (2011), *The ancient Near East: an anthology of texts and pictures*; the *Babylonian omen text* by Lambert, WG (2013), *Babylonian creation myths*; the *Babylonian Venus tablet of Ammisaduqa* by Reiner, E and Pingree, D (1975), *Babylonian planetary omens. Part One. Enūma Anu Enlil Tablet 63. The Venus Tablet of Ammisaduqa*; the *Dead Sea Scrolls* by Van der Kam, JC (2010), *The Dead Sea Scrolls today. Second edition*; the *Gezer Calendar* by Albright, WF (1943b), *The Gezer Calendar*; the *Minet el-Beida clay tablets* by Hyatt, P (1942), *The Ras Shamra discoveries and the interpretation of the Old Testament; inscription on an incense altar found at Khirbet al-Mudayna* in Van der Steen, E et al [eds] (2014), *Exploring the narrative: Jerusalem and Jordan in the Bronze and Iron Ages*; *Arik-din-ili inscription* in Walton, JH (2018),

Ancient Near Eastern thought and the Old Testament; an inscription from the Aramean king Zakur in Spaeth, BS [ed] (2013), *The Cambridge companion to ancient Mediterranean religions; inscribed arrow head from 11th century BC Judah* by Cross, FM (2003), *Leaves from an epigrapher's notebook. Collected papers in Hebrew and West Semitic paleography and epigraphy*. The aforementioned sources form part of the body of extra-biblical sources that will be used in this study.¹⁶

1.6.2 Secondary sources

The Old Testament demonstrates a chronology of covenants that leads to the Sinaitic Covenant. The Edenic Covenant as the earliest antecedent to the Sinaitic Covenant is examined by Waltke, BK (2007), *An Old Testament theology: an exegetical, canonical, and thematic approach*; Block, DI (2021), *Covenant: the framework of God's grand plan of redemption*. The Abrahamic covenant as an integral part of covenant-making is discussed by Leonard, RC and Leonard, JE (1996), *The promise of his coming. Interpreting New Testament statements concerning the time of Christ's appearance*; Couch, M [ed] (1996), *Dictionary of premillennial theology*. The Sinaitic Covenant is discussed by Longman, T, Enns, P, Strauss, M [eds] (2013), *The Baker illustrated Bible dictionary*; Hester, JP (2003), *The Ten Commandments: a handbook of religious, legal and social issues*. The following authors compare and contrast the Sinai Covenant with ancient Near Eastern treaties: Mendenhall, GE (1954), *Covenant forms in Israelite tradition*; Gerstenberger, ES (1965), *Covenant and commandment*; Tadmor, H (1982), *Treaty and Oath in the Ancient Near East: a historian's approach*; Hays, CB (2014), *Hidden riches: a sourcebook for the comparative study of the Hebrew Bible*.

The Israelites show a propensity for idolatry in Judges. The gods of the ancient Near East are discussed by Walton, JH (2015), *The lost world of Adam and Eve. Genesis 2-3 and the human origins debate*; Walton, JH (2018), *Ancient Near Eastern thought and the Old Testament*. Evidence for the Israelites' presence in the material culture are discussed by Faust, A and Bunimovitz, S (2003), *The four room house: embodying Iron Age Israelite society*; Gottwald, NK (1999), *The tribes of Yahweh: a sociology of the religion of liberated Israel 1250-1050 BCE*; King, PJ and Stager, LE (2001), *Life in biblical Israel*. Canaanite *bamot* are discussed by Ryken, L, Wilhoit, JC and Longman, T [eds] (2010), *Dictionary of biblical imagery*; Dömeris, B (2018), 'Section 3: articles on the Old Testament-Jeremiah and the religion of Canaan.'

The following writers will provide their perspectives on monotheism: Walton, JH, Matthews, VH and Chavalas, MW (2000); *The IVP Bible background commentary: Old Testament*; Hill, AE and Walton, JH (2010), *A survey of the Old Testament*; MacDonald, G (2012), *The evangelical*

¹⁶ I am aware that many of the artefacts mentioned postdate the 1200 BC-1150 BC period. However, as I have mentioned before, much can be learned from these archaeological materials since many of the cultural and religious practices represented by these artefacts would have been transmitted from a previous period to a succeeding one.

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1.7 LIMITATIONS

This is not an exegetical study. However, a historical-critical maximum approach will be applied to the biblical text. This study will look at the impact of an invisible God from an invisible realm on the mindset that informs the author/s of Judges in order to have a better understanding of this particular mentality as also examined by means of the lives and behaviour of the people depicted in the Book of Judges. Consequently, this is a study about the belief systems of the author/s of Judges that can for the moment mostly be considered and investigated in terms of the events described in Judges and the physical reality of the people in the pre-monarchic period and any imagery or symbolism of the supernatural that remains in the material culture.

Since first-hand accounts of the events in the Book of Judges do not exist and given the great divide of time and cultural contexts that separate the modern world from the pre-monarchic period, an understanding of the supernatural occurrences in Judges (2:1-4; 3; 4; 5; 6; 7; 13, etcetera) may be difficult to fathom. In addition, the religious practices of the Israelites and neighbors, and their attitudes towards their lives and the divine may be challenging to comprehend. Therefore, many of the views expressed in this study will be speculative. However, I do believe that the Bible is able to supply us with a rich impression of the mindset of the author/s of Judges as will be shown in this study.

1.8 DELIMITATIONS

This study will not deal with the redaction history of the Book of Judges as this falls outside the parameters of this study. We do not know who wrote the Book of Judges and we are also aware that it has been exposed to a number of editing processes (see Footnote 3). It is not the aim of this study to prove or disprove history in the Book of Judges. Rather, it looks at a particular religious mindset through the lens of certain religious (and mundane) aspects of the lives of the pre-monarchic people as depicted in the Book of Judges.

1.9 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

A rationalistic worldview commonly informs contemporary intellectual discourse regarding the origins of the early Israelites and their settlement and lifestyle in Canaan. The aforesaid worldview is an approach that is centred on ‘rationality,’ which is a commendable but at the same time it seeks to overlook the supernatural interactions with the divine and the actuality of God or gods (see Gottwald 1999 and Boer 2002; see also Footnote 113).¹⁷ This reading of the biblical text disregards the legitimation of the mindset informing the author/s of Judges (cf 1.1.2.2). Modern scholarship does not recognise the supernatural encounters of the people in the Book of Judges as real and pertinent to their history making. This study recognizes this viewpoint but at the same time acknowledges the attitude with which the author/s of Judges and the people depicted in the book approached their experiences with the divine which constituted a firm belief in God/the gods.

Consequently, this study will attempt to depict the entire reality of the people in Judges as reflected by the mindset of the author/s of Judges. In the mindset held by the author/s of Judges, the supernatural, as indicated before, was very real. It shaped their lives, formed their identity as a people and, according to the author/s, created their history. If one is to study the supernatural from the people’s perspective, one may conclude that their physical reality could not exist independently of the supernatural and the attendant mindset. I therefore expect that this study will shed light on a topic that is frequently overlooked: the religious outlook of the author/s of the Book of Judges and their conviction that God and other gods actually existed and were part of people’s everyday lived reality in the period of the judges. A crucial aspect of the mindset of the author/s of Judges was the depiction of both revelation and reason as an intrinsic feature of their history making processes, and a worthwhile subject of study. Accordingly, I intend to present a more accurate picture of the author/s of Judges’ worldview by examining both those elements of the supernatural and the material world that defined their worldview and in doing so, close the gap in research that rejects revelation in favour of reason.

1.10 DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

Ancient Near East: The region which includes Armenia, Cyprus, Egypt, Iraq, Iran, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, and a portion of Turkey, which is now also referred to as the Near East. This area corresponds to ancient Urartu, Mesopotamia, Elam, Persia, the Levant, and Anatolia. Typically, the history of the ancient Near East is dated from roughly 5000 BCE to the 7th century CE (Mark 2022).

¹⁷ The emphasis on reason during the Age of Enlightenment, which dominated discourse in philosophy, politics, and science from the late 17th to the early 19th century, is the source of this approach to the biblical text and archaeology. Prior to this time, the majority of biblical scholars as well as scientists, such as astronomers, held the biblical depictions of the supernatural and the existence of God to be true. These were scientists that derived their worldview from the Bible and, like the biblical text, had no trouble matching reason with revelation.

Bamah: '[pl. bamot] a natural height or elevated platform where the early Israelites worshipped idols (cf Jdg 6:26) (From: <https://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/bamah/>).

Dominant cultural ideology in this study indicates the widespread attitudes, convictions, ethics and principles shared by a majority of people in the Book of Judges. The dominant cultural ideology would often differ from YHWH's covenantal culture during periods of idolatry when the early Israelites adopted the polytheistic religions of the Canaanites and their associated worldviews.

Enūma Eliš: Also known as The Seven Tablets of Creation, the *Enūma Eliš* refers to the Babylonian creation narrative whose title originates from the opening words, 'When on high.' The account relates the story of the god Marduk's triumph over the powers of chaos and establishing of order at the time of the creation of the world (Mark 2018).

Judges: 'The judges to whom the title (of the Book of Judges) refers were charismatic leaders who delivered Israel from a succession of foreign domination after their conquest of Canaan, the 'Promised Land' (insertion mine) (Encyclopedia Britannica 2019. Book of Judges).

Metaphorics is a term used in this study to reference the metaphorical or symbolic aspects of the city of Shiloh and the Tabernacle compound that was constructed there.

Mindset : a mindset is comprised of beliefs and thoughts that influence an individual or people's perspective on the world; that is, their worldview (see the definition of worldview below).

Prayer praise is defined in this study as excessive praise of the ancient Near Eastern god in order to induce the deity to bring about a favourable outcome of the divine will upon the individual making the prayer request.

Ritual bribes refers to the offerings and sacrifices that were presented to the god in order to manipulate the god in granting the worshipper his/her requests.

Supernatural: 'of or relating to an order of existence beyond the visible observable universe especially of or relating to God or a god, demigod, spirit or devil' (Supernatural 2019. Merriam-Webster).

Symbolic universe: a set of theoretical traditions that merge diverse domains of meaning and incorporate the institutional framework into a symbolic entirety (Berger and Luckmann 1966:95).

Theophany: Biblical theophany describes a situation in which God manifests His Presence to an individual.

Ugarit (Ras Shamra): A Bronze Age port in northern Syria, destroyed in the early twelfth century BC, and known as modern Ras Shamra. Cuneiform tablets illustrate the religion of ancient Canaan;

that is, the gods against which the first Jewish prophets polemicized' (Ugarit (Ras Shamra) 2019. Livius).

Ugaritic Baal Cycle: An Ugaritic text written between 1500 and 1300BC. The Ugaritic *Baal Cycle* relates the story of the Canaanite storm god Baal who is also associated with fertility. Baal was a popular god worshipped by the early Israelites in the Book of Judges.

Worldview: A worldview encompasses a compilation of perspectives, principles, narratives, and anticipations regarding the world that surrounds us, influencing our thoughts and behaviors. It finds expression in various aspects such as ethics, religion, philosophy, scientific convictions, and more (Gray 2011:58-60; cf Sire 2004:23-50).

CHAPTER TWO

SACRED PLEDGES AND LIFESTYLES

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The author/s of the Book of Judges were recipients of an ideological framework that apparently originated from or was influenced by the ‘theology of the Book of Deuteronomy (see 1.1). In addition, the author/s of Judges drew upon a rich oral tradition, the foundation of preceding texts in the Old Testament (see 1.1), that served as a basis for their distinctive mindset (cf Jdg 2:1-3, 6-9; 5:4-5; 6:8-10, 13; cf Jdg 10:11-15). The worship of YHWH under a covenant was the central focus of this worldview. Embedded within the text of Judges, thus, is an unmistakably profound covenantal mindset, worship and lifestyle consistently emphasized by ‘the author/s’ as the exclusive means of serving YHWH.

In Judges 2, the author/s introduce the concept of a covenant between YHWH and the early Israelites, as well as other covenants made by the Israelites. The covenant between YHWH and the Israelites was established through a relationship that was built upon the Abrahamic and Sinaitic Covenants. As indicated before, this connection required the early Israelites’ exclusive worship of and dedication to YHWH, as well as their strict adherence to the laws and stipulations outlined in the Sinaitic Covenant. Consequently, the religious and daily lives of the early Israelites were designed to demonstrate their unwavering commitment to YHWH and His principles and laws. Judges shows that the Israelites made illegal covenants with the Canaanites whose gods they served. This chapter aims at investigating those important aspects that predisposed the author/s of Judges to adopt their particular religious mindset and to analyse its significance.

Based on the aforementioned context, the present chapter will centre its attention on the covenants or treaties alluded to in the Book of Judges. This chapter will also assess whether the religious beliefs that shaped the worldview of the author/s of Judges, as shown in the worship practices of the Israelites, were regularly followed by the community. Evidence in the material culture that suggests the practice of the covenantal lifestyle in Canaan or other forms will be looked at.

2.2 COVENANTS

2.2.1 Introduction

The Book of Judges revolves around the theme of a special relationship between YHWH and the tribes of Israel since the author/s of Judges present a worldview that demonstrates a strong emphasis on the Israelites’ unwavering commitment to a covenant or covenants. Judges contains both direct and indirect references to covenants with YHWH, but also other covenants or treaties (Jdg 2:1-2, 12, 20-21; 5:4-5; 6:8-10, 13; 10:11-13; cf Jdg 1:16-19; 22, 27-36; 11:13-25). A central theme that permeates the entire Book of Judges is the author/s’ justification of a covenantal lifestyle

amidst a pervasive culture of idolatry and covenant transgression. This perspective is further expounded upon in the subsequent discussions in this chapter.

2.2.1.1 Covenants/treaties in the Book of Judges

A biblical covenant (*bērît/berith*) is an agreement between two parties – between YHWH and the early Israelites – based on promises, stipulations, privileges and responsibilities (cf Jdg 2:1-2; 6:8-10; 10:11-13; see Arnold and Beyer 2002:96; cf 2.2.4.1-2.2.4.2).¹⁸ Judges 2:1-2 refers to a covenant between YHWH and the early Israelites as well as the notion that the Israelites had established illegal covenants with gods other than YHWH.

The Angel of YHWH's words in Judges 2:1, 'I brought you up out of Egypt,' highlights the significance of the Exodus tradition – YHWH's deliverance of the Israelites from Egyptian slavery. The Angel's following words, 'and led you into the land I swore to give to your ancestors' may refer to both the Sinaitic Covenant and its foundational antecedent, the Abrahamic Covenant, in which covenant YHWH pledged the territory of Canaan as an inheritance to the descendants of the patriarch Abraham. It is a promise that recurs in Deuteronomy as well as other texts (Gn 13:15, 17; 15:7, 18; Ex 6:8; cf Lv 20:24; Dt 6:10; 31:20; Jos 5:6). The passage found in Judges 6:8-9 (cf Jdg 10:11-12) can also be analyzed in a comparable manner. In the aforesaid narratives, the author/s of Judges, apparently intentionally, establish a connection between the Exodus – the departure of the freed Israelites from Egypt, their journey to the 'promised land' and the Sinaitic Covenant (see 2.2.2.1) and as stated before, its precursor the Abrahamic Covenant (see 2.2.2.1; 2.2.5.1). YHWH had promised the territory of Canaan to the descendants of Abraham, as stated above, as an 'everlasting possession.' YHWH had also promised to be the God of Abraham and of his descendants (Gn 13; 15; 17; see also 2.2.2.1). There is a requirement, however: Abraham and his descendants were to keep YHWH's covenant by worshipping YHWH, faithfully (Gn 17:1, 9; see also 2.2.5.1-2.2.5.3; 2.2.5.5). During the Exodus, there is a progression (at Mount Sinai) of the Abrahamic Covenant into the Sinaitic Covenant (see also 2.2.5.1). This development involves the establishment of laws and stipulations by YHWH that will govern the worship and daily life of the early Israelites and which will ultimately shape their relationship with Him (Ex 19 and 20).

a. Covenant/s between YHWH and the early Israelites

Mather (2010:21) observes that Judges 2 'speaks of two covenants.' The first covenant YHWH had made with His people and which He had vowed never to break – an eternal covenant (Jdg 2:1; cf Dt 8:18, 29; 24-27; Lv 26:42, 45; Ps 105:8-11; cf Butler 2009:198; see also 2.2.1.1). The first covenant as designated by Mather (2010:21) was in actual fact initially made with the patriarch Abraham before it was expanded into the Sinaitic Covenant at Mount Sinai as explained before (see 2.2.1.1; see also 2.2.4-2.2.5.4). Judges 2:1 reads: '... I said I will never break my covenant

¹⁸ See Bible Study Tools 2023. Covenant.

with you.’ YHWH would remain faithful to the people with whom He had made a covenant (Jdg 2:1; Mather 2010:21; cf Malabuyo 2016:1). As previously mentioned, the early Israelites, however, were not faithful to their covenant God and His covenant (see 2.2.1.1; 2.2.2.1). Judges recounts the periodic unfaithfulness of the Israelites and the criticism of the author/s of the tribes’ idolatry entrenched in passages such as Judges 2:1-3; 3:5-6; 6:8-10, etcetera; cf 2.2.1.1). Judges 3:5-6 evokes the first chapter of the book when the Israelites are unable to fully conquer and settle in Canaan, resulting in the necessity to coexist with the Canaanites in the land which would pave the way to their idolatry (Jdg 1:19-36).

Living in close proximity with the Canaanite nations exposed the Israelites, who were already susceptible to idolatry, to the cultures and cults of the Canaanite nations (cf 2.2.5.3; 7.2.2.1a-d). Judges 2:10 reports that after the death of Joshua the Israelites abandoned YHWH and served the Baals (Jdg 2:11-12). Consequently, the Angel of YHWH appears to the early Israelites to address their unfaithfulness (see also 2.2.2.1). This occurrence happens following Joshua’s demise and the subsequent worship of idols by the tribes, although it is chronologically reported earlier by the author/s of Judges. The Angel of YHWH reminds the Israelites of their covenant. As mentioned before the Abrahamic Covenant (and by extension the Sinaitic Covenant) is referenced by the Angel of YHWH in Judges 2:1 (see 2.2.2.1). This the Angel does in order to substantiate His prophetic judgement upon the Israelites – the perennial harassment and oppression of the tribes by their enemies – a direct result of their covenant disobedience and idolatry (cf Dt 28:25, 33). This brings about a subsequent repentance ceremony by the Israelites and possibly the restoration of their covenant with YHWH (Jdg 2:5). However, this situation was temporary and the Israelites would relapse and worship the Canaanite gods once again (Jdg 2:10-19; 3:5-7, etcetera).

b. Covenants or treaties with the inhabitants of the land

The early Israelites had made covenants with the Canaanites which contravened their own covenant with YHWH (Ex 23:32; 34:15; Dt 7:2-3; cf Jdg 3:5-6; 4:1; 6:8-10; 8:33; 10:6; Ross 2023:77 cf 2.2.2.1; 2.2.5.3).

The second covenant, that is mentioned in Judges 2:1-2, which actually comprises a number of covenants, the Israelites had made with the inhabitants of the land; that is, the Canaanites who lived in the region (Mather 2010:21; cf Butler 2009:198). Other references in Judges to similar covenants and treaties are found in Judges 3:5-6, 15, 17; 8:33; 6:10; 10:6, 13.

Biblical covenants are frequently considered to be similar to ancient Near Eastern treaties (Arnold and Beyer 2002:96; cf 2.2.5.6). However, unlike political and trade treaties that could be made between nations of equal status or a king and his many vassals (Merrill, Rooker and Grisanti 2011:459; cf Arnold and Beyer 2002:96; cf 2.2.5.5-2.2.5.6), an integral component of the stipulations of the Sinaitic Covenant was that the early Israelites were forbidden from concluding political

alliances (covenants/treaties)¹⁹ with any ancient Near Eastern nation or its gods (Jdg 2:1-3; Ex 23:32; 34:12; Dt 7:2; cf Jos 23:12; see Bunn-Livingstone 2002:77-78; cf 2.2.1; 2.2.4; 2.2.5.5).²⁰

The severity of the illegal covenants in Judges (2:1-3; 3:5-6, 15, 17; 8:33; 6:10; 10:6, 13) is emphasized by, (1) the physical presence of the Angel YHWH in His function as the Divine Messenger and (2) the speech of this Divine Messenger. Ross (2023:79) comments that textual repetitions in Judges 2:1-3 (of Ex 23:20-33, especially Ex 32; 34:11-16; cf Dt 7:2) underline the fact that YHWH's emissary (who is in fact YHWH Himself) has arrived to announce the Israelites' disloyalty (Ross 2023:79) and their impending judgement (see also 2.2.1.1; 2.2.2.1). The Angel of YHWH expresses His condemnation of the Israelites with the words, 'What is this you have done?' (Jdg 2:2; *ESV*). The Hebrew root word נָשָׂא (*āśāh*) in the phrase 'you have done' (*āśātem*) in addition to its meaning of to do or perform may also mean to make (an) offering/sacrifice (cf Jdg 13:16; cf 8.5.1). The question of the Angel of the LORD (Jdg 2:2): 'What is this you have done?' [*ESV*] is similar to the one God asks of Eve in the Garden of Eden (Gn 3:13).²¹ The author/s of Judges' replication of the question posed to Eve is probably intended to magnify the magnitude of the Israelites' covenant violation which the author/s are comparing to the very first 'covenant betrayal' in Eden (cf 2.2.3.1a-b). Consequently, similar to the incident in Eden (cf 2.2.3.1b), the Israelites' act of disobedience represents a profoundly bleak chapter in the history of Israel in particular considering the prophetic judgement of the Angel of YHWH in the next verse and the recurring periods of oppression.

Keener and Walton (2017:961) remark that covenants in the ancient Near East were ratified by (animal) sacrifice (Gn 31:44-54; Ex 24:3-8; cf 2.2.4.1).²² Such a sacrifice to the Canaanite god/s of the treaty (see above) was a terrible contravention of their own sacred covenant which the Israelites attempted to make amends for by sacrificing to YHWH in Judges 2:5 but only after He had announced His judgment of their harassment by the Canaanite nations.

The early Israelites deserved to be severely punished for their disobedience (cf Jdg 2:1-2). However, even in His righteous anger YHWH extended His mercy towards His people. Instead of being expelled from the land which was one of the consequences for breaking the covenant (Dt 28:36, 64), the Israelites will receive a 'lesser' punishment (see below). This was because YHWH

¹⁹ Merrill, Rooker and Grisanti (2011:62) remark that although the terms treaties and covenants are not synonymous, they have in common the connection of 'agreements enacted between two parties in which one or both make promises under oath to perform certain actions while avoiding others.'

²⁰ There are many similarities between early Israelite covenants and political agreements and covenants found in ancient Near Eastern literature (Arnold and Beyer 2002:96); however, there are also fundamental distinctions between Israelite and ancient Near Eastern treaties (see 2.2.5.6).

²¹ See Bible Hub 2023. *asah*.

²² Keener and Walton (2017:961) state that the tradition of animal sacrifice to seal a covenant was custom in the ancient Near East, demonstrated by an 8th century BC 'Aramaic Covenant from Syria in which animals were cut in half' (see 2.2.4.1).

remained faithful to His covenant even if His people decided not to (Jdg 2:1; Lv 26:44; see above; see also Mather 2010:21; cf Malabuyo 2016:1-2).

The Israelites' settlement in Canaan (Jdg 1:1-36) was a direct consequence of the rights to the land granted to their patriarch Abraham by YHWH and which was reaffirmed in the Sinaitic Covenant at Mount Sinai (Gn 17: Lv 26:42, 45; see 2.2.1.1; 2.2.4.2). Both the Abrahamic and Sinaitic Covenants will be discussed below (see 2.2.4 and 2.2.5). YHWH, therefore, will not allow the land to be taken away from His unfaithful people (cf Dt 28:16-68). However, the Israelites will be predisposed to a life of oppression and harassment from the very Canaanite nations with whom they made treaties (cf Jdg 2:2; see 2.2.1.1; see also 2.2.5.5).

The ensuing narratives in Judges reveal that YHWH's judgment (Jdg 2:3) could not procure the Israelites' continued adherence to the covenantal lifestyle. Neither did the sacrifice to YHWH (Jdg 2:5) presage the Israelites' continual devotion to YHWH. Ross (2023:79) remarks that 'it is foreboding that Judges 2:4-5 lacks a formal covenant renewal' (cf Jos 24). The absence of such a covenant renewal demonstrates the Israelites' apparent reluctance to abandon their worship of the Canaanite deities, as confirmed in Judges 2:11-19 (see Ross 2023:79).

The author/s of Judges emphasize the significance of the Israelites' covenant with YHWH and the consequences for disobedience in their descriptions of the events in Judges 2:11-19, when the Israelites fall into a cyclical pattern of life, worship and oppression. Judges 2:18-19 reads: 'Whenever the Lord raised up a judge for them, he was with the judge and saved them out of the hands of their enemies as long as the judge lived... But when the judge died, the people returned to ways even more corrupt than those of their ancestors, following gods and serving and worshipping them.'

Judges does not offer a reason why the Israelites would continuously abandon their Covenant God. Perhaps the character of YHWH and the early Israelites' understanding of Him 'resulted in a theology uniquely Israelite' (Walton 2015:147). The early Israelites, thus, probably maintained an unwavering confidence that their covenant God would remain loyal to His promise to protect His people (see 2.2.5.1), despite their own violations of the covenant.

2.2.2 The importance of covenant-making

The foregoing references (see 2.2.1.1b) indicate that covenant-making was an important 'concept' in the mindset of the author/s of the Book of Judges (see Arnold and Beyer 2002:96) which served the following purposes:

- establishing a relationship between YHWH and the Israelites based on mutual devotion and loyalty (Abrahams and Sperling 2007:230),

- shaping Israelite history in accordance with the divine will (cf Jdg 2:1-5; 3:7-11, 12-15, 29, 31, etcetera), and ultimately,
- fulfilling the divine plan to bless the early Israelites and eventually all nations (Gn 12:1-3).

The Israelites' covenantal disobedience not only damaged their relationship with YHWH (Abraham and Sperling 2007:230) but it endangered the divine plan of redemption that YHWH had in mind for all humanity (see also 2.2.2.1; 2.2.3.1; 2.2.4.2; cf 2.2.5.8). The aforesaid could shed light on why the narratives in Judges 2:1-5 and 11-19 exemplify the intense commitment to the preservation of the covenantal lifestyle that characterize the Book and the worldview of its author/s (see Latvus 1998:54). It may explain why YHWH made such intense and continuous efforts to rescue His people in ways, including warfare, that frequently involved elements of the supernatural (as seen in Judges 3:10, 31; 5:4-5; 6:11-40; 7:22; 11:29; 13:1-25, among others). This was in contrast to the prevailing cultural beliefs in the ancient Near East, where gods and nations interacted and waged war differently. However, it is possible that the disobedience of the Israelites in Judges exemplifies a long history of (covenant) rebellion against YHWH and His subsequent acts of redemption that probably typified the relationship between God and people from the beginning of creation.

2.2.2.1 A timeline of covenants and divine restoration

Ross (2023:79) observes that Judges 2:1-3 alludes to the Israelites' earlier history of covenant-making (see also 2.2.1.1; cf 2.2.4-2.2.5; 2.3.1). She asserts that 'the text evokes the Sinai Covenant and the renewal in Exodus 34.' Ross (2023:79) states that 'Exodus 23:20-33 is likely the only allusion in Judges 2:1-5.' Exodus 34:11-16 is only cited 'technically.' Ross (2023:79) argues that Deuteronomy appears to be hidden which contradicts the perspective of this study (see Dt 7:1-4; see 1.1; 2.1, for example). Ross goes on to say that Judges 2:1-3 appears to be a reference to Deuteronomy 7, according to those who contend that this is the case based on previous instances 'the text is evoked' in the Book of Judges.

This study proposes that Exodus 23:31-33 and Exodus 34:11-16 as well as Deuteronomy 7:2 are explicitly alluded to in the Angel of YHWH's speech in Judges 2:1-2. Both texts in Exodus (23:31-33; 34:11-16) convey the message that YHWH will 'drive out' the nations referenced in the passages. The Israelites are instructed to adhere to their own covenant and refrain from forming covenants with 'the inhabitants of the land (cf 2.2.1.1; 2.2.1.1b; 2.2.5.3; 2.2.5.5). In Exodus 34:12, Moses explicitly cautions the Israelites against making a treaty with 'those who live in the land,' since it will inevitably result in these nations becoming a source of entrapment for the tribes. Moses' words ultimately become a prophetic judgement made by the Angel against the Israelites in Judges 2:3 and thus the Angel is specifically referencing Exodus 34:12 (cf Dt 7:4). In addition, the phrase in Judges 2:2: 'and you shall not make a treaty with the people in this land,' directly alludes to Deuteronomy 7:2 which reads: 'make no treaty with them.' The Angel of YHWH's appearance

at Bochim reveals that the Israelites had indeed disobeyed all the instructions given in Exodus 23:31-33; 34:11-16 and Deuteronomy 7 by forming alliances with the nations residing in the land of Canaan (see also 2.2.5.5) and by not destroying their sacred places. The early Israelites had also married the inhabitants of the land and followed their cults (Jdg 3:5-6) in direct violation of the directive given in the aforementioned texts. In light of the aforesaid, it is evident that the three parallel texts, Exodus 23:31-33; 34:11-16 and Deuteronomy 7:1-2, 5, are alluded to in the Angel's address to the early Israelites at Bochim and reference a certain chronology of YHWH's covenant/s with the ancestors of the early Israelites since the Sinaitic Covenant was a (direct) outflow of the Abrahamic Covenant (see also 2.2.4.2; 2.2.5.1).

Previously (see 2.2.1.1) it has been noted that the covenant referenced by the Angel of YHWH in Judges 2:1 signifies the Sinaitic (and the Abrahamic) Covenant (see 2.2.5.1). The Sinaitic Covenant (Ex 20-24, the Book of Deuteronomy, and Joshua 24) and the Abrahamic Covenant (Gn 15:18-21; 17:1-27) from which it originates are arguably two of the Old Testament's most important examples of covenant-making (see Arnold and Beyer 2002:96).²³ As will be discussed further below, the Sinaitic Covenant specified the conditions for the fulfilment of the divine promises of land, seed and prosperity to Abraham (cf 2.2.4-2.2.5; see Table 2.1).

The early Israelites probably were aware of their patriarchal ancestry. Judges indicates that both the early Israelites as well as Canaanite nations were familiar with the 'Exodus' history of the Israelites (cf Jdg 11:13-25; see Woodward 2001:35; see Footnote 6). The Israelites understood that they were YHWH's בְּרִית – *bērît* (covenant) people chosen from among all the other nations in the ancient Near East. They were aware that unadulterated worship of YHWH was the most crucial condition of their covenant requirements (see Chapter Three). They were YHWH's people under His exclusive kingship (Grintz and Sperling 2007:483; cf 2.2.5.3; 3.2.3.2; 3.2.4). They would have recognized that their settlement in Canaan (Jdg 1:1-36) was the fulfilment of YHWH's promises (of land) to Abraham (cf Gn 15; 17; cf 2.2.5). They, in particular the author/s of Judges, likely would have realized that their ultimate destiny was to serve YHWH as a blessing to the nations (cf Gn 12:3; cf 2.2.2; 2.2.3.1c; 2.2.4.2). It is possible that the author/s understood that they had a divine mission greater than their own personal desires and needs as a people. Yet, throughout the Book of Judges, individuals and groups attempted to defy the divine will by pursuing their own aspirations. Judges 3:5-8 is a prime example of the aforesaid statement. The passage parallels many other instances in Judges when 'the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD...' reads: 'The Israelites lived among the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. They took their daughters in marriage and gave their own daughters to their sons, and served their gods' (cf Dt 7:3; Ex 34:15-16). The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD; they forgot the LORD their God and served the Baals and the Asherahs. The anger of the LORD burned against Israel so that

²³ It is not the intention of this study to determine or discuss whether the covenants between YHWH and the early Israelites existed or not. It will only reflect on what is expressed in 'covenantal' terms in the Book of Judges.

he sold them into the hands of Cushan-Rishathaim, king of Naharaim, to whom the Israelites were subject for eight years' (see also Jdg 2:10-19; 3:12; 4:1-3; 6:1, and so on; cf 2.2.1.1b).

In consideration of the above, it is possible that the author/s of Judges intentionally emphasize the severity of the Israelites' covenant violation through the lens of divine judgement (cf Jdg 2:1-3; 5:4-5; 6:8-10; 10:10-14; 13:1-25; 14-16). They may be aware that idolatry is compromising the Israelites' crucial role in YHWH's plan of universal redemption (cf Gn 12:1-3; cf 2.2.2). It is possible that the author/s understood that YHWH's covenantal traditions predate the Abrahamic Covenant and which may go as far back as the Garden of Eden (see 2.2.3.1) and the post-flood Noahic Covenant (see 2.2.3.1f). The aforesaid notion might be seen in Exodus 20:8-11 – the fourth commandment.²⁴

The Hebrew word *אָשָׂה* (*'āsāh*) (Jdg 2:3), in addition to the meaning of to do or perform and making (an) offering/sacrifice (as discussed in 2.2.1.1b) may, in addition, convey the meaning to 'make something out of;' that is, to create (Jdg 8:27).²⁵ The Book of Judges suggests that the early Israelite community, in pursuit of their own self-interests, endeavoured to forge a distinct path detached from their devotion to YHWH. The aforementioned idea is evident throughout the history of YHWH's covenant-making with the Israelites and their ancestors. The author/s of the Book of Judges effectively demonstrate the consequences of the Israelites' breach of their covenant and their self-centred pursuits through the narration of many unfortunate events (cf Jdg 2:10-19; 3:5-7, 12; 4:1-3, etcetera; see also 2.2.1.1.b).

The aforesaid ill-fated events were probably induced or exacerbated by the absence of an effectual Israelite leadership that apparently did not wield sufficient authority or merited adequate respect from the Israelites (cf Jdg 2:17) to (permanently) prevent them from relapsing into a cycle of idolatry. The focus of certain judges (10:3-4; 12:8-15) might not have been fully directed at leading the people of YHWH. The author/s of Judges mention their statuses of wealth. Apparently, these judges, intent on their own personal enrichment (Jdg 10:3-4; 12:8-15), ignored the instruction against the accumulation of great wealth (given to the king in Deuteronomy 17:16-17 and which by extension would have applied to all the leaders of the tribes). YHWH did promise His people abundance but the Israelites were to handle their wealth judiciously and avoid greed. It can be said that great wealth creates certain differences between members in a society – imbalances in socio-economic status and authority (cf Jdg 16:13; 8:2) that may lead to the penury of others (cf Jdg 17, a narrative that alludes to the apparent poverty of the Levite). Leaders are also tasked to be devoted to the covenant (cf Dt 17:17-20). Evidently, a loss of their covenantal values spelled disaster for

²⁴ The purpose of mentioning the fourth commandment is to demonstrate that the oral tradition of the early Israelites (and any texts they might have possessed; see Footnote 2) probably included the creation events described in Genesis 1 and 2.

²⁵ See Bible Hub 2023. *asah*.

the elders of the Israelites who exhibited an unfortunate and injurious lack of wisdom in Judges 11:34-39; 20:10-12, 19-23.

Furthermore, the priests, whose duty it was, may have neglected to instruct the people about YHWH's covenant (cf Jdg 2:10; cf 2.2.3.1e; 2.2.5.6d) and/or enforce the covenantal lifestyle and, after a judge had died, this assisted in their descent into idolatry (Jdg 2:19). The Israelites were compelled to devote themselves wholeheartedly to YHWH, as it would have been inconceivable to the author/s of Judges, for the tribes, the elect people of YHWH, not to do so. The Judges narrative, however, presents an ironic portrayal of the Israelites. The narrator/s likely represent them as the very individuals through whom YHWH intended to bless the nations, yet they, similar to their ancestors (see below), frequently found themselves in need of His salvation.

2.2.3 Covenant-making

2.2.3.1 Introduction

It is very probable that the relationship between YHWH and Adam and Eve was a nascent impetus for YHWH's subsequent covenants (Gn 15, 17; Ex 19-20; see Table 2.1). Some scholars have drawn parallels between the first humans in Eden in Genesis 1-2 and the settlement of the early Israelites in the land of Canaan (Bernard 1988:340; cf MacDonald 2012; Harper 2020:71-88).²⁶ Genesis emphasizes fidelity to YHWH via the prism of disobedience, much like the author/s of Judges (cf Jdg 2:1-5; 3:5-7, etcetera). Waltke (2007:250n2) notes that there are '...striking similarities between the story of humanity on probation in Eden and Israel on probation in Canaan.' Other similarities between Genesis 1 and 2 and the early Israelites have been noted (Waltke 2007:250-251). YHWH makes Himself known in Eden just as He did to the Israelites (cf Jdg 2:1-5; 6:11; 13:3-10). YHWH walks in Eden (Waltke 2007:250), similarly YHWH dwelled among the Israelites via His presence associated with (the Ark of the Covenant in) the Tabernacle (Ex 29:46; Lv 26:12; Davidson and Turner 2021:152). Waltke (2007:250) reports that there is no other place that is more desirable than the Garden of Eden and Canaan – the land of milk and honey – is equated with the paradisaical Eden.

YHWH, as the King of the earth has the right to distribute land on the earth to whom He pleases. YHWH put Adam in the Garden and placed Israel in Canaan (Lv 25:23-24; Waltke 2007:250). In the biblical narrative of Genesis 2, it can be observed that God demonstrated His benevolence towards humans within the context of verses 16-17 and Eden. Similarly, the early Israelites were recipients of YHWH's revelation regarding the prerequisites for attaining a life characterized by abundance and success in Canaan (Ex 19-20; Book of Deuteronomy; see also 2.2.5.2-2.2.5.3; cf 2.2.4.2-2.2.4.3). YHWH's covenants (in Eden and Canaan) are also the revelation of one, true

²⁶ Wenham (1985:19-25) for example has drawn parallels between the Tabernacle as well as Solomon's Temple and the Garden of Eden. See also MacDonald (2012).

God, and the divine nature to humanity, to the early Israelites in Judges and the type of relationship that YHWH desired to have with His people and eventually the rest of the nations (cf 2.2.3.1c-e).

a. The ‘first’ covenant

The Edenic (or Adamic) Covenant (2:15-17) is considered to be YHWH’s blueprint for human life similar to its successors the Noahic, Abrahamic and Sinaitic Covenants.²⁷ (see Table 2.1; Karlberg 2003:101; Riker 2010:63; cf Haw 2021:167).

Table 2.1: The Covenants²⁸

Covenant	Location	Type
Adamic (Edenic) Covenant (Gn 2:16-17; cf Hos 6:7) Gn 3:15 ²⁹	Garden of Eden	Conditional: YHWH’s blessings depend on obedience and fidelity Land, seed, and blessing/prosperity will follow After the fall, YHWH sets these stipulations: Adversities working the land Women will have pain bearing children. They will be ‘ruled over’ by their husbands. The promise of a Redeemer (Gn 3:15).
Noahic Covenant (Gn 9:8-17)		Unconditional (Post Flood) Blessings of the Edenic Covenant renewed YHWH’s image in humanity and humanity’s domain over earth are restored (Gn 9:1, 6). A universal covenant extended to all of creation Protection and blessings promised/ YHWH promised to never again destroy the earth with a flood / Stipulations: People are to be fruitful and multiply ³⁰ and rule over the animals.
Abrahamic Covenant (Gn 12:1-3; Gn 12:7; 13:14-17; 15:1-17; 17:1-8)	Shechem (Gn 12:6) Hebron (Gn 13:14-17)	Unconditional (an everlasting covenant [Gn 17:7]) All nations would be blessed (Gn 12:3). Land, seed, and blessing/ prosperity ³¹ specifically to the Israelites The land of Canaan is promised specifically to the physical descendants of Abraham. Stipulations to Abraham and descendants: Follow YHWH – walk blamelessly before Him obeying the covenant (Gn 17:1, 9-13) Circumcision of males signifying the everlasting covenant in the flesh
Mosaic (Sinai) Covenant (Ex 20:1-31) including Land (Dt 29:1-30)	Mt Sinai in Horeb Moab (Dt 29:1)	Conditional Land, seed, and blessing prosperity Consisted of blessings for fidelity and curses for disloyalty Canaan as a homeland is once again promised as well as peace and security, unity and protection from the enemy in the land. Conditions: Strict obedience to the Sinai Covenant, etcetera Worship the one true God ³² Do not make or worship idols, etcetera (Ex 20; 23) Cautionary Notices: The curses of the covenant will befall the Israelites if they break it (Dt 28:15-68)

²⁷ The terms Sinaitic Covenant and Sinai Covenant will both be used to refer to the covenant made between YHWH and the Israelites at Mount Sinai/Horeb.

²⁸ Adapted from The New Pilgrim Bible (2003:5, 18).

²⁹ There are two parts to the Adamic (or Edenic) Covenant; the first part occurs in Genesis 2:16-17 (before the ‘fall’) and the second part in Genesis 3:16-19 (after the ‘fall’) which is an outflow of Genesis 2:16-17 (Block 2021).

³⁰ Whybray (2001:47).

³¹ Land in the phrase ‘land, seed and blessing/prosperity’ refers to the Israelite possession of Canaan promised to Abraham, the word ‘seed’ refers to the perpetuation of the natural descendants of the patriarch Abraham – the early Israelites as well as his spiritual descendants. The term ‘blessings’ alludes to the agricultural abundance and fertility and longevity of the family as consequences of obeying and faithfully following YHWH and His covenantal laws (see Couch [ed] 1996:28-32).

³² See Munez (2023).

In light of Genesis 1:26-28 and 2:15-17, Block (2021) notes that it is plausible that YHWH's relationship with humanity has always been covenantal in nature. Accordingly, this very 'first covenant' may be termed the Edenic or Adamic Covenant. Block (2021), however, argues that the evidence for the Adamic Covenant in Genesis 1 and 2 is unclear. He references the non-occurrence of the word *bērît* (covenant) in Genesis 1 and 2 as one of the reasons for this ambiguity. But Block does go on to say that this ambivalence does not mean that the relationship between Adam and God 'lacked the features typical of later covenants.'

Consequently, Block (2021) further remarks that the 'two trees in the garden that hold the keys of life,' the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, represent blessings and curses (cf Anderson 2014:92; Hamme, 2016:964; Jeon 2017:16)³³ that are fundamental features of ancient Near Eastern covenants and treaties (see also Deuteronomy 28 in which the blessing and curses of the Sinaitic Covenant are enumerated. There is also a notable similarity between Genesis 2:16-17 and Deuteronomy 30:19: 'I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live' (Wood 2007:55). The author/s of the Book of Judges also refer to two types of trees that may allude to the concept of life and death. The first is the palm tree associated with Deborah, which serves as a symbol of peace, victory, fertility, and immortality (Jdg 4:4; Farrell 2022; cf 4.5.6.4c). These qualities represent the blessings that the Israelites can expect to receive from YHWH as a result of their obedience and faithfulness. The second is the oak tree of Ophrah in the vicinity of the altar of Baal and the Asherah pole (Jdg 6:11, 19, 25-26) and the diviner's oak in Judges 9:37 which probably represented a second category of trees in Judges. The second group of trees likely represented the broken covenant and the connotation of ruin and destruction (cf Dt 28:29, 33) since the author/s place these trees within the context of idolatry (see also 4.3.1.2b).

Similarly, a Hittite vassal treaty produces the theme of covenant curses and blessings. The treaty is between the Hittite king Muršili and the vassal king, Duppi-Teshub of Amurru (ca 1339-1306 BC; the curses of the treaty require the destruction of Duppi-Teshub, his entire household, his residence and land if he breaks the treaty by the gods of the treaty in whose name the treaty is validated). On the other hand, if Duppi-Teshub honours the treaty, he and his household, house, land, and country are guaranteed protection by the gods of the oath (Goetze 1969e:205; Arnold and Beyer 2002:98-100; Boadt, Clifford and Harrington 2012).

Wenham (2005:444) makes the observation that disobedience against YHWH results in curses and consequent suffering, yet there is always a chance of redemption. In this manner covenants of

³³ Hamme (2016:964) comments that the tree of life or sacred tree is an important and widespread theme in the cultic iconography and literature of the ancient Near East. Archaeologists have found representations of a stylized tree associated with a fertility goddess such as Asherah in the Book of Judges (cf Jdg 6:25-26) and throughout Syria-Palestine, Mesopotamia and Egypt (Hamme 2016:964). For more information on the topic of the tree of life see James (1966: VII-IX); Hamme (2016:964); also, Wood, A (2008:57-60) for a Biblical context of the tree of life (cf 4.3.1.2b).

YHWH do not strictly follow the (ideological) purpose of covenant-making in the ancient Near East (Wenham 2005:444; cf 2.2.5.6). The curses of the ancient Near Eastern covenant or treaty always required the total destruction by the gods of the violator of the agreement as evident in the aforementioned vassal treaty between the Hittite king Muršili and Duppi-Teshub of Amurru. By comparison, Adam and Eve are given the promise of restoration (Gn 3:15) and the early Israelites in Canaan are unvaryingly delivered from their enemies (Jdg 2:16-19; 3:9, 15, 31, etcetera). Therefore, it is evident that YHWH's plan for the early Israelites, and subsequently, all humanity has always been one of redemption, rather than extinction (Gn 12:1-3; cf 2.2.2; 2.2.2.1; 2.2.3.1c; 2.2.4.2; 2.2.5.8).

b. Rebellion

As previously indicated, a set of conditions is placed upon Adam and Eve's continued relationship with YHWH: their obedience to the divine directives given in Genesis 2:16-17 (Longman, Enns and Strauss [eds] 2013). Waltke (2007:250) remarks that in order to maintain the Garden, Adam must observe God's law and properly manage it, much as the Israelites must uphold their covenant in order to remain in the land (Gn 2:15-17; Dt 28:1-15; cf Jdg 2:1-5; cf Davidson and Turner 2021:152). The consequence of disobedience in Eden was expulsion from Eden and the loss of their immortality. Israel was warned against seeking to know and worship other gods for which the consequence was banishment from the land (Davidson and Turner 2021:152).

Adam and Eve ate the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and as a result of this disobedience – also known as the 'fall' (from grace), man was ejected from the Garden of Eden and the Edenic Covenant (Hoskins 2006:59). The rebellion in the Eden leads to a life of arduous work, and, most unfortunately, a broken relationship with YHWH (Gn 3:16-19; Jdg 2:10-19; 3:5-7, 12; 4:1-3; 6:1-10; 8:33; 10:6-14; 13:1; Neusner 2001a:57-60; Chilton and Neusner 2012:92-93; see also Table 2.1); similarly, Israelite rebellion in Canaan leads to a parallel lifestyle of suffering and oppression in Judges (Terpstra 2015:187; Walton 2015:147; Jdg 2:1-3; 3:8, 12; 4:1-3; 6:1-6, etcetera).

Unlike in ancient Near Eastern creation texts such as the *Enūma Eliš*, that speak of man's inability to choose whether or not to serve the gods, Adam and Eve were given free will to follow YHWH (Gn 2:16-17). In the same way, the Israelites, as depicted in Judges, were given the choice to follow YHWH or the other gods (cf Dt 30:19; Jos 24; cf Jdg 2:10-19; 3:5-7, 12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6-16; 13:1; see also above, 2.2.3.1a). Chilton and Neusner (2012:92) observe that granted independent will, 'man has the power to rebel against God's will,' thus, 'rebellion lurks as an ever-present possibility.' Block remarks that the (covenant-making) relationship between God and Adam 'established the divine/human paradigm that human rebellion broke' and which said broken relationship might be recuperated solely by means of a 'covenant with humanity and the world graciously designed and instituted by the Creator' (Block 2021). Hoskins (2006:59) maintains 'that covenants do not

expire and do not terminate they are fulfilled.’ Consequently, after the ‘fall’ an additional covenant was necessary to restore the relationship between YHWH and humanity (see Hoskins 2006:59; cf 2.2.4-2.2.5) and thus fulfill YHWH’s desire (‘initiated’ in Eden; cf Gn 2:16-17; see also 2.2.3.1) to have a (covenantal) relationship with humanity (see below 2.2.3.1c).³⁴

c. Restoration

As in the rest of the Old Testament, the theme of ongoing covenant restoration is ever present in Judges (cf Jdg 3:9, 11, 15, 30; 4:3, 23; 5:31, 6:7; 8:28, and 10:15-16). After the Edenic rebellion YHWH’s plan of redemption included the nomination of a specific land where His kingdom could be rebuilt, and the election of a specific people to inhabit the land through whom He could institute a covenant of restoration that would ultimately bless all nations (Enns 2008:53-54; cf DeSilva 2005:54; Gentry and Norman 2015:967; cf 2.2.2; 2.2.2.1; 2.2.4.2; 2.3.3). Eden was YHWH’s first attempt to establish His rule on earth and form a special (covenantal) relationship with people (see 2.2.3.1a) and Canaan would be His second. YHWH chooses to have His will in this matter (the establishment of His kingdom in Canaan) accomplished through human representatives – the Israelites. Gentry and Norman (2015:964) remark that the first ‘kingdom through covenant’ was in Eden. Adam and Eve were the attestation of God’s creative power on earth. They symbolized His rule and by their numbers multiplying, the extension of YHWH’s rule to include the entire earth (Gentry and Norman 2015:964-966). The early Israelites in Canaan were given the same role that Adam and Eve were given in Eden. It was YHWH’s intention for all people, eventually, to be brought back to a wholesome relationship with Him (cf 2.2.2; 2.2.2.1). By following the covenantal lifestyle, the early Israelites were to demonstrate to the rest of the ‘world’ the most proper way of worshiping the one true God (cf 2.2.2.1; 2.2.4.2; 2.2.5.1).

d. Revelation

YHWH’s covenants before and after the ‘fall’ unveil revolutionary concepts regarding the revelation of the divine nature and humanity’s role and relationship with deity and which set YHWH’s covenants apart from their ancient Near Eastern parallels (cf 2.2.5.6). The aforesaid themes will be discussed in Chapter Three. In this segment only the revelation of YHWH’s (covenantal) love will be discussed.

In ancient Near Eastern cosmology: ‘Man was not created to fulfill a plan of creation or divine morality, but to serve the gods so that their lives would be easy’ (Abramovitch 1994:102). By contrast, YHWH, created humanity to enjoy a mutual relationship of love and devotion with Him that is further intensified by YHWH’s expression of covenantal love; that is, אָהָב – *’ēhāb*. YHWH’s

³⁴ Hoskins (2006:59) cites the sacrifice in Genesis 3:21 as a blood sacrifice to cover the sin of Adam and Eve and that then becomes the second covenant (required atonement for sin through blood sacrifice). Atonement for sin through blood sacrifice is one of the primary religious stipulations of the Sinaitic Covenant.

love for the early Israelites is also expressed in the word סֶגֶל – *səḡullāh* (special treasure/treasured possession) (Ex 19:5; See Bible Hub 2023. *səḡullāh*; see also 2.2.5.3).

Beyond Eden, YHWH's love for humanity continues. To deepen the bond between Himself and the early Israelites, YHWH's grand plan for His people (and all other nations) included two types of love: אָהַב – *'ehāb* as part of (YHWH's divine signature within) His covenant/s of love (Dt 7:8; cf Gn 12:2-3; Mills 1998:72; cf 2.2.5.1; 2.2.5.3),³⁵ and חֶסֶד – *hesed* or lovingkindness within (specifically) the Sinai covenant of devotion and fidelity (cf Ex 19:5, see above, see Goiceachea 2015:93; Jenkins 2022:125; cf 2.2.5.1; 7.4.4.1). The Hebrew word אָהַב is a term that is also used for the intimate love between a husband and wife (Mills 1998:72; Hârlăoanu 2009:52) and that of parents for their children (Hârlăoanu 2009:56). The latter usage of אָהַב denotes an image of YHWH as a father to his human family. As such אָהַב signifies the intense feelings and loving deeds that YHWH direct towards the early Israelites (Hârlăoanu 2009:53, 56). Hârlăoanu (2009:52) notes that several academics have also determined that the term is a component of the judicial language used in historic ancient Near Eastern treaties. As a result, Deuteronomy makes use of covenantal language; that is, אָהַב to convey YHWH's love for the Israelites which denotes His consistent faithfulness within the covenant (Dt 7:7-8; cf Jdg 2:10-19; 3:9-11, 15, 30, 31; 4; 5; 6:8-10, 11; 10:16; 13:5, 25). In turn, as their covenant King, YHWH has the authority to demand the Israelites' undivided loyalty and to impose judgement when it is refused after several warnings (cf Jdg 2:1-3; 3:8, 2; 4:2; 6:1; 10:7-9; 13:1; cf 2.2.5.3-2.2.5.4).

The ancient Near East religions, on the other hand, placed such an excessive emphasis on carnal love (see 7.4.4.1; see also Footnotes 36 and 38).³⁶ An ancient Egyptian text states:

³⁵ The word אָהַב occurs 200 times as a verb, and nearly 50 times as a noun in the Bible. The term אָהַב also expresses God's love for the entire world and actions over it (Hârlăoanu 2009:52, 57).

³⁶ The ancient Near Eastern gods in general, did not require or expect love from their worshippers (Keener and Walton 2017:318). Love, in the milieu of (ancient Near Eastern) treaties, denotes harmonious and faithful international relationships (Keener and Walton 2017:318). 'The Great King, the suzerain, in a suzerain-vassal treaty in the ancient Near East' required his vassal to love him, not only in a legal manner but with fervor and emotional dedication (Keener and Walton 2017:318).

The gods/the *shedim* had created humans to provide for their needs (Keener and Walton 2017:1052; see; 2.2.5.8; 3.3.2.1a; 3.3.5.1; 3.3.6; 3.3.6.2; cf 2.2.3.1d;). In return the gods will 'satisfy the desire' of humans for protection and food and rule by virtue of satisfying these very human requirements (Keener and Walton 2017:1052). Because the physical wants and needs of people and gods were addressed in this kind of reciprocal relationship, rife with harmful magic practices, it was more geared toward a carnal association than a spiritual one. Hoffner (1966:328) comments that 'black or destructive magic practices' inundated the ancient Near Eastern societies in which 'the belief in the effectiveness of magic was current' and which was the basis of the gods' powers and authority (see also 3.3.5.1).

The gods may express their love for one another which was frequently mired by morally dubious behaviour (Hoffner 1966:330). Among humans, sexual love and fertility, aspects intrinsic to fertility deities including Baal and Asherah in the Book of Judges, were elevated in fertility rites detestable to YHWH (Hoffner 1966:327-330; cf 7.4.4.1; Footnote 36). YHWH denounces sexual acts that lead to physical and spiritual harm. Certain sexually transmitted diseases were well known in the ancient Near East; gonorrhoea is possibly described in Leviticus 15:1-15.

I am he who made heaven and earth what is thereon. I am he who made the waters, so that the Heavenly Cow might come into being. I am he who made the bull for the cow, so that sexual pleasures might come into being. I am he who made the heaven and the mysteries of the two horizons, so that the soul of the gods might be place therein (Wilson 1969c:13).³⁷

According to the aforesaid, the relationship between the world of humans in the ancient Near East and the abode of the gods may be interpreted as a sexual one³⁸ and אָבִי – *'ēhāb* (see above; see also 7.4.4.1; see also Footnote 36) in the sense of divine paternal love within a covenant was generally not extended by the gods to humans.

e. Relationship

Covenantal faithfulness and devotion to YHWH are foundational elements of the covenantal relationship between YHWH and the early Israelites. These elements also serve as shared unifying features between the Sinaitic Covenant and earlier covenants of YHWH. In addition, knowledge of YHWH and His requirements for worship and daily conduct are other essentials to a successful relationship between YHWH and the early Israelites (see Halahawi 2007:70; see 2.2.5.1; 2.2.5.3). The author/s of Judges, in prescribing to their worldview, are adamant that the Israelites cannot enjoy a benevolent relationship with YHWH without strict adherence to His covenant (see 2.2.5.2-2.2.5.3). The author/s narrate that peace ensued after a period of idolatry and warfare (see Jdg 3:11, 30; 5:31, etcetera). During these periods it is likely that the Israelites experienced a wholesome relationship with YHWH. However, a cycle of peace and covenant restoration did not endure for more than a generation or two after which the Israelites would abandon their covenant once again.

Apparently, when the Israelites ‘forgot’ YHWH (Jdg 2:10), the author/s may refer to the idea that a certain loss of knowledge of YHWH and His covenant occurred among the Israelites that aided

Mesopotamian texts describe ‘the disease of intercourse’ and the ‘disease of Ishtar (goddess of love)’ that exhibit physical signs of venereal diseases (*NLT*, Parallel Bible Study 2006:1086).

Deuteronomy declares the love of YHWH for His people to be of the highest, noblest order, without moral defect (cf Dt 6:5; cf 3.4.6-3.4.6.4). Keener and Walton (2017:318) observe that the Israelites’ love for YHWH, although not devoid of ‘emotional commitment’ also was a manifestation of fidelity. This was a definite divergence from the ancient Near Eastern polytheistic religion in which undivided devotion to the gods (or one god) was never a priority placed upon humans by the gods (Keener and Walton 2017:318).

³⁷ The excerpt is from the Egyptian text: ‘*The God and His Unknown Name of Power*’ and narrates the quest of Isis to learn the hidden name of the god Re and so to acquire the god’s power (Wilson 1969c:12-14).

³⁸ I am not referring particularly to the rite of sacred marriage or cultic prostitution practised in the ancient Near East. See Barstad (1984:21-25); Kelle (2005:122-123); Reigner (2009:11-18); Oden (2000:140-153) for a discussion on the topic of sacred prostitution in the ancient Near East. Some scholars, such as Stuckey (1997:8); Marsman (2003:497, 548-551); Budin (2008:3, 26, 28, note 180) now believe there is little textual evidence for the pervasiveness of cultic sexual activity in the ancient Near Eastern cult, although the Old Testament does refer to this type of activity. Be that as it may, I am referring to the sexual nature and behaviour of the gods for which there exists ample textual evidence. The gods and goddesses are described in ancient Near Eastern texts as having partners and engaging in incest (Kimuhu 2008:172; cf Kramer 1969a:37). The pursuit of sexual pleasure and apparently (dark) magic were major aspects of both divine and human existence in the ancient Near East (see 7.4.4.1; see also Footnote 36) and probably among the idolatrous Israelites in the Book of Judges who also worshipped the Canaanite deities during cycles of idolatry. The paternal love of YHWH is thus unique given the largely sexual colouration of the ancient Near Eastern religions.

in their idolatry (cf 2.2.2.1; 2.2.5.6d). The author/s also describe an anti-covenantal syncretic or hybrid cult functioning among certain Israelites (Jdg 17; 18; cf 2.3.2.1; 2.3.4.3a-b) as well as general lawlessness mentioned previously (cf 2.2.2.1) which may be ascribed to a periodic lack of understanding the covenantal requirements (cf Jdg 2:10; see also 2.2.2.1; 2.2.5.6d) and as well as consequences for breaking these requirements (cf Dt 4:5-9; Longman, Enns and Strauss [eds] 2013; cf 2.2.5.1-2.2.5.3).

Another important element that signified the covenant relationship is the ethos of equality inherent in YHWH's covenants (see Chapter Seven). Both men and women may be assigned (similar) tasks to fulfill YHWH's plans and purposes for the Israelites (see also 4.3.1.1b). Early Israelite women in Judges were also allowed to be mobile and had a type of independence that was rare in the ancient Near East (Sha 2018:1-5).³⁹ Deborah and Jael, the mother of Samson (Jdg 13; 14), Delilah (Jdg 16), the wife of the Levite (Jdg 19) exhibit their leadership role and independence in a patriarchal society. The Sinai Covenant stipulated divine blessings of life for all Israelites to enjoy (that could be viewed as a derivative of Genesis 1:26-28 and 2:15-17).

f. Noahic Covenant

In the Noahic Covenant, YHWH reaffirms the divine image in humans and their rule over the earth (Gn 1:27-28; 9:6; see Park 2010; see Table 2.1). The divine promises of divine protection and blessing made to Noah, before the flood, in Genesis 6:18-21 are reiterated in Genesis 9:9-17, post flood (Whybray 2001:46).⁴⁰ Similar to the directives given to humanity in Eden, YHWH instructs Noah to 'be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth' (Gn 9:1, 7; see Table 2.1).

³⁹ The value of human life is evident in the way YHWH created man (cf 7.4.4.1). YHWH produces man from the dust of the soil and animates him with the breath of life (Gn 2:7). In the Old Testament, people are God's servants 'of some nobility and standing' (Mills 1998:72; cf 2.2.3.1d). YHWH creates humans with free will, independence and equality; both Adam and Eve are tasked to work in the Garden (Gn 2:15), to be the caretakers and rulers of the earth (Gn 1:27-28). They are created in the 'image of YHWH;' that is, they possess the sacred qualities of YHWH and are commissioned to fill the earth with the divine qualities (see 2.2.4.2; 2.2.5.8c).

The religions of the ancient Near East treated people like mere slaves of the gods. Clifford (1994:173) remarks that Akkadian cosmologies show that soon after the gods subjugate the primordial cosmic waters, the temple-city is built, people are created to maintain the temple and provide for the gods (cf 4.5.5.2). Marduk creates man as slaves from the blood of the slain consort of Tiamat (see 2.2.3.1d; see also Footnote 36). In fact, the *Enūma Eliš* states that Marduk creates humans expressly to do the work of the gods so that they (the gods) shall be at leisure (Dalley 2000:260-261). The *Ugaritic Baal Cycle* may provide parallel insight into these tasks that the gods found onerous. Anath may be a fearsome warrior but she is also portrayed in a domestic role, the domain of women in the ancient Near East (Smith and Pitard 2009:184). Several goddesses are associated with spindles (in the *Ugaritic Baal Cycle*) which may refer to certain domestic tasks performed by women specifically, such as weaving (Smith 1994:442). Smith remarks that 2 Kings 23:7 may associate Athirat with weaving. The craftsman god, Kothar-wa-Hasis ('which means skillful and wise') makes weapons and furniture and constructs houses for the gods 'out of silver and gold' (Feldman, M 2006:126).

⁴⁰ Van Drunen (2014:111) remarks that the postdiluvian Noahic Covenant must be distinguished from the prediluvian Noahic Covenant in that the prediluvian covenant promised salvation for only a remnant through an otherwise universal judgement while the postdiluvian covenant promised preservation for the whole creation by holding off such judgement.

The word covenant is used in the Bible for the first time in Genesis 6:18 (Park 2010; cf Whybray 2001:46). Whybray (2001:46) notes that the Noahic Covenant is ‘by implication a covenant made by God with the whole future human race; it points forward also, however, to the specific covenant to be made later with the people of Israel.’⁴¹

In light of the above, the Noahic Covenant is, apparently, a bridge that connects to the Edenic Covenant (Gn 1:26-28; 9:1, 9; see Harless 2004:94) and the Abrahamic Covenant (see Jeon 1999:118-119). In both the Noahic Covenant and the Abrahamic Covenant a divine sign points towards covenant-making. YHWH sets a rainbow ‘literally a bow in the sky’ as a sign of His covenant with Noah (Gn 9:12-16; Whybray 2001:47).⁴² Circumcision is a sign of the covenant between YHWH and the patriarch Abraham and his descendants (cf 2.2.4).

2.2.4 The Abrahamic Covenant

YHWH’s plan to reconcile people with Himself was a reaction to the post ‘fall’ separation which led to a fractured human society (Tempelmeyer 2022:24; cf 2.2.2; 2.2.2.1; 2.2.3.1b-e). Tempelmeyer asserts:

While all other nations of the world, were invested in protecting themselves from each other, God gave birth to the Jewish nations who were to serve and bless the world. The children of Abraham were chosen not to remove themselves from others but to be the people who would include everyone. The call to Abraham was the launch of God’s intention to bring the nations back together.’ And above all, return the nations to YHWH.

In light of the above, it is clear that the significance YHWH’s covenant/s differ drastically from ancient Near Eastern treaties (see also 2.2.5.6). Ancient Near Eastern kings relied heavily on treaty vows to manage and expand their power and territory (Leonard and Leonard 1996:12). The ‘great king’ swore to safeguard his ‘servant’ who may be either a sub-king or a vassal in exchange for

⁴¹ In this new creation, symbolized by the Noahic Covenant (Whybray 2001:47; cf Van Drunen 2014:111; Kennard 2015:55), animals will fear humans and they may also be consumed by people as food. However, people may not eat the meat of animals that contains blood (Gn 9:2-4). Blood was regarded as a life force in antiquity (Dt 12:23; Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:39).

Walton, Matthews and Chavalas (2000:39) state that the prohibition against eating meat that contains blood merely requires that the blood be drained – it does not forbid the consumption of any blood at all. Before consuming the meat, the blood was drained to return the life force of the animal to the God who had given the animal life. ‘This offers recognition that they have taken the life with permission and are partaking of God’s bounty as His guests. Its function is not unlike that of the blessing said before a meal in modern practice.’ There is no comparable prohibition known in the ancient world (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:39).

Whybray (2001:47) remarks that the description of animal slaughter in Genesis 9:4 once more dates the establishment of a Mosaic law to the prehistoric era (cf Gn 7:2-3). Additionally, no one is allowed to kill another person or they will face punishment (Gn 9:6; see Van Drunen 2017:128).

⁴² Walton, Matthews and Chavalas (2000:39) add that the goddess Ishtar in the *Gilgamesh Epic* recognised the lapis lazuli ‘(deep blue semi-precious stones with traces of gold-colored pyrite)’ of her necklace as the foundation of an oath by which she would never forget the days of the flood. An Assyrian relief from the 11th century BC depicts two hands emerging from the clouds, one bearing a bow and the other a blessing. Since the word for the weapon and the word for the rainbow is the same, Walton, Matthews, and Chavalas (2000:39) note that this is an intriguing image.

allegiance and tribute payments (Leonard and Leonard 1996:12).⁴³ Leonard and Leonard (1996:12) observe that the ancient Near Eastern treaty also established a connection akin comparable to that between family members since all the servants of the great king were to consider one another as brothers. In the biblical worldview YHWH grants such a covenant to His ‘servant people’ in His capacity as the ‘Great King’ (Leonard and Leonard 1996:12). Within the context of the ancient Near Eastern treaty making between kings and gods, YHWH, overturns this dominant cultural ideology and makes a treaty with, first, the patriarch Abraham, who is not a king, followed by a covenant made with the biological descendants of Abraham.

2.2.4.1 *To cut a covenant*

As previously indicated (see 2.2.1.1), in the Old Testament and the ancient Near East, a covenant ‘is an agreement or legal contract made between two parties sealed by an oath that binds one or both parties to certain conditions and obligations’ (Couch [ed] 1996:27; Marshall 2003:173; see also Jdg 2:1-2). The Hebrew word for covenant בְּרִית – *bērît* which literally means (to) ‘cut a covenant’ (Garrett 2020:181-182; cf Block 2021)⁴⁴ indicates the importance of covenant-making by the act of cutting or sealing of the covenant in blood (Kuhn 2020). The phrase ‘cut a covenant’ is likely derived from the custom of the cutting up of an animal associated with covenant-making such as in Genesis 15 (cf Jr 34:18-19; Day 2003:95; cf Garrett 2020:182). In Genesis 15:9-10 Abraham cuts a heifer, ram and a goat in two and afterwards, a smoking firepot with a burning torch appear signifying YHWH passing between the pieces (Gn 15:17) ‘in connection with the divine covenant with Abraham’ (Gn 15:18) (Day 2003:95).

Day (2003:95-96) notes that ancient Near Eastern texts attest to the association of animal rituals with covenant-making; For instance, an 18th century BC *text from Mari*;⁴⁵ an 18th century BC *Babylonian letter* from Tel al Rimah regarding Zimri-Lim of Mari and Hatnu-rapi of Karana; the 17th

⁴³ Carr (1996:188) remarks that the language in Genesis 12:3 is used for pledges made to a king (in the ancient Near Eastern context of treaty making). Carr notes that the promises of blessings and protection in Genesis 12:3 have ancient Near Eastern analogs (see also Dt 28:1-14). However, Carr adds that the language used for the divine promise of ‘protection in ‘Genesis 12:3a is stronger’ than that which is normally used in a biblical (context) (cf Gn 27:29; Nm 24:9) as well as ‘ancient Near Eastern parallels’ (see also below). Carr notes that the standard formula (for blessings and curses) is ‘those who bless you will be blessed, but those who curse you will be cursed’ (Gn 27:29; Nm 24:9). However, Genesis 12:3 replaces the word curse with the term ‘treat lightly’ [לָלַךְ – *qalal*] (insertion mine; Carr 1996:188). The *NLT* reads: ‘those who treat you with contempt’ and the *ESV* ‘him who dishonors you.’

⁴⁴ Garrett (2020:181-182) explains that word ‘*berith*’ frequently appears in the following Hebrew patterns: as ‘*karath berith*’ – ‘cut a covenant’ that means ‘to make a covenant’ and ‘*heqim berith*’ that means to ‘set up’ a covenant. The two phrases ‘sometimes overlap in meaning; they are often but not always functionally synonymous.’ For a discussion of ‘*karath berith*’ and ‘*heqim berith*’ and the meanings of the two phrases see Garrett (2020:182-188); Day (2003:91-110); Block (2021). The ritual of cutting prescribed animals in two in the process of the covenant made between Abraham and YHWH (Gn 15:10) was also practised in ancient Near East covenant-making: The two covenant parties walked between the pieces of the slaughtered animal thus binding themselves to the covenant terms ‘under penalty of a fate similar to that of the slaughtered animal’ (Durken 2017; see also Borowski 2002:417-418).

⁴⁵ See Albright (1969b:482).

century BC treaty between Abba-AN and Yarimlim⁴⁶ as well as the 8th century BC vassal treaty between Ashurnirari V of Assyria and Mati'ilu of Arpad (cf Howard 1993:37; Reiner 1969:533).

Couch ([ed] 1996:31) mentions that it was the custom (in the ancient Near East), in the ratification of a blood covenant, for both parties to pass between the pieces of animal conjointly binding themselves to an irreversible covenant (see also Footnote 44). However, Abraham is excluded from the formal ratification of the covenant in Genesis 15 and YHWH alone passed through the pieces of animals. This means that only YHWH could break the covenant (Couch ([ed] 1996:31), thus rendering it impossible for any human governance of the covenant. About the Abrahamic covenant Couch ([ed] 1996:27) comments:

the Abrahamic Covenant is the single most important event in the Old Testament. It governs God's entire program for Israel and the nations and is thus determinative of God's program in history...and foundational to the whole program of redemption. All subsequent revelation is the outworking of this covenant.

The practice of Israelite monotheism and the (Sinaitic) covenantal lifestyle in Canaan thus were vital for the successful fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant and the restoration of the entire creation under the sovereignty of mono-YHWH.

2.2.4.2 Initiation, divine promises and stipulations

In Genesis 12, YHWH initiates the grand plan of the restoration and blessing of humanity (Enns 2008:53). YHWH promises to bless Abraham, who is from Ur of the Chaldeans⁴⁷ and his descendants and all nations through him (Gn 12:1-3; see Table 2.1). Genesis enumerates the divine blessings made to Abraham:

- YHWH will be the God of Abraham and his descendants (Gn 17:8; cf Gn 12:8; 13:18; 15:1, 6). Judges 2:1 alludes to the Exodus tradition and the journey to the land of Canaan. Both this allusion and the 'conquer and settlement' of Canaan in Judges 1 are direct results of the Israelites' land entitlement in Canaan, a fundamental aspect of the blessings that YHWH initially promised to their ancestor Abraham, and which was later reiterated in the Sinaitic Covenant at Mount Sinai (cf 2.2.1.1a; 2.2.2.1).
- Abraham's name will be made great since he will become a great nation and have numerous descendants (Gn 12:2, 13:6; 15:5; 17:5-8; 16 [the mention of 'Israel' on the stele of Merneptah indicates that the early Israelites had indeed gained such a 'status' that they would attract international attention; see Hasel 1994:45-61]). The hyperbolic use of the

⁴⁶ See Arnold and Beyer (2002:96-97).

⁴⁷ Scholars have suggested three locations for Ur of the Chaldeans: modern-day Urfa on the Balikh River, a place west of the Tigris River, between Hatra and Nisibis and at Tel al-Muqayyar in southern Mesopotamia – the latter location being the most preferred site among scholar (see Hoskisson 1989:119-136). Hoskisson (1989:119-136), however, is not convinced that the evidence for placing Ur of the Chaldeans in Southern Mesopotamia is adequately persuasive and suggests a region closer to Haran (Gn 11:31), in either northwestern Syria or southcentral Turkey.

phrase: ‘...offspring like dust of the earth...’ in Genesis 13:16 is common in the Old Testament as well as in ancient Near Eastern texts (see Trimm 2022; Elliott, Atkinson and Rezetko 2023) and may simply reference the great nation promised to Abraham in Genesis 12:2 and as probably indicated on the Merneptah stele (see above). However, it may be said that the Israelites will be a great nation (in terms of socio-religious and political status) because of the active involvement of YHWH in their history. The ‘conquest’ of Canaan described in Judges 1 contains powerful elements of the supernatural since the ‘conquest’ involves encounters with powerful and formidable Canaanite nations (Jdg 1:20; cf Jdg 20-36; 3:1-3). In the worldview of the author/s of Judges only YHWH’s involvement in these ‘conquest’ wars could ensure the Israelites’ victory (cf Jdg 1:1-2) and elsewhere in Judges (3:10, 29-30, 31; 4:23-24; 5: 4-5, 31, etcetera) since the Israelites were weaker in military strength and skill than their Canaanite neighbours (cf Jdg 3:1-2).

- The divine promise of the land of Canaan to the patriarch and his descendants (Gn 12:1; 13:14-17; 15:18-21; 17:8; cf Jdg 1:1-36; 6:9; 2:26; 11:21). Accordingly, the covenant promises the (early) Israelites the permanent possession of Canaan and blessings in the land geographically delineated in Genesis 13 and 15 (cf Jdg 11:21; Couch [ed] 1996:32; cf Seebass 1975:76; Weinfeld 2007:252; Wenham 2005:444; Enns 2008:54). However, as Judges 1:1-36 reveals, the Israelites did not entirely ‘conquer’ the Canaanite cities which as the succeeding narratives show greatly affected the promises in Genesis 12:3 (cf 2.2.2).
- YHWH will bless those who bless Abraham (and his descendants) and curse those who curse him (Gn 12:3; cf Lk 24:27; Ac 3:25). This concept is exemplified in the wars of deliverance YHWH launched against the tyrannical enemies of the Israelites in Judges (Jdg 2:10-19; 3; 4, etcetera, see above). The notion that YHWH will fight the Israelites’ battles on their behalf is an integral part of the Sinaitic Covenant (Ex 23:23, 17-28; Dt 1:30, 3:22; Jos 10:14, 42; 23:3; Jdg 5:4-5; 7:22; see 2.2.5.3) which is an outflow from the land promises made to Abraham in Genesis 12, 13, 15 and 17).
- All the nations of the earth will be blessed through Abraham (Gn 12:3). The descendants of Abraham in the land of Canaan were the image bearers of YHWH (see 2.2.5.8c; see also Footnote 39) and their permanent portrayal of the covenantal lifestyle had to induce other nations to serve YHWH (see 2.2.3.1c-f; cf 2.2.2.1; 2.2.5.1).

The covenant made with Abraham is an eternal and unconditional covenant – as far as the promises of land and seed are concerned (cf Jdg 2:1). When YHWH alone passes through the animal pieces, He is forever and irreversibly binding Himself to His oath to Abraham (see also 2.2.4.1; cf Footnote 44) and confirming the promises (of land and blessings therein) by a covenant of blood (Couch [ed] 1996:27-31; cf 2.2.5.1). The Abrahamic Covenant is repeated in Genesis 13:14-17, confirmed in Genesis 15, and signified in Genesis 17 (Couch [ed] 1996:28; cf Marshall 2003:173).

At the heart of YHWH's covenant with Abraham lies the three fundamental features of 'land, seed and blessing' (Couch ([ed]1996:27; cf Enns 2008:53; Wenham 2005:444; see above; see also Table 2.1). Seebass remarks (1975:76) that the land was never viewed as solely a material possession but rather as a spiritual heritage that stood for 'freedom, peace and well-being in and with God.' Seebass contends that the covenant-making in Genesis 17 advances this idea and assures that the land promised to Abraham and his offspring is not interpreted in a nationalistic manner as private property but rather as the place of worship fitting for the world's creator. Seebass (1975:76) further notes that Genesis 17 formulates the message that helped the early Israelites as portrayed in Judges survive despite their disloyalty to YHWH. YHWH establishes His covenant with Abraham and his descendants as an everlasting covenant and the land of Canaan as an everlasting possession with the patriarch and his offspring.

Seebass (1975:76) adds that the commission to serve the Creator, in a manner consistent with who He is, came to the people of YHWH in the middle of world powers that held disparate numinous mindsets and lifestyles. But, asserts Seebass, humanity as a whole, including 'Israel' and the patriarchs, had succumbed to the desire to be like God (Gn 3:5), to the enigmatic 'crouching of sin before the door of the heart' (Gn 4:7), and the need to make a name 'for oneself in a single kingdom' (Gn 11:1-9). 'However, the Lord of the world made a new beginning with Abraham' (Seebass 1975:76).

As far as the 'promise' of 'seed' is concerned, Lehman (1998:84) remarks that YHWH chose the patriarchs and their (biological) descendants to 'be the recipients of His revelation and witnesses to the world of His redemption in an act of grace' (Gn 11:10-33). When God reveals Himself to Abraham as *El Shaddai* – the Almighty God – Abraham responds with faith (Lehman 1998:97; cf 3.4.2). Abraham is to 'walk before' YHWH 'and be blameless' (Gn 17:1). Abraham's response of faith to YHWH's extraordinary promise of innumerable descendants – since Sarah is barren – is credited to him as righteousness (Gn 15:5; Lehman 1998:97; Rm 4; 9:6-20). Abraham and Sarah's names are changed; Abram – Abraham (father of many nations, Gn 17:5-6) and Sarai – Sarah (mother of many nations, Gn 17:15)⁴⁸ to reflect YHWH's promise of the blessing of descendants. In addition, YHWH requires Abraham and all the males in his household to be circumcised as a sign of the everlasting covenant He had made with Abraham (Gn 17:10-14; cf 2.2.3.1f).

2.2.4.3 *The divine principle of election*

The divine principle of election continues with the patriarch Jacob (Lehman 1998:105), the son of Isaac borne to Abraham and Sarah in their elder years in accordance with the divine promise (Gn 17:19).⁴⁹ Jacob is instructed by his father Isaac to go to Paddan Aram (Northwest Mesopotamia)

⁴⁸ See also Bible Hub 2023. Abraham and Bible Hub 2023. Sarah.

⁴⁹ According to the Book of Romans both the twin sons of Jacob had a divine destiny to fulfill. According to Romans 9, not all Abrahams' genetic descendants are 'his children;' that is YHWH had a plan in which the descendants of

after having deceptively gained the blessing of his elder brother, Esau, from Isaac. Isaac blesses Jacob to receive the divine promise of land and seed YHWH had made to Abraham (Gn 28:3-4; see Table 2.1). Isaac is also instructed not to marry a Canaanite wife but to take a wife from ‘among the daughters of Laban,’ his mother Rebecca’s brother (Gn 28:1-2). On his way to Harran (Gn 28:10), Jacob rests at a certain place for the night. There, he has a dream in which the LORD appears to him and declares Himself to be YHWH, the God of Abraham and Isaac. YHWH makes the same promise of countless descendants as well as divine protection and possession of the land of Canaan to Jacob (Gn 28:13-15) that He had made to Abraham. Jacob erects a pillar at this place and names it Bethel (House of God, Gn 28:17-19). He makes an oath that if the LORD will protect, provide for him and return him safely to Canaan, the LORD will be his God, that the pillar that he had set up will be God’s house and that he will give a tenth of all that the LORD gives him back to the LORD.

A significant aspect of YHWH’s promise to Isaac is that in this pledge, God explains how He would bless all the nations (Gn 12:3) by spreading the innumerable descendants of Jacob ‘to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south’ (Gn 28:14) indicating the (eventual) universal kingdom of YHWH. YHWH’s eternal covenant is one of reconciliation with all the nations and their redemption. Given the foregoing, YHWH’s solemn promise to Abraham, the blessing of Abraham’s offspring, and the blessing of all the nations (Gn 12:2-3), served as the foundation for His strategy to reconcile all people to Himself following the Edenic rebellion (see 2.2.2; 2.2.2.1; 2.2.3.1c; 2.2.4.2). It was expanded upon and codified in the Sinai covenant and it was thereafter faithfully upheld by YHWH even throughout the early Israelites’ periods of idolatry and religious syncretism as reflected in the Book of Judges.

2.2.5 The Sinai Covenant

2.2.5.1 Introduction

The Sinai Covenant was added to the Abrahamic Covenant with stipulations for worship and life that were lacking in the Abrahamic Covenant (see 2.2.1.1; 2.2.2.1). Morrison (2008:93), however, based on Deuteronomy 5:2-3, maintains that the Sinai Covenant is ‘distinct’ from the Abrahamic Covenant ‘although it was a fulfilment of the promise in Genesis 17:8 (Dt 4:13; 29:13; Lv 26:42, 45), and it incorporates the main elements of the Abrahamic Covenant – the promise of land, numerous descendants, circumcision and the promise to be God’s people’ (see Table 2.1; see also 2.2.4.2).

This study argues that the Abrahamic and the Sinaitic Covenants are essentially ‘one’ covenant (cf 2.2.1.1; 2.2.2.1) or the same covenant that was revealed separately (and referenced in Judges 2:1).

Jacob – the children of the promise – had a particular role to fulfill. Esau, the twin brother of Jacob was destined to serve Jacob (Rm 9:12).

When Moses declares that YHWH ‘did not make this covenant with our fathers but with all of us who are alive here today’ (Dt 5:3), he may simply mean that the LORD did not reveal the stipulations and laws of the Abrahamic Covenant to the patriarchs but now He is doing so through this (the Sinaitic) covenant. It may be argued that the Abrahamic Covenant is incomplete without the Sinaitic Covenant while the former provides an indispensable context for the covenant made at Mount Sinai.

The Sinaitic Covenant was YHWH’s self-revelation as the only true God and a revelation of His requirements and laws for life to the early Israelites and all the other nations in the ancient Near East (cf 2.2.2.1). Like all of YHWH’s covenants, the Sinaitic Covenant was founded on love – YHWH’s benevolence, His lovingkindness – and the divine character that the early Israelites were to emulate by living a covenantal lifestyle (see also 2.2.3.1d-e; Lv 19:18-19). Consequently, the Sinaitic covenant was a Covenant of Love; that is, for the early Israelites to love YHWH and their neighbours as they loved themselves by keeping the statutes of the covenant (Lv 19:18-19).

The Sinaitic Covenant was to be eternal since YHWH’s covenant with Abraham was eternal and thus YHWH had sworn never to break His covenant with the Israelites (Jdg 2:1; see also 2.2.1.1-2.2.1.1a). In light of the aforesaid, the Sinaitic Covenant can also be called a Covenant of Salt. Pollard (1915:729) reports that since salt was a needed ingredient of the Israelites’ daily meals and of all sacrifices offered to YHWH, ‘it became an easy step to the very close connection between salt and covenant-making.’ Pollard (1915:729) further remarks that a sacrificial feast was usually served to reaffirm covenants, and salt was always present as a symbol of an enduring covenant. Given that salt also functions as a preservative, it may easily come to represent an enduring covenant. Thus, perpetual statues also governed the offerings to YHWH (Pollard 1915:729). Leviticus 2:13 reads: ‘Do not leave the salt of the covenant of your God out of your grain offerings...’ (cf Nm 18:19). Salt is referenced in covenant-making in ancient Near Eastern text, too, since ‘its preservative qualities made it the ideal symbol of the perdurability of a covenant’ (Milgrom 1991:191).

Although the early Israelites would perennially fall away from their faith in YHWH, covenantal permanence and loyalty were YHWH’s desire for His people. In the worldview of the narrator/s of Judges, had the Israelites been consistently devoted to YHWH and remained loyal to His covenant, they would have always been bestowed with the blessings that He had promised them at Mount Sinai. The Book of Judges, however, is filled with a broken relationship between the Israelites and YHWH (cf Jdg 2:1-3; 3:8, 12-14; 4:1-3, 6:1-10) and with each other as a result of their adultery (cf Jdg 17:1-2; 18; 19; 20; 21).

One can only imagine the unsurpassable heights that the early Israelites could have achieved for themselves and humanity if they had remained faithful to YHWH’s covenant: If only the Israelites did not make treaties with the Canaanites (cf Jdg 2:1-2) and served their gods (cf Jdg 2:11-13; 3:6-

7, and so on). If Gideon, for example, did not create the golden ephod in Judges 8, the Israelites' may not have fallen into subsequent idolatry. If only Samson was more spiritual and had completely fulfilled the prophecy of the Angel of YHWH (Jdg 13; 16), he might have been the judge that delivered the Israelites permanently from their idolatry. If the Levite in Judges 19 had simply protected his wife from the Benjamites, the dire events in Judges 20 and 21 could have been prevented. However, the author/s of the Book of Judges espoused the belief that since YHWH would keep His word to protect His people, He would restore them and His covenant and they could begin anew after each cycle of idolatry. Judges' author/s indicate that their very continuation as a people (and that of the entire human race [cf Jdg 12:2-3]) depended on their loyalty and devotion to their Covenant God. The unceasing redemption of the Israelites by YHWH demonstrates His unwavering commitment to His people, as He intended to restore all nations of the world to Himself and bring them together as a single family and the Israelites had a vital role to play in the divine plan (cf 2.2.3.1d-e; 2.2.4.2).

2.2.5.2 Primary stipulation

As previously indicated, covenant-making is the contextual setting for the YHWH's plan of redemption (Block 2021; cf 2.2.2; 2.2.4-2.2.4.2). Monotheistic worship was the primary covenantal requirement since only through their devotion to YHWH could the early Israelites be blessed and retain their status as His chosen people (see also 2.2.5.1; cf 2.2.4.3; see also below 2.2.5.3 and Chapter Three). The Israelites were assured they would be the head (cf Jdg 1) and not the tail, a symbol of YHWH's blessing and approbation of the tribes as YHWH's elect people. From the perspective of the author/s of Judges, the oppression of the Israelites, a sign that they were 'the tail' – under the tyranny of their enemy – was, therefore, a great disgrace. How could this be possible, given that they were, after all, YHWH's elect people, with a definite role to play in His plan of redemption? (cf 2.2.2; 2.2.2.1; 2.2.3.1c; 2.2.4.2; 2.2.5.1).

Longman, Enns and Strauss [eds] (2013) maintain that in Deuteronomy the leitmotifs of 'life, blessing, obedience, and wisdom ... come together most overtly.' These qualities are systematized under the 'terms and conditions' of the Sinaitic Covenant. The consistent practise of monotheism that encapsulated the aforesaid elements would always formulate the early Israelites' lives, securing their longevity, success and abundance as long as they remained faithful to YHWH (see also 2.2.3.1; 2.2.4.3; 2.2.5.3). In the worldview of the narrator/s, the Israelites' sole devotion to YHWH's and His kingship leads to a wholesome life and the bestowal of YHWH's blessings in the land promised to the Israelites, but rebellion and idolatry lead to death and expulsion from the land or as depicted in Judges, oppression (Dt 28:1-28; 30:19-20; see Longman, Enns and Strass [eds] 2013).

2.2.5.3 YHWH's kingship

Exodus 3 describes Moses' encounter with YHWH and Moses' calling to rescue the Israelites from Egyptian slavery. (In Exodus 3, the revelation of the divine Name also occurs [Ex 3:1-22; see 3.4]). Shortly after their departure from Egypt, YHWH appears to the tribes in a spectacular theophany at Mount Sinai (Ex 19:16-19; cf 8.2.2.1).⁵⁰ Subsequently, Exodus 19 and 20 describe one of the most important events in the history of the Old Testament when the tribes and YHWH enter into a sacred agreement at Mount Sinai.

At Mount Sinai (Ex 19-20) the Israelite tribes were covenanted to be YHWH's 'treasured possession' (see also below in this section, cf 2.2.3.1d); a legal status that positioned them in a kingdom under the protection, care, and beneficence of YHWH as their King (Ex 19:5-6; cf Dt 28:1-14; see Glatzer 2009:199; Brody, SH 2018:86). A theocracy was announced (see Karlberg 2000:77; Hannah 2018; Brody, SH 2018:86) in which *YHWH would be the King of the Israelite tribes* and He alone is to be worshipped. As stated before, YHWH would *bless the tribes with abundance and success in life* (Dt 28:1-14; 2.2.3.1; 2.2.5.2; cf 2.2.4.2- 2.2.4.3).

YHWH also *promised to fight their battles* (Dt 28:7) in a land of hostile people which also depicts His salvatory acts as demonstrated in the Book of Judges (cf Jdg 1:4, 22; 3:10; 4:7, 15, 23; 6:16, 34; 7:22; see also Ex 6:6). Nysse (1987:193) remarks: 'Yahweh-is-a-Warrior is central to many tenets of the Old Testament.' Thus, as their patron God, YHWH was also the warrior God of the (Sinaitic) covenant (see also 6.4). Exodus 15:3 reads: 'The LORD is a warrior; the LORD is his name' (cf Is 42:1,3; cf Ex 6:6). Exodus 23:27 states that YHWH would send His terror ahead of the Israelites 'and throw into confusion every nation' that they encounter on their way to Canaan.

⁵⁰ At Mount Sinai YHWH descends upon the mountain in fire, subsequently transforming the mountain into a meeting place between the divine and human (Ex 19; Bernbaum 2022:132; see also 6.3.5.1). Some claim that the 'pyrotechnical theophany on Mount Sinai' indicates the mountain to be a volcano (Hobbs 1995:56) and the events in Exodus 20:18 a volcanic eruption (Bernbaum 2022:132). Exodus 19:18 reads: 'Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the Lord descended on it in fire. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, and the whole mountain trembled violently.' Bernbaum (2022:132) remarks that a thunderstorm would also explain the fire and smoke that enveloped the mountain. Nevertheless, with fire YHWH reveals His presence and confirms His sacred covenant atop Mount Sinai (Ex 19:16, 18; 20:18). Bernbaum (2022:132) remarks that '... an eruption of the sacred ... into the profane world of ordinary reality' occurred. Previously a similar event had happened to Moses when he experiences the presence of YHWH in the burning bush (Ex 3:2; Bernbaum 2022:132).

It should also be mentioned that a pillar of cloud and a pillar of fire, signs of the LORD's presence, accompanied the Israelites, leading the way in the wilderness (Ex 13:20-21). Gabriel (2003:75) perceives these mysterious phenomena as signals to the Israelites to either set up camp or break camp. According to Gabriel (2003:75-76) the pillar of cloud is a pillar of smoke and perceives the pillar of fire and the pillar of cloud to be a device that apparently is depicted in the *reliefs of Ramses II military camp* at the battle of Kadesh (1275 BC) found in the Luxor Temple. In the lower relief, two figures behind Ramses seated on his throne, are each holding a long pole. On top of one of the poles is a flaming brazier. Apparently, the second figure is holding a second pole with a brazier at its top that seems to be partially covered and thus producing smoke (Gabriel 2003:75-75). Gabriel reports that in an *Amarna relief* of a marching military unit a similar object is present. However, he states that it is uncertain if this is an Egyptian depiction 'of the pillar and smoke signalling device described in Exodus and Numbers.' It has also been suggested that the pillar of cloud or of smoke was created by a multitude of people creating dust as they move across a desert landscape and that the pillar of smoke appeared as a fire when they move by torchlight in the night (Rossel 2007:106).

YHWH would make the enemies of the Israelites ‘turn and run.’ YHWH would also ‘deliver’ the enemy into the hands of the Israelites (Ex 27:31). Still, YHWH demands certain things in exchange for His protection and kindness: obedience and dedication, which He sought in a special bond of mutual love (cf 2.2.3.1d-e; 2.2.5.1–2.2.5.2). YHWH also made the following pledges and stipulations to the early Israelites:

- I will be your God, and you will be my people (Ex 6:7).
- If you obey me fully and keep my covenant, you will be my treasured possession (Ex 19:5; cf 2.2.3.1d).
- You will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Ex 19:6).

In return for the aforementioned promises to be realised, the early Israelites were required to: worship no other gods (Ex 20:34; cf Jdg 2:1-2; see also 2.2.5.1-2.2.5.2). Other important requirements and stipulations are referenced in:

- Exodus 21:1-35: obeying the laws about personal and neighbour’s freedom and injuries
Exodus 22:1-33: protection of personal and neighbour’s property and undertaking social responsibilities
- Exodus 23:1-19: other laws involve the exercise of justice and mercy, keeping the Sabbath and undertaking the three annual festivals
- Exodus 25:1-37: making offerings to YHWH and constructing the Ark of the Covenant, the Table of the Showbread as well as the Lampstand and the altar of incense (Ex 30:1-7) that were to be placed inside the Tabernacle
- Exodus 26; 27: constructing the Tabernacle, the altar of burnt offering and the courtyard
- Exodus 28:1-42: making the priestly garments including the ephod and breastpiece of the High Priest
- Exodus 29:1-44: consecrating the priesthood, the Tabernacle and the altar of burnt offering

In addition, the early Israelites were to destroy the idols and high places of the Canaanites, make no treaties with the Canaanites and not marry their daughters (Ex 23:24, 32; 34:12-16; Nm 33:52 Dt 7:2-5; 12:3; cf Jdg 2:1-3; 3:6; Thorson 2007:614; cf Lowery 1991:160; see also 2.2.1.1b). Notwithstanding the abovementioned sacred requirements, YHWH required a heart of unadulterated devotion more than He did the outward appearances of worship, sacrifices, and offerings. The latter was more reminiscent of the worship of the ancient Near Eastern gods. If the Israelites remained faithful and devoted to YHWH’s kingship alone, they would flourish as a people and experience abundance and longevity (Dt 28:1-14). But as was previously said (see 2.2.1.1a-b; 2.2.2.1), the early Israelites openly disregarded these directives. They made treaties with the inhabitants of Canaan (Jdg 2:1-2; see 2.2.1.1a-b; 2.2.2.1), took possession of the Canaanite high places intact (cf Jdg 6:25-26), married the sons and daughters of the surrounding nations and worshipped their gods (Jdg 3:5-6).

Idolatry tarnished YHWH's sovereignty over His people, His nature – lovingkindness, righteousness and justice – uniquely engraved in the law codes of an extraordinary covenant in the ancient Near East (Birch 1991:38; Smith 2019b:23; Hoffmeier 2021).⁵¹ Any other covenant/s that the early Israelites made with the Canaanite gods (see 2.2.1.1-2.2.2.1) were a grave desecration of the sacred covenant made with YHWH (Jdg 2:1-2; cf Ex 34:12; Dt 7:2; see MacDonald 2012:113-114; Smith 2016:195). The treaties made with the Canaanites (Jdg 2:1-2) not only contravened Exodus 23:24, 32; 34:12-16; Nm 33:52 Dt 7:2-5; 12:3 (cf 2.2.1.1b; 2.2.2.1) but they also symbolized the spiritual death of the early Israelites since they became associated with the *shedim* the (false) gods of the Canaanites (cf Gn 3; 6:1-4; Dt 32:17; see 2.2.5.8). These gods, were in the biblical worldview, considered to be dead entities (see 2.2.5.8a; cf 2.2.3.1b) since they were separated from the life-giving qualities and laws of YHWH because of their fallen nature (see 2.2.5.2; cf Ex 20:2-17, 22-24; Dt 30:19).⁵²

In the worldview of the author/s of Judges, the ancient Near Eastern gods (the *shedim*) such as Baal-*berith* (Jdg 8:33), were false and corrupt deities who had usurped the kingship of YHWH over the nations (Webb 1987:153; Mulder 1999:141-144; Oeste 2012:74; see below 2.2.5.8). Given the majesty of YHWH and His active involvement in the history of the early Israelites as indicated throughout Judges (cf Jdg 2:1-5; 6:13; 11:14-25; cf 2.2.2.1; 2.2.4), it is therefore, rather mystifying that the early Israelites came to worship Baal-*berith* ('Lord of the covenant'), a Canaanite deity, regional to Shechem (Jdg 8:33; cf 2.3.2.1a-c). The city of Shechem was a place of covenant or oath making where the LORD had appeared to the patriarch Abraham and promised the land of Canaan to Abraham's descendants (Gn 12:7; cf Jdg 9:4, 46; cf 2.3.1; 2.3.2.1c; 2.3.4.2a; 4.3.1.1i).⁵³ Could it be possible that future generations remembered the event between YHWH and Abraham (Gn 12:6-7), but mistakenly associated it with an event between Abraham and the Canaanite god, Baal? 'Baal' (*b'l*) was also a title of YHWH (see also 2.2.5.8b; cf 3.2.4.2; 3.6.1.1c), which might have led to the confusion. The Canaanite Baal may have been referred to as Baal-*berith* afterwards.

As previously said, YHWH desired to restore humanity's broken relationship with Him through covenant-making (see Jordan 1999:xx; see 2.2.4; 2.2.4.2; 2.2.5.1; cf 2.2.3.1a-f).⁵⁴ The special

⁵¹ The other gods also practise justice (Wallenfels and Sasson 2000:121). They are the *shedim*, however, and their justice cannot be compared to YHWH's because it only serves to further their own [selfish] needs (Walton 2018; see 2.2.5.8; cf 3.3.6.1-3.3.6.3).

⁵² In light of the above, the early Israelites' association with the dead *shedim* dead means that they do not have any experience of YHWH's goodness or life. The Israelites have, in effect, become like Sheol (the abode of the dead) which was a place of bodily corruption and where there is no remembrance of God or His wisdom or knowledge (cf Ecc 9:10; Ps 6:5; Job 7:9; Jdg 2:10).

⁵³ Scholars are uncertain of the exact nature of Baal-*berith* and if he was a separate deity from El-*berith* or the same god under a different name or YHWH worshipped as Baal-*berith* (see Clements 1968:21-32; Oeste 2012:74 for further interpretations of the identity of Baal-*berith*; see also Mulder 1999:141-144) who argues against the idea of YHWH and Baal-*berith* as the same deity; cf Na'aman 1999a:140). Nevertheless, YHWH had foreseen the idolatry of the Israelites in Canaan (Dt 31:16-18).

⁵⁴ Jordan (1999:xx) provides themes in the Book of Judges that are all centred on the name of YHWH. Gentry and Norman (2015:964) presents a description of the theme of 'kingdom through covenant' in the Old Testament.

emphasis that the author/s of the Book of Judges place on the name of YHWH as God of the covenant (see also Chapter Three) demonstrates YHWH's desire to rule over His people in a covenant (see Gentry and Norman 2015:964-966). Jordan (1999:xx) alludes to the Book of Judges: 'as a whole' that 'is a large-scale exposition of the meaning of the name of the Lord' (cf Chapter Three). YHWH's revelation of His name to Moses is as the God of covenants which would determine His relationship with the Israelites in the Book of Judges as described above (Ex 3:1-22; see also Chapter Three). Yet, the early Israelites would continuously exhibit a remarkable proclivity for serving the Canaanite gods (see 2.2.1.1a-b; 2.2.2; 2.2.2.1; 2.2.3.1e; 2.2.5.1).

Abrahams (2007a:291) concurs that the (Sinai) covenant was intrinsically, an essential part of YHWH's plan of redemption for all nations (see 2.2.2; 2.2.2.1; 2.2.3.1c; 2.2.4.2).⁵⁵ The aforesaid idea explains the preoccupation of the author/s of Judges with the preservation of the covenant (cf 2.2.1; 2.2.1.1; 2.2.2.1; 2.2.3). Israelite abandonment of YHWH (cf Jdg 2:12-13) in order to serve the Canaanite gods such as Baal-*berith* (see above) posed a grave threat to YHWH's cosmic plan of redemption (see 2.2.2). The severity of the covenant's curses symbolized this great offence against YHWH and His plan of universal redemption to the greatest extent possible (Dt 28:15-68).⁵⁶ When the Israelites in Canaan worshipped the Canaanite gods, inter alia, through treaty making including marriages and the worship of their cults (Jdg 2:1-3; 3:5-6; 6:10; 8:33; 10:6; cf Jdg 6:25-26; 17:5; 8:30-31; see also 2.2.1.1a-b; 2.2.2.1; 2.2.3.1e; 2.2.5.1), they, as stated before, violated one of the primary commandments (Ex 20:3) which in the mindset informing the author/s of Judges, merited the execution of YHWH's judgement as shown in Judges (2:1-3; 3:7-8, 12; 4:1-3, etcetera; see below 2.2.5.4; see also 2.2.3.1d).

2.2.5.4 *The Ten Commandments*

a. Introduction

The foundation of all covenantal laws is comprised of the Ten Commandments – a set of religious edicts and ethics (Miller 2009:1; Rooker 2010:3-4). The Ten Commandments according to Exodus were divinely disclosed to Moses on Mount Sinai and were inscribed on two stone tablets by the finger of YHWH (Ex 24:12; 32:15-16; Miller 2009:1; Arnold 2014:121-122; cf 4.5.6.5a-b).⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Abrahams (2007a:291) views YHWH's 'election' of the Israelites not as 'favoritism' but that 'it represented a mission involving special responsibility and corresponding retribution' (cf Gn 15:16; cf Ryan 2007:1; cf 2.2.2; 2.2.2.1; 2.2.3.1c; 2.2.4.2).

⁵⁶ This would account for the severity of the covenant curses rather than the maledictions following the tradition of treaty oaths in ancient Near Eastern agreements (see 2.2.5.6c, f). Apparently, the similarity of the Sinai covenant to the form of other ancient Near Eastern treaties was in the tradition known to the Israelites. YHWH may utilize certain societal customs to achieve His purposes. On the other hand, the Book of Judges demonstrates that YHWH's actions will also fall outside the parameters of the traditions held by the early Israelites (cf Jdg 6:11-20; 13:1-20).

⁵⁷ See Encyclopedia Britannica 2023. Ten Commandments.

The phrase Ten Commandments in Hebrew is עֲשֶׂרֶת הַדְּבָרִים – *‘āšeret haddəbārîm* (literally the ‘Ten Words’; Ex 34:28; Dt 4:13; 10:4; Rooker 2010:3). Rooker (2010:3) observes that ‘the use of the term *dābār*, ‘word,’ in this phrase distinguishes these laws from the rest of the commandments (*mišwā*); that is, status (*hōq*), and regulations (*mišpāt*)’ (cf Dosick 1995:31-33; Barclay 1998:2; Rooker 2010:3). The first commandment in Exodus 20:3 reads: ‘You shall have no other gods before me.’ The rest of the commandments enumerated in Exodus (Ex 20:3-17) flow from the commandment to worship YHWH above all other gods (Miller 2009:1).

b. The Ten Commandments and the Book of Judges

The author/s of Judges frequently emphasize the importance of the first two commandments, which the Israelites continuously violate (Jdg 2:10-19; 3:5; 6:25-26; 8:33; 10:6), by alluding to the concepts of covenant keeping and monotheistic worship (hidden) in the text (Jdg 2:1-2; 6:8-10). It is inferred that during times of covenant restoration, all the commandments were kept by the early Israelites (cf Dt 27:26; cf 2.2.3.1e; 2.2.5.6d). Moses had exhorted the early Israelites to ‘keep all the commands’ of YHWH ‘so that it may go well with them’ (Dt 6:1-2). It is clear that the author/s of Judges are advocating for the wholehearted worship of YHWH and the keeping of His commands (cf Dt 6:1-6) often while admonishing the Israelites for their idolatry. The author/s’ references to general lawlessness in Judges 17:6 and 21:25 are probably made in the context of Exodus 20:2-17 when the covenantal lifestyle is not fully adhered to. Likewise, the author/s of Judges may have subtly referenced Exodus 20:12 when describing Samson’s relationship with his parents (Jdg 14:1-10), Jephthah’s relationship with daughter (Jdg 11:34-39) and Micah’s relationship with his mother (Jdg 17:1-5). It has been proposed that the reasons why Samson does not tell his parents of the happenings in Judges 14:5-9 was that he did not want to boast about killing the lion (see Bible Hub 2024. Judges 14:6). In addition, Samson did not tell his parents about the honey that he gave them to eat – a swarm of bees had formed a hive inside the carcass of the lion Samson had killed where they had made honey (Jdg 14:9; cf 4.5.6.4a). The parents being overly strict (cf Jdg 14:4) would have been more scrupulous than he was about the ceremonial defilement involved in anything which had touched a carcass (see Bible Hub 2024. Judges 14:9). Despite his apparent kindness towards his parents, Samson’s actions reveal a disdain for the covenantal code that governs their lives. The betrayal and rape, that led to the death of the Levite’s concubine (Jdg 19) as well as the murder and rape of the women in Judges 21 expose the appalling state of ethics among some Israelites, which seems to fit the statement of the author/s of Judges: ‘everyone did what was right in their own eyes’ (Jdg 17:6; 21:25).

In light of the aforesaid, the Ten Commandments were the core principles that governed the tribes and their work.⁵⁸ Without these principles the Israelite society in Judges deteriorated into a deplorable state where people lost their human rights, value, dignity and lives (cf 2.2.3.1d-e). The

⁵⁸ Theology of Work Project 2013. The Ten Commandments (Deuteronomy 5:6-21).

Israelites had lost the ‘codification of absolute truth’ (McDowell and Hostetler 1994:91; cf Rooker 2010:3), the very ‘foundation of all social ethics’ and thus their reverence for God and respect for men (Barclay (1998:2). The author/s of Judges disclose in the narratives of Judges (see also above) that YHWH’s absolute truth and ethics as revealed in the Ten Commandments become subject to people’s personal desires and decisions (cf 2.2.2.1) resulting in the lawlessness that pervaded the tribal communities and undermining the divine will and plan (cf 2.2.2; 2.2.2.1; 2.2.3.1c; 2.2.4.2; 2.2.5.1-2.2.5.2; see also Footnote 55).

c. Description of the Ten Commandments

Hester (2003:14) observes that in the ‘Jewish tradition,’ the Ten Commandments have been historically structured as follows (cf Barclay 1998:1-2; Miller 2009:13-48, etcetera):

1. The Prologue;
2. Prohibition of the worship of any deity but Yahweh (God), and the prohibition of idolatry;
3. Prohibition of the use of the name of God for vain purposes;
4. Observance of the Sabbath;
5. Honoring of one’s father and mother;
6. Prohibition of murder;
7. Prohibition of adultery;
8. Prohibition of stealing;
9. Prohibition of giving false testimony;
10. Prohibition of coveting the property or wife of one’s neighbor.⁵⁹

Hester (2003:14) observes that the Ten Commandments appear in two places in the Pentateuch: Exodus 20:1-17 and Deuteronomy 5:6-21 (see also Arnold 2014:121; Janssen 2022:1993). Arnold (2014:121) avers that the two lists ‘are almost identical.’ In Exodus 34:11-26 there is also a similar list focusing on proper worship (Arnold 2014:121). Hester (2003:14) asserts that the most important differences in these two texts (Ex 20:1-17 and Dt 5:6-21) ‘are in the Sabbath command and the command against covetousness.’ ‘The Exodus version is connected to the Sinai Covenant with God and with the regular ceremony of covenant and renewal, whereas the version in Deuteronomy is used in teaching religious leaders in towns and villages’ (Hester 2003:14-15). Hester (2003:19) also states that ‘the first commandment affirms the unconditional and exclusive claim of God on His Covenantal people’ (cf Jdg 2:1-2; see Stevens 2004:135; cf Huffmon 2004:205-212; see also above).

Consequently, in the worldview of the author/s of Judges, YHWH as the Heavenly Father (see 2.2.3.1d) and sovereign King of the early Israelites (see 2.2.5.3), YHWH has every right to require that His people love Him by obeying His commandments, failing which He may, as the Book of Judges illustrates enact His judgement upon them as also stated before in this chapter (Jdg 3:8, 12-

⁵⁹ See also Hester (2003:15-24); Rooker (2010:24-164); Coogan (2014:1-135); Todd (2017:89-126).

14; 4:1-3; 6:1-10, etcetera; cf Jdg 2:1-3; see above, 2.2.5.3; see also 2.2.3.1d). The commandments for the Israelites to love YHWH (Ex 20:6) and their neighbour (Ex 20:26-27) are indispensable their well-being (see Harrelson 1997:159; see also 2.2.3.1a-e). Harrelson asserts that ‘taken together they sum up what it means to belong to the family of YHWH, the household of God (cf 2.2.3.1d). By loving YHWH and by accepting His kingship the early Israelites (in Judges) would never have to experience the (oppressive) rule of human kings and the Canaanite gods (see Harrelson 1997:159-160; cf Dosick 1995:31-33). Yet, the Israelites in Judges did come under the despotic rule of successive Canaanite kings and gods.

This study asserts that the Ten Commandments embody the ethical principles of YHWH that surpass those of the ancient Near Eastern deities (see 2.2.5.8; see also 3.3.6; see Solomon 1956:ix-xvii). Therefore, the Ten Commandments by providing people access to YHWH’s moral code, set them free from the contradictory and inferior moralities of the other gods. This allows humanity to know and follow the divine will regarding the worship of the one true God and people’s behaviour towards others that was previously not made known (by the other gods) (see Barclay 1998:2; Rooker 2010:3; Walton 2018; cf 2.2.5.4b). The early Israelites were granted liberation and spiritual and a redemptive relationship with YHWH by following the absolute and divine standards outlined in the Ten Commandments (see Dosick 1995:31-33). The early Israelites would be liberated from the dominion of the other gods if they accepted YHWH’s command to love Him above all else, as stated in the first command (see Harrelson 1997:159-160).

In the Book of Judges, the author/s express the view that the Israelites are unjustified in the evil they commit (Jdg 2:11, 19, Jdg 3:7, 12, Jdg 4:1, Jdg 6:1, and so on) because they are fully aware of YHWH’s covenant requirements for worship and life but they have broken their covenant by serving the Canaanite gods (Jdg 2:10-19; 3:5-6; 8:33; 10:6). Therefore, the author/s do not offer a defence on behalf of the idolatrous Israelites. They have no excuse for worshipping idols. This is in contrast to Judges 8:27 when the author/s report the Israelites’ idolatry as a direct result of the ephod that Gideon had made and Judges 17 when the syncretic household shrine of Micah is ascribed to the pervasive lawlessness of that time (cf 2.2.3.1e; 2.2.5.4b).

2.2.5.5 Allegiance

The Sinai Covenant was unique as it only involved YHWH and the early Israelites, unlike ancient Near Eastern treaties. The Israelite covenant strictly formulated and regulated the religion of the Israelites (cf 2.2.6-2.2.6.3). In the Book of Judges (cf Jdg 2:1-3; 16-19 etcetera), it is evident that the covenant was supposed to play a much larger role in the lives of the Israelites compared to the involvement of ancient Near Eastern or Canaanite treaties in the lives of their respective kings and nations. In fact, unlike treaties in the ancient Near East which were essentially political agreements between a superior and a minor king (cf 2.2.1.1.b; 2.2.3.1a; 2.2.5.6), the Sinai Covenant strictly formulated and regulated the entire religion and daily lives of the Israelites. The status of the

Israelites in the covenants made with the inhabitants of the land (cf 2.2.1.1b; 2.2.3.1a; 2.2.5.6) is not known. Did they assume the role of a superior or minor entity in the agreements? Judges 1:19-34 probably presented the Israelites with opportunities to engage in treaty making with the inhabitants of the land. Judges indicates that at that time the Israelites had the upper hand over certain nations living in Canaan. Nevertheless, by swearing allegiance to the Canaanite gods in the illegal covenants mentioned in Judges 2:2 (see also 2.2.1.1b; 2.2.2.1), the early Israelites were in breach of the primary stipulation of their covenant (see 2.2.5.2; cf 2.2.1.1a-b; 2.2.2.1).

In the Book of Judges, the unity, coherence and prosperity of the Israelite community are primarily derivatives of their covenantal faith and allegiance to YHWH (Jdg 2:1-4; 10-23; 3:1-31; 4:1-23; 5:31; 6:1-11, etcetera; see also 2.2.5.2). In the worldview of Judges' narrator/s, the oppression of the Israelites is always a direct consequence of their worship of the Canaanite cults (see also 2.2.5.4b-c). Consequently, by insisting on continuous loyalty to YHWH, as shown throughout this study, the author/s present YHWH's covenant/s as a contrast to the polytheistic religious worldview of the ancient Near Eastern nations (Jdg 2:1-3; 6:8-10, 25-26; 10:11-13; Heiser 2019; (cf 2.2.5.6; see also Chapter Three). In their mindset, only a return to YHWH's covenant will restore the fortunes of the Israelites (cf 2.2.5.2). The author/s express the inescapable notion that it is solely by means of covenant restoration and faithfulness that the Israelites may experience a divine abundance and blessings in their lives (cf Jdg 2:1-5, 10-19; see also 2.2.3.1c-e). If the early Israelites are unable to grasp this perception, they are destined to repeat the same mistakes recurrently, as shown in the narratives of Judges. In accordance with the biblical worldview, the author/s of Judges present YHWH as a deity who refuses to share the Israelites' loyalty with other gods (cf Jdg 2:1-5; cf 3.3.6.1). As previously indicated, YHWH has every right to claim the Israelites' love and their loyalty (cf Jdg 2:1-5; 6:8-10; 10:14-16; see 2.2.3.1d). The early Israelites did, after all, enter into a sacred agreement with God for that very purpose (cf Ex 19; 20). The author/s are consistently reminding the Israelites of the aforesaid fact by means of their critique of the tribes in narratives such as Judges 2:1-3, 2:10-19; 3:5-7; 4:1-3; 6:8-10, and so on.

2.2.5.6 The Sinai Covenant and ancient Near Eastern treaties

Ancient Near Eastern covenants, particularly Hittite treaties, have been likened to the Sinai covenant because they share comparable forms (Mendenhall 1954:49-76; Gerstenberger 1965:38-51; Mayes 1970:38-39; Lopez 2004:72-106; Wenham 2005:444; Taggar-Cohen 2011:461-488; Johnston 2020:72; cf 2.2.1.1.b; 2.2.3.1a). Lopez (2004:106) concurs that God fashioned Israelite covenants after the ancient Near Eastern treaties (cf Cross 1997b:268). However, this study argues against the aforesaid idea since the covenant/s of YHWH and ancient Near Eastern treaties exhibit profound differences (see 2.2.5.7). In fact, as stated before (see 2.2.5.5), the author/s of Judges maintain the covenant/s of YHWH as a polemic against ancient Near Eastern polytheism that allowed for many gods to be invoked as participants in treaty making.

The covenants made between the early Israelite tribes and the inhabitants of the land in Judges (cf Jdg 2:1-3) may have taken the form of ancient Near Eastern treaties described below (cf 2.2.5.3). In the ancient Near East, a covenant was an arrangement between two people or groups of people in which pledges were made by one or both under oath to carry out or desist from actions stipulated beforehand (Mendenhall and Herion 1992:1179; cf Steck 2005:1 and Charlesworth 2011:1-11; cf 2.2.1.1; 2.2.4.1). The suzerainty treaty between the Muršili II king of the Hittites (ca 1321-1295 BC) and his vassal king Niqmepa of Ugarit (Lackenbacher 2000:194) and the treaty between Hittite king *Hattušili III* and Rameses II of Egypt⁶⁰ (Langdon and Gardiner 1920:179-205; Spalinger 1981:299-358) are examples of the aforementioned ancient Near Eastern treaties (cf 2.2.3.1a). It is probable that the Israelites' coexistence with the nations in Judges 1:19-36 required the making of treaties as indicated before (see 2.2.5.5.). Judges 3:5-6 shows that marriage contracts between the different groups (see Jdg 1:19-36) and acceptance of the Canaanite cults may have been involved in these treaties.

Mendenhall (1954:53-70) distinguishes between two types of Hittite treaties: parity treaties between two kings of equal standing and the vassal treaties between the Hittite suzerain and a vassal. Mendenhall (1954:58-60) identifies the Hittite treaty form as a six-part treaty that is reminiscent of the Sinai covenant.

a. Preamble

The preamble of the (Hittite) treaty starts with a formula: 'thus (saith) NN the great king, king of the Hatti land, son of NN... the valiant', which identifies the author of the covenant, his title, qualities, and genealogy (cf Ex 20:2; Dt 5:6). The grandeur and power of the king 'who confers a relationship by covenant upon his vassal' (Mendenhall 1954:58-60) are extolled.

The statement 'the Lord your God' appears throughout the Book of Deuteronomy as a way for YHWH to identify Himself as the God of the covenant (cf Dt 5:6,15; 7:8; McLaughlin 2012:59). Later the prophet in Judges would use the (covenant) language of Deuteronomy: 'I am the LORD your God' (Jdg 6:10) to remind the Israelites of their covenant God and the violation of His covenant.

b. Historical prologue

The historical prologue (of a Hittite treaty) refers to the past relationship between the king and his vassal. It describes the benevolent deeds (actual historical events) that the suzerain has carried out for the vassal in great detail. In return for these acts of favour the vassal is obliged to obey the

⁶⁰ After years of hostilities between the Hittites and the Egyptians, a truce was reached between king *Hattušili III*, and Rameses II of Egypt and the treaty concluded in circa 1269 BC (Smith 2010:51-52; cf Van de Mierop 2010:126-127).

treaty stipulations (Mendenhall 1954:58-60). According to Mendenhall, Deuteronomy 1-4 constitutes the historical prologue to the Sinai covenant (Dt 1:26-46; cf Jdg 2:1-2; 6:8-10; 10:10-12).

At Shechem, Joshua reaffirms the covenant and reminds the Israelites of their sacred pledge by listing all the ways that YHWH had protected them from their adversaries on the road to Canaan (Jos 24:5-13; cf Jdg 11:14:26; see 2.3.1). In the Book of Judges, YHWH responds to the idolatrous Israelites' pleas for deliverance from oppression by enumerating all the times He has saved them from their enemies (for example, the Canaanites [Jdg 4 and 5], the Midianites [Jdg 6:14], the Philistines and Ammonites [Jdg 10:7]). The historical prologue form of the covenant, which is also, as stated before, language derived from Deuteronomy (Dt 5:6; Jdg 6:10), is utilized by the author/s of Judges to remind the Israelites of YHWH's (covenantal) faithfulness and juxtaposing divine loyalty with Israelite disloyalty.

c. Stipulations

The stipulations of a treaty describe in depth, the requirements that were to be kept by the vassal for the duration of the treaty. Deuteronomy 5:6-21 lists (also Ex 20) the covenant stipulations and principles (Mendenhall (1954:58-60; see also 2.2.5-2.2.5.5). In the ancient Near East, the severity of a covenant was determined by an oath that sanctified and sealed the covenant (Tadmor 1982:132-133; Mendenhall and Herion 1992:1179-1180; cf Mendenhall 1954:49:76; Gerstenberger:1965:38-51). The oath was ordinarily sworn on the life of the treaty god or goddess (Tadmor 1982:132-133).

In a conditional covenant such as the Sinai Covenant, the actions of the participants involved determined whether heavy penalties were to be incurred by the treaty deity if the vow is broken or whether blessings were to follow if the agreement is kept (see below, see also Gerstenberger 1965:45-46). As such the blessings and curses in Deuteronomy 28:1-68 were in keeping with covenant-making in the ancient Near East. In an *Assyrian treaty tablet* the following inscription of curses may be equated with the maledictions in Deuteronomy 28:21-22, 26-27: 'May Palil, the fore[most] lord, let the eagles and vultures [eat your f]lesh. May Ea, king of the Abyss, lord of the springs, give you deadly water to drink, and fill you with dropsy' (Hays 2014:176).

The blessings and curses in Deuteronomy 28:1-68 revealingly and uncannily foreshadow Israelite life as depicted in the Book of Judges (cf Jdg 3:6-8; 4:1-2; 6:1; 10:6-7; 13:1). The monotheism of the Sinai Covenant may be contrasted with the polytheistic nature of the *Assyrian treaty tablet* that are evident in these inscriptions: '... may all the gods that are [mentioned by name] in th[is] treaty tablet make the ground as narrow as a brick for you. May they make your ground like iron [so that] nothing can sprout from it' (Hays 2014:176; cf 2.2.5.5). Apparently, the Israelites did not understand the enormity of breaking the covenant with YHWH (Jdg 2:1-4; 2:10-19, etcetera; cf 2.2.2;

2.2.2.1) since the curses of the covenant according to Exodus 23:21 and Joshua 24:20 would lead to their own death (Tadmor 1982:132-133; Steck 2005:3-4).

Similar to the Sinai Covenant, the oaths and curses of a treaty in the ancient Near East had supernatural overtones which indicated their powerful effect on the individual or community who made the oath (Hays 2014:36). Hays (2014:174) narrates that the standard (civic) curses for the Assyrian breaker of an oath are for example: ‘May Asher, king of the gods, who decrees [the fates] decree an evil and unpleasant fate for you. May he not gra[nt yo]u long-lasting old age and the attainment of extreme old age. May Marduk, the eldest son⁶¹ decree a heavy punishment and an indissoluble curse for your fate.’

In ancient Assyria, ritual maledictions uttered in the name of a god included:

May Girra⁶² who gives food to small and great, burn up your name and your seed.
Just as bread and wine enter into the intestines, [so] may [the gods] make this oath enter into [your] intestines and those of [your] so[ns] and your [daught]ers (Hays 2014:176-177).

For the early Israelite who reneged on their covenantal oaths Deuteronomy 28:15-20 reads:

You will be cursed in the city and cursed in the country.
Your basket and your kneading trough will be cursed.
The fruit of your womb will be cursed, and the crops of your land, and the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks.
You will be cursed when you come in and cursed when you go out.
The LORD will send on you curses, confusion and rebuke in everything you put your hand to, until you are destroyed and come to sudden ruin because of the evil you have done in forsaking him.

It is YHWH Himself who will incur the curses of the Sinai Covenant on the early Israelites. Thus, due to their idolatry, the Angel of YHWH (see also 2.2.1.1; 2.2.2.1; 5.3.2.2a, c-d, f) pronounces judgement upon the Israelites (Jdg 2:1-3; cf Jdg 3:6; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1-20). Within the ancient Near Eastern context of treaty making, the oaths in the covenants, which the Israelites entered into with the Canaanite deities (cf Jdg 2:1-2), probably were ratified by a self-malediction: A curse would come upon them if they did not honour the agreements of the covenant in such a way that dire curses would befall the renouncers of the covenant (Tadmor 1982:132-133). The Israelites probably entered into the Canaanite covenants on the prohibited Canaanite *bamot* (Tadmor 1982:132-133; see also 2.2.5.6e; cf 2.3.4.3b) or perhaps at Shechem (cf 2.3.4.2a; cf 4.3.1.1a). If he had followed the oath stipulation, Jephthah’s injurious vow (cf Jdg 11:34; cf 3.2.3.3a; 3.2.4.1; 4.3.1.3a) may reflect a religious worldview with Canaanite intrusions since human sacrifice was anti-covenantal (Wiersbe 2007:457; see Lv 20:2-5). As stated above, the egregiousness of the early

⁶¹ Marduk was associated with the planet Jupiter. The text may refer to that association (see Hays 2014:174).

⁶² Gerra (Girra) was the Mesopotamian (Babylonian – Akkadian) god of fire (Jordan 2004:104). Gerra derives from the Sumerian god, Gibil (see Peterson 2014:302).

Israelites' sin, that is their covenant disobedience and idolatry, led to the visitation of the Angel of YHWH at Bochim (Jdg 2:1-5). YHWH acts outside of the dominant cultural ideology regarding covenant-making in the ancient Near East when He Himself visibly appears to His people to condemn them for their faithlessness (cf 6.3.5). No mention is made in ancient Near Eastern texts of a god or gods appearing to the king in some form or the other to bring upon them the curse mentioned above for violating a covenant or treaty. The gods and their statues are mute regarding treaty violation and it is probably certain that the parties involved preferred it that way (cf 2.2.5.6e).

When the Israelites decided to worship YHWH again (Jdg 2:4-5), the aforesaid was probably done with the expectation that their faithful Covenant God would prevent the prophecy uttered by the Angel of YHWH and probably the other covenant curses from coming into effect (cf Jdg 10:15-16; cf 2.2.2.1). Once the Israelites were restored to their covenant (Jdg 2:4-5; cf Jdg 2:18; 10:16), they could again experience YHWH's protection and the blessings of the covenant:

You will be blessed in the city and blessed in the country.
The fruit of your womb will be blessed and the crops of your land and the young of your livestock – the calves of your herd and the lambs of your flocks.
Your basket and your kneading trough will be blessed.
You will be blessed when you come in and blessed when you go out (Dt 28:2-6).

As mentioned before (see 2.2.3.1e), it is probable that during their cycles of peace, the Israelites as depicted in the Book of Judges (Jdg 3:11, 30; 5:31; 8:29, etcetera) did experience YHWH's covenantal protection and blessings until the next cycle of idolatry.

d. Deposit in the temple

This part of the Hittite treaty – deposit in the temple and public reading of the treaty – describes the safekeeping of the treaty in the temple of the vassal as a sacred object, where it would remain under the protection of the deity. The treaty was to be read to the public from time to time (Mendenhall 1954:58-60). The Sinaitic Covenant was to be read regularly in public as stated in Deuteronomy (Dt 10:1-5; 27:2-3; 31:9-13; 24-26). The tablets on which the Ten Commandment were inscribed were preserved in the Ark of the Covenant that was housed in the Holy of Holies within the Tabernacle at Shiloh (Dt 10:1-5). The commandments were read in public (probably a copy [cf Dt 31:24-26]) at the end of the seven years or remission of debt during the Feast of Tabernacles (Dt 31:10-13, 24-26). It is unclear whether the aforementioned event occurred in the Book of Judges.

However, it is feasible that a copy of the Ten Commandments, (the original tablets, as stated before, were kept in the Ark of the Covenant that rested in the Holy of Holies which could only be entered once every year by the Priest) was read at the Tabernacle in Shiloh, perhaps, for example,

at the time of the three annual pilgrimages made to the sacred compound (see Millard 2007:264; cf Friedman 2014:178).⁶³

Judges states that ‘a generation grew up who neither knew the LORD nor what he had done for Israel’ (Jdg 2:10) possibly because this generation did not, inter alia, witness or hear the regular reading of the ‘law’ at Shechem, where Joshua deposited the written covenantal laws at the sanctuary of YHWH (Jos 24:27; see Brockman 2011:244) and neither were they exposed to it at Shiloh (cf 2.3.1; see also 2.2.2.1; 2.2.3.1e).

e. Witnesses of the covenant

Hittite treaties display a list of the names of the gods of the pantheon of the Hittite king and the deities of the vassal king who witnessed the treaty. Deified mountains, rivers, springs, sea, heaven and earth, the wind and the clouds also served as witnesses (Mendenhall 1954:58-60). Appropriate to the polytheistic nature of ancient Near Eastern treaties a multitude of gods were witnesses to the treaty. The treaty (ca 1320 BC)⁶⁴ between Muršili II of Hatti (the Hittite Empire) and Manapa-Tarhunta, a king in western Anatolia (the land of the Seha river)⁶⁵ followed a similar pattern: ‘We have now summoned The Thousand Gods to assembly for this oath. They shall stand, observe and listen. And they shall be (witnesses) (Hays 2014:164).’⁶⁶

Various storm gods (or *iskur* deities) are summoned as divine witnesses in the treaty enforced by Šuppiluliuma I (1344-1322 BC) of Hatti on Huqqana of Hayasa: ‘IŠKUR-of-Heaven, IŠKUR-of-Hatti, IŠKUR-of-Aleppo, IŠKUR-of-Arinna, IŠKUR-of-Zippalanda ... IŠKUR-of-the-Army, IŠKUR-of-the-Market, etc.’ (Allen 2015:5). The gods summoned as witness were known as the ‘gods of the oath.’ However, the gods’ role was to sanction the agreement between the two parties the latter whose legal relationship according to the treaty stipulation remained the most important act in the treaty (Altman 2010:25).⁶⁷

The Sinai Covenant does not have gods as witnesses to consecrate the covenant between the Israelites and YHWH (cf Dt 4:26; 31:19-22, 26-28). Neither are there any witness apart from the

⁶³ It may be inferred that the Ten Commandments were read at the Tabernacle. Eisenberg (2008:412) observes that the Ten Commandments were read at the Temple as part of the daily services (cf 2.2.5.4).

⁶⁴ Hays (2014:161) provides the following information regarding the treaty between the two kings: the treaty is a ‘file copy’ of cuneiform text inscribed in Hittite on a clay tablet (*CTH* 69) which was found in Hattuša (modern Bogazkale in Turkey).

⁶⁵ See Hoffner (2009:293) reporting on Manapa-Tarhunta who seemed to have broken an allegiance to Muršili II, in the early days of the latter’s reign. For more about Manapa-Tarhunta from the land of the Seha river, see Hoffner (2009:291, 293-294, 316, 407); see also Devecchi (2010:4).

⁶⁶ For a list of names of all the gods who acted as divine witnesses to this oath, see Hays (2014:164). See also Allen (2015:84, 93) and his comments about *lamma* deities – tutelary deities – who also acted as divine witnesses in Hittite treaties.

⁶⁷ Altman (2010:25) mentions that the structure of Late Bronze Age treaty documents included ‘if necessary, the time when the agreement would come into force’ or an ‘escape clause’ was inserted before the curses section (cf McLaughlin 2010:60).

people themselves when Joshua reaffirms the covenant at Shechem (cf Jos 24:22, 26). There are no divine gods acting as witnesses since this would violate the primary covenant stipulation that is to call upon the name of the Lord only (see McLaughlin 2012:59). In Deuteronomy 31:19, Moses is instructed to teach a divine song to the Israelites: ‘... write down this song and teach it to the Israelites and have them sing it, so that it may be a witness for me against them.’ The text indicates that the Israelites are the witnesses in the covenant when they sing the song. Similarly, the book in which Moses wrote the law would be a witness against the Israelites (Dt 31:26). In both the aforesaid instances the Israelites themselves are the witnesses when they recite or read the song or book respectively (cf Jos 24:22; cf 2.3.1; see also Jdg 5).

The reason for this is made clear in the following verse (Dt 31:27) when YHWH foreshadows the Israelites’ breach of the covenant upon their settlement in Canaan (Dt 31:19-22, 26-28). Indeed, in Judges, as mentioned before (see 2.2.1.1; 2.2.2.1), the Angel of the LORD castigates the Israelites for breaking the covenant and making illegal covenants with the Canaanites (Jdg 2:1-4). The Israelites set up *Baal-berith* as their god (see 2.2.5.3), indicating their propensity for covenant-making with the Canaanite deities (Jdg 8:33; cf Jdg 2:1-3; Mulder 1999:143).

It would be on the Canaanite high places (*bamot*) that YHWH foresees His people violating their covenant and where, as previously indicated, they, presumably, entered into the treaties made with the foreign gods (Dt 31:20; cf Jdg 2:1-3; see 2.2.5.6c; cf 2.3.4.3b). The gods of the Canaanite pantheon could also act as divine witnesses in a covenant (Cross 1997a:40; 1997b:251; cf 2.3.5.2b).

They would have acted as witness in the treaties the early Israelites made with the Canaanites against their covenant that forbade it (Jdg 2:1-3; see above; cf 2.3.4.2a). As indicated before, these treaties involved sacrificial rituals (cf 2.2.1.1b; 2.2.2.1; 2.2.4.1) that associated the Israelites with the Canaanite gods which desecrated the first commandment (cf Ex 20:3-4 23:32; 34:12; Dt 7:2; see also Ex 23:13, 24; cf Jdg 6:25-26).

f. Blessings and curses

Blessings were to follow if the vassal in the ancient Near Eastern treaty obeys the stipulations; on the other hand if the vassal breached the treaty a great number of various curses would befall it. Deuteronomy 27 and 28 describes the blessings and curses in the Sinai Covenant (Mendenhall 1954:58-60; see 2.2.5.6c). It was ‘shocking’ to the Israelites when YHWH announced in Judges 2:3 and 10:13 that He would no longer ‘fight’ their enemies. YHWH had after all promised never to break His covenant with them (Jdg 2:2). Judges 2:4 records that the Israelites wept and offered sacrifices (of appeasement) to the LORD (cf 5.5.1). In Judges 10:13, the author/s reported that the Israelites were in misery, and they were willing to endure any punishment meted out by YHWH if only He would save them from their oppressors.

2.2.5.7 Differences

Gerstenberger (1965:39) argues that ‘the covenant relationship [of the Hittite treaty] itself cannot be easily identified’ (insertion mine). This is because the treaty alliance established in the ancient Near Eastern documents such as the Hittite inscriptions to which the biblical covenant are compared are different when considering the divergences in the form. Also, the form of these treaties as discussed above is ‘not always distinguishable from other comparable forms such as contracts, instructions, edicts, law codes...’ (Gerstenberger 1965:39; Taggar-Cohen 2011:461-488). Taggar-Cohen (2011:461-488) identifies another form of Hittite treaty that she terms instructions texts. These she desires to be made more prominent and studied in detail for an understanding of the biblical covenant (Taggar-Cohen 2011:475).

The major differences between the ancient Near Eastern treaties and that of the Sinai covenant are as follows:

- Ancient Near Eastern treaties were usually made between two kings or a suzerainty and a vassal (see Mendenhall 1954:49-76; cf 2.2.5.6). The Sinai covenant was between YHWH and the Israelites and, thus, is intrinsically monotheistic in form (see Lopez 2004:72-106; cf Mayes 1970:38).
- Unlike the ancient Near Eastern nations, warfare protocols were enclosed in the Israelite law code that was contained in their Yahwistic covenant (Trimm 2017:405; cf 2.2.5.3).
- Ancient Near Eastern treaties expressed a political affiliation. The Sinai covenant articulated a theological relationship (Haber 1999:133). An important stipulation of YHWH’s covenant was holiness, Exodus 19:5 states: ‘...you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a *qādōwōš* – *qādōwōš* (holy [or separate]) nation...’ (see 2.2.3.1d; 2.2.5.3). The purpose of the covenant was to prevent the corruption of the Israelites and maintain them in an everlasting state of grace and redemption (see Shanks 1999:32-33, 60). Holiness is not a requirement within ancient Near Eastern treaties.
- The Sinaitic Covenant may also be placed within the category of kinship relationships. Accordingly, YHWH was the Divine Kinsman of the Israelites and in this role, He enters into the covenant with His elected people (Shanks 1999:32-33, 60; cf 2.2.5). Shanks remarks that through its covenant with God, Israel becomes the ‘kindred of Yahweh.’ YHWH, in effect, adopts the people of Israel (a very novel concept that is not reflected in the ancient Near East; cf 2.2.3.1d). Mutual obligations are thereby created (Shanks 1999:32-33, 60; cf 2.2.5; 2.2.5.8). In return for their faithfulness, YHWH would bless the Israelites with abundance (cf Dt 28:1-14; cf 2.2.3.1; 2.2.5.2-2.2.5.3; cf 2.2.4.2-2.2.4.3).

YHWH presented the Israelites with the divine revelation and knowledge of the one true God, His nature and requirements within an intimate covenantal relationship. In the biblical worldview, the ancient Near Eastern world was ruled by the pernicious, capricious and unknowable false gods,

the *shedim* (cf Jdg 2:3; 10:14; see 2.2.5.8). The mindset informing the author/s of Judges was thus remarkable in light of the aforesaid concepts.

2.2.5.8 *The shedim*

This present study posits that the Sinai Covenant was a covenant of redemption-based liberation. This perspective aligns with the worldview held by the author/s of Judges and their narration of YHWH's perennial deliverance of the idolatrous Israelites from the tyranny of their enemies, the worship of the Canaanite deities and the restoration of the covenantal lifestyle.

The Edenic rebellion (cf 2.2.3.1b) not only damaged the relationship between YHWH and humanity but also led to people developing relationships with supernatural beings – *ēlōhîm* – other than YHWH which widened the rift between YHWH and people. In the biblical worldview, the ancient Near Eastern gods, including the Canaanite deities, mentioned in the Book of Judges, are *ēlōhîm* or *shedim* (cf Dt 32:16-17) that represent sin, darkness and death (Heiser 2019; see also 2.2.5.3).⁶⁸ The concepts mentioned above might offer further justification for the author/s of Judges' harsh denunciation of the Israelites for their worship of these deities. The aforesaid ideas may provide further reasons why the author/s of Judges are intensely condemning the Israelites for worshipping these entities.

YHWH's establishment of the Sinaitic Covenant served to restore people to the one true God. The sacred covenant, thus, also presented a polemic against the worship of the other gods or *shedim* who, as stated before, are in the biblical worldview, malevolent and false deities. In other words, YHWH desired to forge a new religious and cultural ideology for His people in opposition to the prevalent worship of (false) gods and cultural perspectives centred on these deities (cf Jdg 2:1-3, 12; 3:6, etcetera). In order for YHWH to achieve reconciliation with humanity, it was deemed crucial that His sacred covenant was always maintained in Canaan. This would serve the purpose of exposing the other gods as false deities, as previously indicated, and their associated systems of worship as deceptive and morally corrupt.

By serving YHWH, people would be liberated from these adverse systems of control. This could potentially explain why the author/s of Judges consistently advocate for the covenantal lifestyle and assert its superiority over the polytheistic practices of the Canaanites. The Sinaitic Covenant revealed the one true God and His requirements for life that were based on His ethical standards.

⁶⁸ I am indebted to the late Dr Michael Heiser for his insights into the supernatural realm in the Old Testament and his perspectives regarding this topic which I have adapted and made relevant to the worldview in Judges (see Heiser 2019. Supernatural Seminar). The perspective of Dr Heiser regarding the supernatural realm is also a perspective based on Deuteronomy 32:17. According to Dr Heiser (2019) the supernatural realm is inhabited by both good and evil numinous beings. Both types of beings are referred to throughout the Bible. In the New Testament, concepts of the existence of fallen or evil angels, discussed above, are derived from the Old Testament as well as the Book of Enoch, the latter text expanding on the narrative in Genesis 6:1-4.

Consequently people could now know the only true God and have a relationship with Him that Judges, ironically through the lens of idolatry, shows are always beneficial to people (cf Jdg 2:1-5, 10-19; 3:5-11, 12-30, 31, etcetera). Although the Israelites' decision to worship the Canaanite gods, the *shedim*, is still a mystery, it is possible that they saw certain parallels between mono-Yahwistic practises and polytheism and assumed that it was appropriate to worship the other gods (cf 2.3.2.1) despite their covenantal allegiance (see 2.3.2.1a-c; 2.2.5- 2.2.5.5). In light of the foregoing the *shedim* will be discussed in the sections that follow.

a. Origins

The word *shedim* (שְׁדִיִּם – *šēdîm*) translated as 'demons' in Deuteronomy 32:17 refers to the אֱלֹהִים – '*ēlōhîm* (gods) of the ancient Near Eastern people including the Canaanites. The word *shedim* is translated as demons (NIV, Old Testament Lexical Aid, no.: 8717; NIV Hebrew-Greek Key Word Study Bible). The word appears in Dt 32:17 and Ps 106:37 where in both text it refers to sacrificing to idols (those of the ancient Near Eastern gods). In Dt 32:17 *shedim* refers to the gods of the ancient Near East. The Septuagint uses the plural of *daimonion*. Other renditions ESV – demons/ New King James – devils / NASB – demons. Aramaic bible in Plain English – demons/JPS Tanak 1917 – demons/ ISV – demons.

The singular form of *shedim* is שְׁדִי – *shed* derived from the Akkadian cognate form *šēdu* (shadu) which was a protective and benign spirit entity (see Bible Hub 2024. shed; see also Guiley 2009:260). Consequently, some consider the *shedim* to be malevolent only because they are not YHWH (McCraw and Arp 2017:9); that is, '*ēlōhîm* other than YHWH were thought to be evil. Nevertheless, the Old Testament (see Dt 32:17) ascribes a state of sinfulness to these gods whom YHWH initially created as angelic beings. According to the biblical worldview, two types of supernatural beings (*ēlōhîm*) exist: fallen angels (the *shedim*) who rebelled against YHWH's cosmic rule⁶⁹ and the angels who have always been loyal to YHWH. The two categories of angelic beings were created by YHWH who is *the* *Ēlōhîm* (see Chapter Three; see Heiser 2019).⁷⁰

The biblical worldview regards the *shedim*, as always evil (Riley 1999a:238). It is very likely, that the author/s of Judges, might have believed that the proliferation of evil in the world, after the 'fall,' came about when some of the בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים – *hā'ēlōhîm bənê* (the sons of God; that is, [fallen] angelic beings)⁷¹ married the daughters of men and had children by them that became known as

⁶⁹ See Hurwitz (1999:56-57) and his comments on the delegation of evil Lillith thought to be the first Eve and Satan to the status of demons (cf Bane 2012:296-297; Guiley 2009:170, 233). According to this perspective, humans are also able to become demons due to their evil natures.

⁷⁰ The word '*ēlōhîm* means 'supreme one or mighty one' and it is not only used of YHWH, the one true God but also occasionally used in the Bible to refer to human rulers, judges and angels (Leake 2021).

⁷¹ Some Christians hold that this union was between sons of the line of Seth and the ungodly line of Cain (Newman 2009:40). Early founding church fathers such as Tertullian and Origin believed the beings to be evil fallen angels. Earlier Rabbinic tradition (before the 2nd century AD) holds that the beings were the sons of God; that is angelic beings (Doedens 2019:107-108, 126-130). The Dead Sea Scrolls also refers to the sons of God as fallen angels (Van der Kam

the הַנְּפִלִים – *hannāpīlīm* (*the nephilim* or giants) (Gn 6:2-5; cf Dt 2:10-12; 20-23 Newman 2009:40; cf Doedens 2019:56-78).

The term *nephilim* is derived from the root נָפַל – (*naphal*) which means to fall (Doedens 2019: 59) or ‘a feller; that is, a bully or tyrant.’⁷² The *nephilim* are described as mighty warriors which account for their fame (or notoriety) (cf Gn 6:4). the Hebrew word for renown הַשָּׂמָה – *haššēm* (the name) is also a designation for God that implies their connection with YHWH through their, albeit fallen, divine fathers – *hā’ēlōhīm bānē* – (the sons of God) (White 2019a; Hendel 1987:8-13; Van der Kam 2003:32, 34-36, 46, 48; Perrin, A 2019).⁷³

According to the biblical tradition, the Book of Enoch⁷⁴ as well as the Book of Judges, the *nephilim* and their progenitors, their fathers, the *hā’ēlōhīm bānē*, caused great corruption on earth (cf Gn 6:11-13; Lumpkin 2010: 28-32).⁷⁵ In the worldview of Deuteronomy and Judges, the separation of the *hā’ēlōhīm bānē*, the other gods or *shedim*, from YHWH caused the *shedim*, as stated before (see 2.2.5.3), to be seen as spiritually dead and by association all those humans who worship these entities (Gn 3; 6:1-4; Dt 32:17; cf 1 Cor 6:3; 2 Pt 2:4 and Ju 1:6).⁷⁶ In Judges the rule of the (dead)

2010:192-193; Lumpkin 2010:26-28). Newman (2009:40) contends that marriage and procreation between angels and humans are not impossible. He also mentions that angels appeared as men to Abraham. Additionally, Zechariah 5:9 mentions female angels, showing that although angels cannot reproduce in heaven, they are not sexless (Newman 2009:40). The gods (*shedim*) in the ancient Near Eastern pantheons procreate as well.

⁷² See Bible Hub 2022. Nephilim; see also Doedens (2019:58-71) for interpretations of the word *nephilim* in Genesis 6:4 and their connection to similar beings in the Old Testament as well their connection to YHWH. The root word *naphal* and the wickedness of the world in the context of Genesis 6:5 indicate that the actions of the *nephilim*, although famous, were evil. Concepts of the existence of fallen or evil angels are derived from the Old Testament as well as the Book of Enoch, the latter expands on the Genesis 6:1-4 narrative.

⁷³ One of the offspring of the union between the sons of God and human women in Genesis 6:1-4 is the giant or *nephil* (singular of *nephilim*), Gilgamesh in the Aramaic Book of the Giants found among the corpus of the *Dead Sea Scrolls*. Gilgamesh is the famous king in the Sumerian document the *Epic of Gilgamesh* (ca 2150 BC-1400 BC) (Perrin, A 2019 presents a detailed discussion of the Book of Giants).

⁷⁴ Three versions of the Book of Enoch are extant: The First Book of Enoch or 1 Enoch. The Ethiopian text dates to the 2nd century BC and is based on an earlier Greek text that itself is derived from earlier documents. Among the Dead Sea Scrolls were found fragments of 10 Enoch texts. 2 Enoch or Second Enoch known as the Slavonic Enoch, or The secrets of Enoch was discovered in 1886 and was also probably copied from a Greek text that was based on a Hebrew or Aramaic document. Due to several later additions to the original text and the omission of teachings deemed incorrect, the text is regarded as being unreliable. The Hebrew Enoch, also known as 3 Enoch, is the final book of the Enochian tradition and is filled with a variety of mystical knowledge. According to the text, it was authored by Rabbi Ishmael (ca 90-130 AD). However, no fragments earlier than 400 AD have been discovered. The book is primarily written in Hebrew (Lumpkin 2010:11-19).

⁷⁵ 1 Enoch speaks of *hā’ēlōhīm bānē* teaching people the art of warfare, magic, and astrology as well as the ‘cutting of roots’; that is, drug inducing plants (Lumpkin 2010:28-29).

⁷⁶ Death is found in the heavenly abode of the *Enūma Eliš* and on Mount Saphon of the *Ugaritic Baal Cycle*; it can be inferred that the gods’ earthy temples and sanctuaries on the *bamot* for example are places of death and thus may be compared to the netherworld. Dagon’s sanctuary in Jdg 16:23-30, was an unholy temple for the god’s ‘chthonic associations’ and particularly since he ‘as the *bel pagrē*, ‘lord of corpses,’ ‘received sacrifices for the dead’ (Leick 2003:30). The hapless circumstances of the dead in the netherworld is described in the text of the *Descent of Ishtar to the Underworld* (Dalley 2000:155). It should be noted that the reference to the food of the dead in the description of the underworld above ‘Where dust is their food, clay their bread’ (Dalley 2000:155), is reminiscent of the judgement of the serpent in Genesis 3:14 (cf Footnote 52).

other gods is, thus, regarded as evil and consequently, in the worldview of the author/s of Judges, the Israelites partake of this evil when they serve the gods of the Canaanites (Jdg 3:7, 12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1; Dt 32:17; see also above).

b. Deception

It is inferred that the gods specifically mentioned in Judges (2:11, 13; 3:7; 8:33; 10:6; 11:24 and 16:23) are *shedim* since the author/s of the Book always decry the Israelites' (anti-covenantal) worship of these deities. These deities are regarded as deceivers and tricksters⁷⁷ since they assume sovereignty over the nations that, in the worldview of Judges' author/s, for example, solely belongs to YHWH (Ps 81). The West Semitic gods, especially the weather gods are given the title *b'l*, lord or master (a title that in the biblical worldview rightfully befits YHWH), with the storm deity Baal (worshipped in Judges) being the most significant of these (Leick 2003:18; cf 2.2.5.3; 3.2.4.2; 3.6.1.1c). The gods also appropriate the nature and attributes of YHWH.

As stated before, the redemptive, reconciliatory qualities and faithfulness of YHWH are reflected in the narratives of Judges (see also 2.2.3.1c; 2.2.4.2; 2.2.2.1; cf 2.2.2). The author/s of Judges use both literal and symbolic elements to emphasize the said qualities of YHWH, which are infused with the supernatural, as the provider of those essential things needed for the liberation of the idolatrous and oppressed Israelites. Some examples of the aforementioned elements are: the raising of judges, the rain-storm and earthquake in Judges 5:4-5, condensation in Judges 6:34, and light in Judges 7:20. Baal, too, is worshipped by the idolatrous Israelites although he is portrayed as the god of thunder and lightning and the bringer of seasonal rains (Sibley 2009:56). However, the author/s of Judges depict YHWH's power as supreme, for example in Judges 3:10; 5:4-5; 6:34 and in these narratives they show that the gods, such as Baal, cannot possess the same qualities of YHWH. They cannot save the oppressed Israelites (cf Jdg 2:15-16; 10:14; cf 3.3.5.1).

The Babylonian creator god, Marduk, too, is said to be merciful (Oshima 2011:51; Casey 2009:54), and a source of illumination (in the night; Green 1992:33). However, Marduk in the biblical worldview is a dead entity (see 2.2.5.3; 2.2.5.8a). As said before, he imposes a heavy workload and enslaves the people he has created (see also 2.2.3.1d; see also Footnotes 36, 39). Judges deny the cultural ideology of the peaceful gods or the idea that the gods process order out of chaos. For the Israelites it is the exact opposite since their worship of the Canaanite gods bring chaos and oppression (Jdg 3:5-8, 12-14; 4:1-3; 6:1-6; 10:6-9, and so on). Ancient Near Eastern texts, both the *Ugaritic Baal Cycle* and the *Enūma Eliš* report that the gods' struggle to attain a state of peace

⁷⁷ In the ancient Near East, the gods are known to be tricksters and two ancient Near Eastern deities 'commonly resort to deception' (Nicholas 2009:16). Seth, the ancient Egypt god, is portrayed as a trickster. He is the deity of disorder and anarchy. Seth is the opposing force in a religious framework where order and the continuity of the future with the past are expected (Nicholas 2009:16). Enki/Ea, a wise and crafty god in Mesopotamia, frequently employed his 'craftiness' ironically for the benefit of humans (Nicholas 2009:16).

in the realm of the divine. Marduk lacks the kind of power necessary to maintain peace (Dalley 2000:267).⁷⁸

Considering the aforementioned, the gods are ultimately fraudsters because they have tricked the nations into believing they are the one true God/s or that YHWH is a deceitful God (cf Gn 3:1-6; cf Ex 23:33; Webb 1987:153; Mulder 1999:141-44; Oeste 2012:74).⁷⁹ Did the idolatrous Israelites in the Book of Judges fall victim to a similar deception? (cf Jdg 2:1-2; 3:5-7, and so on). The author/s of Judges disclose that the Canaanites and their gods often deceive the Israelites by violating the treaties that the tribes had established with the inhabitants of the land (cf Jdg 2:1-2; see 2.2.1.1b; 2.2.2.1). The other gods allow the Israelites to be oppressed on a regular basis (cf Jdg 3:8, 12-14; 4:1; 6:1; 10:7-9; 13:1).

Further deception characterizes the relationship between humanity and the ancient Near Eastern *'ēlōhîm*.⁸⁰ The ancient Near Eastern gods/*shedim* not only concealed their true identity from humanity but also 'stole' the rule of humans over the earth. According to Genesis (1:27-28), humans were created as the (rightful) rulers of the earth as they, alone, were made in the image of YHWH. This role was a divine appointment by YHWH (2.2.5.8c). In Genesis 1:27 the Hebrew word בְּצַלְמֹוֹ – *bašalmōw* (in His [own] image) is derived from the root word צָלַם – *tselem* (shade or shadow).⁸¹ As the representatives or 'imagers' of YHWH in Canaan, the early Israelites were to shade or represent YHWH's nature (see also 5.2.1.1) and rule over the land via their adherence to the covenantal lifestyle. The early Israelites were to be the image bearers of YHWH; that is, exact copies of God by showing the divine attributes and nature through their devotion and faithfulness to the Sinaitic Covenant.

In the Old Testament, the word *tselem* (cf Gn 1:26-27) is also used to refer to the idols of the Canaanites (Nm 33:52; 2 Ki 11:18) since it was thought that the gods' souls resided within their statues so that they were perceived to be 'alive' (see also Chapter Six). The biblical writers extract the concept in question from its ancient Near Eastern paradigm and appropriately applied it to the people that YHWH had created. The true *tselem* are people! The biblical worldview afforded the early Israelites, as the people of YHWH, the status of the *tselem* of YHWH and as they, ideally,

⁷⁸ Dalley (2000:275) is uncertain what the term 'dead gods' means in the *Enūma Eliš*. The biblical worldview presents an explanation, namely that the ancient Near Eastern gods, created beings, known as the sons of God, who sinned against YHWH and thus in their fallen state are considered to be dead (cf Dt 32:17; see 2.2.5.8).

⁷⁹ In the ancient Near East, the gods are known to be tricksters and two ancient Near Eastern deities 'commonly resort to deception' (Nicholas 2009:16). Seth, the ancient Egypt god, is portrayed as a trickster. He is the deity of disorder and anarchy. Seth is the opposing force in a religious framework where order and the continuity of the future with the past are expected (Nicholas 2009:16). Enki/Ea, a wise and crafty god in Mesopotamia, frequently employed his 'craftiness' ironically for the benefit of humans (Nicholas 2009:16).

⁸⁰ The deception of the ancient Near Eastern gods is reminiscent of the deceptiveness in the messages given to modern humans by supernatural beings. These cases are well documented by the scientist Jacques Vallée (1993) in his book 'Messengers of Deception.'

⁸¹ Bible Hub 2022. *tselem*. The term 'imagers' is borrowed from Heiser (2019).

represented YHWH's rule on earth they also had direct access to God. Consequently, it seems that YHWH has restored the order in which He created the world, giving back to the people their true identities, which the gods had usurped.

Among the attributes of the ancient Near Eastern *'ēlōhīm* featured not only deception but also craftiness, lust and overt sexuality (cf 2.2.3.1b; see also Footnotes 36, 38; 7.4.4.1; 8.4.3.1) and a host of others (Walton 2018). These characteristics of the gods caused their devotees to live morally dubious lives and engage in destructive practises (see 3.3.6.1-3.3.6.3; 3:4; cf 3.6.1.1) since individuals in the ancient Near Eastern societies emulated the behaviours of the gods they worshipped. Conversely, as stated before, the Sinai Covenant discloses the perfect holiness of YHWH, who always upholds the most supreme principles with which to bless humanity (see 3.3.1-3.3.5.1; 3.3.6.1-3.3.6.3; Knierim 1995:127).

c. Requirements

As stated before, the Sinai Covenant revealed the interminable divine nature and YHWH's requirements for Israelite life via the covenant laws and stipulations (see 2.2.5-2.2.5.5). The course of Israelite history now takes a specific path; it is driven by a set of divine goals. YHWH, as mentioned before, has promised the fulfillment of these goals: a life of abundance, success and perpetuation if He is worshipped above all else (cf Dt 28:1-14; see 2.2.4-2.2.5.5). Subsequently, the early Israelites had a unique sense of stability that was not present in the lives of the ancient Near Eastern people. This was because the devotees of the ancient Near Eastern deities never knew what to expect from their unpredictable gods.

The ancient Near Eastern gods/*shedim* did not make known their expectations to people, leaving them unaware of what was required of them in terms of worship and daily living. The gods themselves were inscrutable at best (Benzel et al 2010:127; Walton 2018; cf 2.2.5.8b; cf 3.3.6.1-3.3.6.3). Hundley (2013:140) concurs that the gods never truly make themselves known to people and neither do they, apart from their cult statues, reveal their actual nature or form to humans (cf Hamori 2008:129-130; cf 2.2.5.8b). Walton, Matthews and Chavalas (2000:176) also remark 'The gods did not reveal what they were (actually) like or what pleased or displeased them' (cf 2.2.5.8b). Walton, Matthews and Chavalas (2000:176) further observe that there was no belief that the gods of the ancient Near East had any long-term plans. Their followers, who yearned for continuance and longevity and the guarantee of a happy and successful life would have felt a certain amount of disquiet in their lives as a result. Finkelstein (1992:370) notes since the ancient Near Eastern gods lacked a divine plan for humanity, they could not be held responsible for the course of human history (cf 3.3.5.1). Furthermore, the gods do not participate in a salvatory relationship with humans (cf 3.3.5.1). The Canaanite gods, therefore, possibly fail to save the oppressed Israelites in Judges for this reason. When taking into account all of the previously cited points, the author/s of Judges' disdain for the Canaanite gods become clear (cf Jdg 10:16).

The one thing that humanity did know about the gods was that they, as stated before, were unreliable and unpredictable. Baal in Judges (Jdg 2:11, 13, etcetera) is a ‘cosmic deity’ and like the weather phenomena he represents, Baal is a fundamental but erratic force (Leick 2003:19; cf 3.2.4.2; 3.6.1.1c). Ancient Near Eastern texts disclose the terror inspired by the gods in the violent forces of nature that often were believed to represent their fury and their need to destroy human society (Speiser 1969:94; Ginsberg 1969a:133; Kramer 1969d:580; cf Goetze 1969d:127; Meek 1969:179). The capricious natures of the gods meant that people had to do something to influence these deities to act in their favour. Mesopotamian texts show people seeking to please their gods and gain their blessings through worship acts such as magic and ritual blood sacrifice (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:120; Roberts 2002:65; Green 2003:35). People realised that they had to provide the gods with the very necessities that they themselves needed for their survival – food, clothing (feeding and clothing their cult images) and shelter (taking care of their temples) – if they were to secure and maintain the favour of these capricious deities (see Walton 2015:147; cf 2.2.3.1d; 3.3.2.1a; 3.3.5.1; 3.3.6; 3.3.6.2; see also Footnote 36). Since this was the purpose for which the gods created humans in the first place, to take care of them in their temples, it stands to reason that this dynamic underlines the relationship between the ancient Near Eastern gods and the nations (see 3.3.5.1). This relationship was fundamentally very different from the loving and devoted relationship that YHWH desired the early Israelites to have with Him.

d. Sin

Various words are used to designate sin in the Old Testament: ‘omission, iniquity, injustice’, insurgence (Leon-Dufour 1967:480; cf Knierim 1997:542-548). Covenantal unfaithfulness was the Israelites primary sin or iniquity against YHWH (cf Jdg 2:1-3; cf 2.2.5.2).⁸² In Judges (10:10, 15), the Israelites ‘confess’ their sin (of worshipping the Baals) (cf Jdg 2:5, 2:10-19; 3:9, 15, 4:3, and so on). Leon-Dufour (1967:480) remarks that this revelation regarding the Israelites is also a revelation about YHWH: ‘about His (covenantal) love to which sin is opposed’ and about His mercy or compassion ‘that He exercises in regard to sin’ (insertion mine). Walton (2015:146) concurs that the Israelites’ understanding of sin was predicated on their discernment of the nature of YHWH. YHWH has no known or unknown needs analogous to that of humans or the ancient Near Eastern gods whose unfulfilled demands people believed constituted sin and resulted in punishment. However, the gods did not make the aforesaid clear (cf 2.2.5.8c). YHWH’s desire is to have a relationship with humans built on ‘the law that promotes the virtues of gratitude and fidelity and love’ (Mittleman 2012:20; cf 2.2.5.8c). The early Israelites, therefore, sin when they break this ‘law’ by worshipping the gods of the Canaanites and adopting their cults and value systems (see 2.2.5.8c).

⁸² The sin of idolatry in the Israelite community had a far reaching effect. According to Carvalho and Niskanen (2012:8) sin defiled the clans, lands, and cities of the early Israelites (see also Walton 2015:146).

Walton (2015:146) remarks that ‘sin is problematic in an ancient Near Eastern context.’ The people in the ancient Near East understood the concept of sin as ‘offending a deity and suffering for it.’ However, as stated before (see 2.2.5.8c), the gods did not make known their expectations to their followers (Walton 2015:146). People, thus, did not know what sin they had committed to offend the god which presumably aggravated their suffering. In light of the foregoing, sin became a physical entity that people could or sought to control, for example, by offerings and vow making (see below), if the gods were reluctant to assist them.⁸³

Thus, in ancient Near Eastern (and [idolatrous] Israelite) societies sin was ‘objectified’ as something that could physically be carried and lifted off someone (Walton 2015:146; Ginsberg 1969a:148). In the Ugaritic *Legend of King Keret*, the extremely ill king Keret repeatedly asks for his affliction to be removed from him (Ginsberg 1969a:148). It was thought that illness was the physical result of sin (Walton 2015:146) but, as stated above, what the offence was to cause the sin was not known. In an *Amarna Letter* a man attributes his illness to sin and thus he attempts to redeem himself by making a vow to the gods (Albright 1969b:483). Vows, rites, and sacrifices are offered to appease the gods since the gods are reluctant to declare sins, but they do not actually assist people find ‘relief’ in these activities by absolving them of their sins. Because of the gods’ self-centredness, people had effectively been deprived of the vital need to acknowledge and confess their transgressions and make amends – a process that is immensely restorative and beneficial to both the human body and psyche. ‘Wasting disease,’ and ‘fever and inflammation’ are some of the illnesses enumerated in Deuteronomy that would come upon the early Israelites for violating their covenant (Dt 28:22, 27). The Israelites knew exactly the nature of their sin and could ‘remove’ the effects that it caused only by asking YHWH for forgiveness. By receiving His pardon, the Israelites could work towards healing and restoration (cf Jdg 10m 10:15-16 also Jdg 2:5; 3:9, 15; 4:3, and so on).

In light of the aforesaid, both the ancient Near Eastern people and early Israelites may have objectified sin but their view of what ‘constituted’ sin greatly diverged. An ethical imperative ‘based on a discernment of God’s nature as found in Israel was lacking’ in the ancient Near East (Walton 2015:146). Walton remarks that ethical standards in the ancient Near East and early ‘Israel’ may parallel each other but the derivation of these standards in the early Israelite worldview – God and not society (cf Blumenthal 2005:21; Mittleman 2012:19-20; Levine 2018; Athas 2020), the rationale for ethical standards – holiness in order to maintain entry into God’s presence (cf Olson 2008:6; Kaminsky 2007:89; Duvall and Hays 2019; Walton 2019:349-354), and their purposes – to be like God (that is, YHWH’s *tselem*) – (cf Barton 2014:272-273; McDowell 2016:29-46) are

⁸³ In the ancient Near East, people also believed that sin was generated by demonic maledictions in which demons gained power with every sin committed by humans (McCraw and Arp 2017:4; cf Messadie 1996:103).

what differentiate the concept of sin among the early Israelites and in the ancient Near East.⁸⁴ Because of His grace, love and compassion, YHWH is revelatory about sin and allows people to confess their transgressions and receive forgiveness in turn. The enigmatic and unfathomable gods of the ancient Near East, on the other hand, never provided their followers with the necessary instructions to understand what sin was and how to live in the freedom that came with being delivered from the guilt of one's sin. The ethical standards of the ancient Near Eastern gods primarily emphasized societal order and the prevention of chaos in order for their needs to be met while in early Israel the major importance was the covenantal relationship with YHWH and living a moral life in keeping with His holiness and in accordance with His laws (Walton 2015:146).

I have attempted to familiarize the reader with the *shedim*/false gods and their pervasive influence on people's life in the preceding segments which, (1) in the biblical worldview was 'evil' and (2) serves as an explanation for the biblical polemic against these gods by the author/s of Judges. The covenantal regulations and requirements were an entirely opposing religious mindset and lifestyle against the dominant cultural ideology established by YHWH in order to restore humanity – which had been ensnared by the *shedim* – to their proper identity, role in life, and relationship with their real God, the one true God, YHWH. The prophet Isaiah states that the LORD 'will destroy the shroud that enfolds all people, the sheet that covers all nations' (Is 25:7; cf 2.2.6.2). Covenant making with His elected people marked the beginning of YHWH's divine purpose to demolish the deception of the ancient Near Eastern gods and their domination over the nations by revealing the true identity of the true God, and bringing them back to Him. It is very unfortunate that the early Israelites in the Book of Judges fell victim to the deception of the *shedim* in Canaan.

2.3 THE LIFESTYLE OF THE ISRAELITES IN CANAAN

In the above, I have already indicated how the 'legacy of Deuteronomy' and the Sinai Covenant stipulations are reflected in the Book of Judges. Despite the sacred agreement entered into with YHWH, Judges exposes the frequent idolatry of the Israelites. This section will discuss the two opposing worldviews operative among the Israelites. Evidence in the material culture will be considered and religious sites will be examined as markers of either the covenantal lifestyle or an idolatrous one. First, however, the renewal of the Sinai Covenant in Canaan and also possible reasons for Israelite idolatry will be discussed.

2.3.1 The renewal of the Sinai Covenant

⁸⁴ The 'ethical standards' of the ancient Near East primarily emphasized societal order and the prevention of chaos while in early Israel the major importance was the covenantal relationship with YHWH and living a moral life in keeping with His holiness in accordance with His laws (Walton 2015:146).

Brown (2014) remarks that ‘Exodus 24 narrates the completion and ratification of the Sinai Covenant in two rituals’:

Contingent upon the completion of the covenant seems to be the two reiterations of the people’s commitment to exclusive relationship with God through keeping the covenant stipulations laid before them in the Ten Commandments. Here for the first time in the biblical narrative, the human parties of a covenant with God make explicit their conscious commitment of *obedience* to God, rendering them full participants, active agents, in this covenantal relationship. Across the rest of Israel’s Scriptures, this is the covenant that is operative. For this reason, Joshua calls the confederation of Israelite tribes to a covenant renewal ceremony at Shechem after the successful conquest of the land [Jos 24] [However, Judges does indicate that this was not actually the case]. It would be the demands of the Sinai Covenant that determined success or failure of the both the tribes as a corporate entity and the lives of its individual people (insertion mine).

The Sinai Covenant was first ratified at Shechem (Jos 8:30-35; cf Dt 27:12; Hahn 2009:85). Following in the tradition of the patriarchs, Joshua himself had built an altar near Shechem at the foot of Mount Ebal on which the priests presented burn offerings and peace offerings (Jos 8:30; Wood 1986:145). At Shechem, the patriarchs Abraham (Gn 12:6-7) as well as Jacob (Gn 33:20) had built altars (see 2.2.5.3; 2.3.2.1c; 2.3.4.2a; 4.3.1.1i). Probably as a result of these patriarchal activities, it appears that Shechem already had a sanctuary dedicated to YHWH when the Israelites arrived at the city (cf Jos 24:26; see 2.3.2.1c; 2.3.4.2a).

Joshua wrote ‘a copy of the law of Moses’ – the blessings and curses of the law – on stones near the Ark of the Covenant (Jos 8:32; Wood 1986:145) which he read to the people (Jos 8:34-35). There is a belief that Joshua had written the law on the stones of the altar (Bible Hub 2024. Joshua 8:32. Regarding early Israelites’ writing ability, see Footnote 2). However, it seems that the verse in Joshua 8:32 suggests that a series of stone pillars was placed next to the altar. Likely these pillars were plastered and the law was then duplicated on them afterwards (Bible Hub 2024. Joshua 8:32).

‘Under the influence of Deuteronomy’ (cf 1.1; 2.1), Joshua reaffirms the Sinai Covenant during a renewal ceremony at Shechem (Jos 24; see also Jos 8:30-35; Boadt, Clifford and Harrington 2012; cf Cook 2004:260). Wood (1986:145) observes that the purpose of the renewal ceremony was to ‘repeat for the benefit of this new generation what had been done forty years before at Mount Sinai when the covenant was ratified’ (Ex 24:4-8). Wood adds that it was appropriate that this serve as both a reminder of YHWH’s commandments – and a rededication of the people’s commitment since the Israelites were now literally in the land.

Brown (2014) notes that the tribal assembly described in Joshua 24 is vital to the formation of a cohesive and ‘unified people’ in a twelve-tribe league in terms of the renewal of the Sinai covenant (cf Marks 2016). The people become themselves personal participants in the Sinai covenant by reaffirming it (Jos 24:22; Brown 2014; cf Boadt, Clifford and Harrington 2012). Like all covenant making passages, Joshua 24:14-24 is characterized by a command and a response. In terms of service, the first commandment of Sinai is reaffirmed by Joshua and the tribes at Shechem (Brown

2014). The Israelites, represented by the tribal confederation, now have the opportunity to express their decision for YHWH in response to YHWH's prior selection of the Israelites (Brown 2014). When they make their final response to the call, they also promise their obedience, reinforcing their resolve to serve only YHWH. Only with their response of obedience to YHWH's offer of covenant can the covenant's renewal be finalized through a ceremonial rite (Jos 24:25-28). As a witness to the covenant's renewal, the statutes and ordinances were inscribed in a 'book' and placed under an oak near the sanctuary at Shechem that was dedicated to YHWH (Previously Joshua had inscribed the 'law' on stones as described above [Jos 8:30-35]) (Jos 24:26; cf 2.2.5.6d). Then Joshua sends the people to their 'tribal inheritance' (Brown 2014; cf Rosenthal 2001:14-16; Nitzan 2001:88; Boadt, Clifford and Harrington 2012).

Boadt, Clifford and Harrington (2012) remark that the renewal of the Sinai Covenant under Joshua (Jos 24) is the nearest equivalent to a Hittite treaty in the Old Testament (cf 2.2.5.6). 'It even includes the people as witnesses against themselves (cf 2.2.5.6e) and public reading and deposit of the agreement in a sanctuary' (cf 2.2.5.6d; cf Nitzan 2001:88; Cook 2004:260). Nitzan (2001:88) observes that the covenant (renewal) under Joshua emphasized the eradication of the idols (Jos 24:14-40). And yet, as indicated throughout this study, the early Israelites would persistently come to worship the Canaanite idols.

2.3.2 The early Israelites in Canaan

In Judges 1, the account of the conquest of Canaan in the Book of Joshua is continued. Scholars have raised the issue of the differences between the Book of Joshua's account of the settlement and that given in Judges (Lemche 2004:236; Levine 2005:329). Joshua records a rapid, uncomplicated, and complete conquest by a unified tribe stationed in one camp while Judges gives a more 'realistic' image of a conquest by individual tribes that happened over time and the problems faced by the tribes once settled in the land (Coleson, Stone and Driesbach 2012:6). Coleson, Stone and Driesbach argue that a meticulous study of the two books do not portray 'such radically opposing pictures.' Bacon and Sperling (2007:562) describe the conquest events in Judges as 'mopping up operations left to the individual tribes.'

The archaeological record provides confirmation of the (12th century BC) tribal presence in Canaan (Ussishkin 2016:226; Redmount 2001:79; cf Meyers 2006:245-251; Millgram 2018:503-506).⁸⁵ The extrabiblical evidence for the conquest and settlement of the tribes in Canaan provided by archaeology for the most part discards the supernatural perspective and the numinous phenomena

⁸⁵ See also Footnote 6; cf 4.2.1.1a-b.

that Judges, for example, attaches to the history of the tribes in the narratives of the book (cf Jdg 1:1-2; 2:1-2; 3:8:11. etcetera; see Table 2.2; see also 1.2).⁸⁶

The Israelites faithfully served YHWH while Joshua was alive. However, after the death of Joshua the tribes fell into cyclical patterns of idolatry and the worship of Baal and the Ashtoreths/Asherah, for instance (Jdg 2:10-11). Judges 6:25-26 indicates that the Israelites worshipped images of the gods (Jdg 17:4-5) and also other idolatrous images (cf Jdg 8:27; 17:5). How was this possible given the nature of YHWH's interactions in the history of the early Israelites (cf Jdg 6:13; see Hill and Walton 2010:201; see also 3.1) and the dire warnings against idolatry (Dt 28:15-68)? The early Israelites had the following aides-mémoires that served as countermeasures against idolatry: the covenant written on the tablets that were preserved in the Ark of the Covenant and the written laws deposited at the sanctuary of YHWH in Shechem (see Jos 24:26). It is possible also that a copy of the covenantal laws (the Ten Commandments) were placed at Shiloh for public readings (see Millard 2007:264; cf Eisenberg 2008:412; Friedman 2014:178). Given the dire warning against idolatry (Dt 28:15-69; Jdg 2:1-3) what can account for the early Israelites unfaithfulness towards YHWH and His sacred covenant?⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Knight and Levine (2011) remark that while both Biblical and 'extrabiblical evidence' (archaeology) confirm each other, they often do not and often provide opposing sequences of events. See also Dever (2002:16-17) on the topic of convergences between the Bible and archaeology (cf Hoffmeier 2004:60; Gottwald 2017:45). Depending on their educational and personal worldview, archaeologists are mainly focused on either confirming or disproving the history of the Old Testament. For secular scholars the religious element and particularly the supernatural ethos attached to the history of the early Israelites, the liberation of Israel from slavery in Egypt, for example, in the Old Testament is entirely overlooked. If any attention is paid to it, it serves only to relegate the Old Testament narratives to the category of story or myth making. Gottwald (2017:45) alludes to the notion that the early Israelites did not distinguish between actual events and fantasy and embedded both in the writing of their history. But is this viewpoint true? Row (2018:6), referring to the supernatural in the New Testament states that

... various forms of modern unbelief are making the strenuous efforts to prove that the supernatural elements of the New Testament are hopelessly incredible, and that the attestation on which the supernatural occurrence mentioned in it rest, is simply worthless...

Row continues (2018:6):

Modern scepticism makes with respect to supernatural occurrences...the three following assertions and endeavours to establish them by every available argument:

1st. That all supernatural occurrences are impossible.

2nd. That, if not impossible, they are incredible; that is, that they are contrary to reason.

3rd. That those which are narrated in the New Testament (and Old Testament) are devoid of any historical attestation and owe their origin to the inventive powers of the mythic and legendary spirit (insertion mine).

The abovementioned statements may be equally applicable to the Old Testament. Discoveries have been made in modern physics that have led scientists to consider the possibility that there is more to reality. In the field of physics, it has been discovered that matter may behave in unexpected ways than what was previously known. Some physicists even ascribe 'a spiritual aspect of reality to the philosophy of quantum mechanics' – a branch of physics (Laurikainen, Montonen, Sunnarborg [eds] 1994:1; cf De Ronde 2015:137-138). Could there be more to the supernatural events in the Old Testament that involved the reality of an undiscovered physics or aspects of our known science that are not understood? Could YHWH have utilized the aforesaid types of science to interact with His people, in Judges for example?

⁸⁷ The Canaanites had no intention of upholding the agreements with the early Israelites (Domeris 2018:125; see Jdg 2:1-3). They would violate those agreements allowing Canaanite and other nations to subjugate the Israelites (cf Jdg 3:8, 12-14; 4:1; 6:1; 10:7; 13:1).

Is it possible that the statues or other sacred images and objects of the Canaanite gods took on a certain quality that encouraged the worship of these images that the early Israelites erroneously thought were divine aspects of YHWH? The ensuing segments (2.3.2.1a-c) will show that certain inscriptions in the ancient Near East acquired a divine and magic quality that possibly was evocative of the tablets on which were written the Ten Commandments. In the early Israelite society, the covenant emphasizes the significance of divinely inspired words (cf Ex 20:1-17; Jos 24:26). The resemblance to the ancient Near Eastern tradition and its emphasis on divinely given utterances may have drawn the early Israelites to the Canaanite deities since they were reminiscent of certain of YHWH's attributes.

The ensuing segments (2.3.2.1a-c) will show that certain inscriptions in the ancient Near East acquired a divine and magic quality that possibly was evocative of the tablets on which were written the Ten Commandments as well as Joshua's writing of Moses' law on the stones in Joshua 8:32 (see 2.3.1). In the early Israelite society, the covenant emphasizes the significance of divinely inspired words (cf Ex 20:1-17; Jos 24:26). The resemblance to the ancient Near Eastern tradition and its emphasis on divinely given utterances may have drawn the early Israelites to the Canaanite deities since they were reminiscent of YHWH's covenant written on the tablets (the Ten Commandments) and the 'law' written on stones (Jos 8:32) and in a 'book' (Jos 24:26) at Shechem (see 2.3.1; 2.3.2.1c). It is possible also that a copy of the 'law' was placed at Shiloh for public readings (see Millard 2007:264; cf Eisenberg 2008:412; Friedman 2014:178; cf 2.2.5.6d-e; 2.3.1) so that the Israelites were familiar with divine inscriptions (on stone as well; see Jos 8:32; see also 2.3.1) and utterances which were also common traditions in the ancient Near East.

2.3.2.1 Sacred stone

Marriage to the Canaanites posed a threat to further the social disintegration of Israel brought on by their cultic devotion to the other gods (cf Jdg 3:6). Exogenous marriages endangered early Israelite identity as YHWH's elect people (cf 3.2.3.1). It also had the potential to imperil tribal land ownership and erode the Israelite tribal claims to their territories (cf Jdg 1:34-36; 18:1; see Cabal [ed] 2003). Non-Israelite women, unassimilated into the Israelite religion and lifestyle, wielded an exceptionally destructive power by way of the idols that they worshipped as the polygamous life of Solomon attests to (see Gn 26:34-35 27:46; 28:6-9; Nm 25:1-16).

Probably one of the main reasons the Israelites engaged in the Canaanite treaties was to take part in and profit from the commercial ventures the area had to offer (cf Jdg 2:2). Canaan's central location in the region of the Levant, facilitated trade routes to the ancient Near East countries and as distant as Arabia. In order to increase their economic affluence, neighboring countries secured trade routes through Canaan by making treaties [of commercial value] with the Canaanites (Brandon et al 2014:25). Thus, the internal Canaanite populations groups such as the Philistines (Faust and Katz 2011:232) were able to prosper from the travelling trading caravans passing through their regions (cf Jdg 5:6; 21:19).

Israelite trade with their Philistine neighbours, for instance, as apparently their shared pottery assemblages point to (see Finkelstein et al 1985:16; cf 4.2.1.1) encouraged closer contact and mingling (see also Jdg 14-16) despite the ongoing hostilities between the two nations described in Judges 14-16. The treaty between Ahab and Ben-hadad, king of Syria that involved setting up markets in Samaria and Damascus (1 Ki 20:34; see also De Vaux 1997:78) may parallel a pre-monarchic treaty with the Canaanites.

a. ‘Tablets of Destiny’ and the Tablets with the words of the Ten Commandments

In the *Enūma Eliš*, Marduk reveals that his possession of the Tablets of Destiny entails much more than taking advantage of the spoils of war. The inscriptions on these tablets were powerful. They decreed the different fates of everything created, including gods and people (Dalglish 1992:652-653; Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:631). Walton, Matthews, and Chavalas (2000:603) assert that the ‘gods governed the world’ by means of the ‘tablets of destiny’ and without these texts (presumably they were ‘magic’ texts that may have contained incantations and spells for divination) the gods were powerless to rule (cf Dalglish 1992:652-653). It is also likely that the Tablets of Destiny represented or served as some sort of covenant between the gods that decreed or ascribed supremacy to the god who held possession of these tablets (see Dalley 2000:258-259).

It is most probable that the Bible authors were aware of the aforesaid and imprinted their worldview regarding the supernatural onto the biblical texts to provide insight into this situation (Heiser 2019). Thus, the tablets on which the Ten Commandments were inscribed were presented to the early Israelites to possibly address or correct the aforesaid aberrancy; that is, the (concept) of the Tablets of Destiny. The words (of the Ten Commandments) inscribed on the tablets given to Moses were not magic texts but divine ordinances that taught the Israelites the principles of worship and YHWH’s requirements for life (see 2.2.5.4). If the early Israelites faithfully obeyed the Ten Commandments, they were destined to achieve all the blessings described in Deuteronomy 28:1-14. The sacred words of the tablets of the Ten Commandments most importantly, ascribed sovereignty to YHWH alone and as stated before, the guidelines of worshipping the one true God.⁸⁸

Since the early Israelites were familiar with divine utterances (conditions) within a covenantal context, perhaps they mistakenly equated the treaties made with the Canaanites with their own sacred covenant (cf Jdg 2:1-3; cf 2.2.1.1; 2.2.2.1). It is also possible that the Israelites were attracted to the very visible image of the god (a statue, an altar or a pillar for example [cf Jdg 6:25-26) that was engraved with words (see 2.3.2.1b) reminiscent of the stones of the altar or pillars inscribed with the law by Joshua (Jos 8:32; see also 2.3.1). The cult statue of the god was also very visible while the Israelites’ own covenant God remained invisible.⁸⁹

b. The permanence of stone engravings

⁸⁸ In the worldview presented by the author/s in Judges, YHWH is *the* God, the *One True* Elohim. His covenant contains divine requirements that must be obeyed since they are a reflection of His divine nature. Houston (2007:1-25) describes the character of YHWH and His ethics (see also Chapter Three).

⁸⁹ Despite the great and combined power that the multiple gods as a divine pantheon represented, they were fragile; they could be damaged, enslaved, work laden (cf 3.4.4.2a). Deceased gods could be revived but they remain susceptible to death and could be turned into statues that possessed the spirit of the god and which were etched with magic engravings that attracted people (See Dalley 2000:257, 266, 268; Smith 1994:99; cf Figure 2.5). Marduk turns defeated Tiamat’s demons into statues which were placed at the entrance to (the) Apsu (Dalley 2000:257) which echoes the positioning of cultic figurines found in the houses of the Israelites (cf 4.3.1.3a).

Important events were frequently recorded on clay and stone tablets in the ancient Near East. The treaty between king *Hattušili III* and Rameses II of Egypt were originally inscribed on silver tablets and offered to their respective deities. The originals of these inscribed silver tablets have not survived but fragmentary Akkadian copies found on clay tablets exist as well as Egyptian copies from the Ramesseum, the funerary temple of Rameses II on the west bank of Thebes, and the temple of Amun of Karnak (Smith 2010:51-52; cf Van De Mierop 2010:126-127).

Ancient Near Eastern kings could have their own statues inscribed (Collon 1995:109; Wagensonner 2022:248-49). The limbs of the silver statue of Nuradad, king of Larsa, for example, the father of Siniddinam were beautifully inscribed. Wagensonner (2022:249) reports that Siniddinam addressed two ‘letters-prayers’ to the statue (of his father) and it is probable that these prayers were engraved on tablets ‘that were deposited near the statue’ (actions that may be considered covenantal [cf 2.2.5.6d]).

In early Israel as well as the ancient Near East the permanence of stone represented perpetuity and protection. This could be a reason that the statues of gods and kings (see above) were venerated and thought to be imbued with the spirit of the god (or the king). In the ancient Near East, for example in the old Babylonian period, the statues of rulers (and gods) could also take on a meditative role (Dirven 2008:246). Dirven remarks ‘that a ruler from Larsa, for example, implored that a votive image may be a living thing in the temple.’⁹⁰

In the biblical worldview, YHWH does not inhabit statues (cf 3.3.2.1). In a metaphorical sense, the author/s of Judges understood YHWH to be the true Rock of life (cf Dt 32:15, 18, 31), who protects the Israelites (like an eagle protects its young) (Dt 32:10-11). YHWH nourishes His people with honey and oil from His rock (Dt 32:13). Judges 6:13 indicates that the Israelites were informed about YHWH’s active involvement in the history of their ancestors (cf 2.2.1.1; 2.2.2.1) and therefore they understood that their covenant God is their provider and protector. However, within the context of the ancient Near East (described above), it is probable that the early Israelites confused certain aspects of YHWH with the inscribed cultic objects of the Canaanite deities that were thought to protect and provide for the needs of the people.

A parallel to the aforesaid can be found in the image of the bull associated with ancient Near Eastern deities, particularly with the Canaanite god Baal, which the Israelites would come to confuse with the bull as representing the presence (and power) of YHWH (De Vaux 1997:334). Ackerman (2022b:91) remarks that ‘the biblical record makes clear that the Israelites god Yahweh can also be referred to as ‘Bull’: see the epithets ‘Bull of Jacob’ and ‘Bull of Israel’ ‘used of Yahweh

⁹⁰ Dirven (2008:246) adds that Abisare, king of Ur requested his statue in the sanctuary of Nannai to inform the god of the good things done by the king daily. Siniddinam had a silver statue of his father Nuradad, king of Larsa made which he, Siniddinam, required to tell the god of the great things done by his father (Dirven 2008:246; cf Wagensonner 2022:248-249).

in Gen 49:24; Isa 1:24, 49:26, 60:16; and Ps 132:2' (see also Hutton 2010:159). The title 'Bull of Jacob' is also translated as 'the Mighty One of Jacob' (Childs 2022:108; see also Wolf 2007:32; Lewis 2020:197; cf Kingsbury 2009:51) or the 'Mighty One of Israel (Is 1:24; Lewis 2020:197). Childs (2022:108) believes that the aforesaid title comes from El's bull imagery, 'as does the image of YHWH having horns 'like the horns of the wild ox' (Nm 24:8). Or is the reverse of Childs' statement also true – that the title comes from the bull imagery attributed to YHWH which instead came to be associated with El, the Canaanite god? Previously (see 2.2.5.8), I have mentioned that in the biblical worldview the *shedim*, such as El and Baal, created by YHWH, were deceivers and appropriated some of YHWH's titles.

Based on the information presented earlier, it is possible that the early Israelites worshipped images associated with idolatrous practices – the cult objects with inscriptions described above (Jdg 6:25-26; cf Jdg 2:2; 8:27 and 17:5). This may have been due to the similarities between the Canaanites' cultic objects and the Israelites' understanding and depictions of YHWH (see 2.3.1; 2.3.2.1a). However, the author/s of Judges placed the cult objects mentioned in Judges 6:25-26; 8:27; 17:5; 18:30-31) firmly in the context of idolatry. In the worldview of the author/s the tablets of the Ten Commandments rather than possessing any inherent power, as stated before, merely serve as mnemonic devices to remember YHWH's laws (cf Jdg 2:10; cf 2.3.2).

In the ancient Near East, writing the customs of a nation on clay tablets were intended to preserve the traditions and memory of that nation for posterity: The *Mari tablets* (ca 1800 BC-1750 BC) written in Akkadian (see Ochterbeek 1996:214; Feliu 2003:39-41, 63-66; Fleming 2004:48; DeVries 2006:26-30; Gates 2013:62), the *Ebla tablets* (2500 BC-2250 BC) discovered in the palace archives at Ebla in Syria (see Biggs 1980:76-87; Wellisch 1981:488-500; Moorey 1991:150-151; Stanley 2007:141-142), the *cuneiform Ugaritic texts* (see Curtis 1999:6-18; Yon 2006:43-44; Montgomery and Harris 2009:5-11; Huehnergard 2012:3-11) and the *Amarna letters* (14th century BC), a corpus of communication between the rulers of the ancient Near East and Egypt (see Albright 1966:3-8; Mynářová 2014:37-46 also Rainey 1996a:1-7), are famous examples. Frequently, upright stone pillars (*stelae*) and the walls of buildings were engraved with commemorative inscriptions such as the *Code of Hammurabi*, the Babylonian code of law decreed by Hammurabi the sixth king of Babylon and inscribed on stone (ca 1754 BC) (see Driver and Mills [eds] 2007:27-53; Van de Mieroop 2007:99-111; Westbrook 2008:100-103; cf 2.3.1; 2.3.2.1b). The *Deir 'Alla Inscription*, written in plaster (or *Bal'am Son of Be'or Inscription*, ca 880-770 BC, the Balaam son of Beor mentioned in the inscription may be the same Balaam in Numbers 22-24) (Hoftijzer and Van der Kooij [eds] 1976:3-23; Lipinski 1994:103-159; see also McCarter 1980:49-60; Hackett 1984:1-4, 21; Dijkstra 1995:43-64).

Considering the above, inscriptions on clay tablets, stone and walls were the preferred method to archive the social, political and religious traditions and life codes of cities and nations. YHWH used a well-known tradition of the time to engrave His divine laws on tablets of stone (or pillars

of stone [Jos 8:32; see 2.3.1]) that would serve to guide the early Israelites in their lives. Given the context and the similarities mentioned above (see also 2.3.2.1a), the early Israelites would assume the images of the Canaanite gods to be alive (YHWH is the Rock of life) and worship them. The aforesaid is also demonstrated in the event of the Israelites engaging in idolatry with the golden calf and the subsequent destruction of the stone tablets (Ex 28:1-19) that prefigures the recurring idolatry and covenant violations in the Book of Judges (cf Table 2.2).

c. Stone pillars

The early Israelites had a long-held fascination with stones as sacred objects. In Genesis 28:18, the patriarch Jacob erects and anoints a stone pillar (*massebah*) and names the place where it stands the House of God (Bethel; cf Gn 35:7; see 2.3.1; cf 2.3.4.2c; 4.3.1.1a). Bethel is the area where the patriarch Abraham built an altar to YHWH after his construction of a similar altar dedicated to YHWH at Shechem (Gn 12:6-8). As mentioned before (see 2.3.1), Jacob built an altar at Shechem which he called El-Elohe-Israel (Gn 33:20; see 2.3.1 also 2.3.4.2a; 4.3.1.1a). Later, Jacob buried the household gods, stolen by Rachel from her father, Laban, under the oak (Gn 35:4) which is possibly the same tree as the ‘great tree of Moreh at Shechem where Abraham built an altar (Gn 12:6; it is possibly also the same ‘oak’ where Joshua had placed the ‘book’ of the law in Joshua 24:26). This tree is likely the same tree that is referenced in Judges 9:37 which was also near Shechem (cf 4.3.1.2b).⁹¹ The altar at Bethel or Luz in Genesis 35:6 seems to be the same one that Jacob built earlier and which is recorded in Genesis 28:18 (cf 2.3.1; 2.3.4.2c) and possibly where the Israelites assemble in Judges 20.

Joshua had set up a stone (pillar) up under the oak (tree of Moreh at Shechem; Jos 24:26-27) near the altar built by either Abraham (Gn 12:6) or Jacob (Gn 33:20) and that site probably also became a sanctuary or ‘holy place’ of YHWH (see 2.3.1; 2.3.4.2a). The stone, which was most likely engraved with the ‘law,’ was intended to serve as a ‘witness’ against the Israelites’ covenantal disloyalty (Jos 24:27). The words of the ‘law’ that was etched on the stone most likely acted as a constant reminder of the Israelites’ oath of loyalty to their covenant.

According to Zevit (2001:260) the act of Jacob’s anointing the *massebah* (Gn 28:18-19) is an ‘acknowledgement of the manifest power within the stone.’ In the ancient Near Eastern cults the essence or the god itself was present within the stone. For this reason, breaking the stones of Canaanite gods, as the Israelites were instructed to do, was the breaking of ‘the aniconic representation of the deity whose function was to guarantee its presence when addressed (Zevit 2001:261;

⁹¹ Interestingly, they also buried their earrings. In Judges 8:24 the Israelites gave Gideon an earring each to turn into gold for the ephod. The earrings were war booty confiscated from the Ishmaelites and possible symbols representing their god.

see also 3.4.5). Zevit (2001:262) describes the *massebot* from Arad, the Bull Site, various locations at Dan and at Lachish as Yahwistic, ‘aniconic channels for the presence of God.’

The Israelites may have adopted this custom of the Canaanites to worship stone idols which accounts for the idols of Gilgal mentioned in Judges 3:19, 26. Gilgal (see Jdg 2:2) that was originally a Yahwistic site (cf Jos 4:19-24; 5:7-12 before it became a place of idolatry (see also 2.3.4.3a-b). The Israelites might have believed that the stones at Gilgal were imbued with the YHWH’s presence taking on the qualities of YHWH and therefore equal to YHWH and worshipped them as such (Zevit 2001:260-262; cf Hadley 2000:71-72). The author/s of the Book of Judges (2:1-5, 10-18; 6:8-10; 10:11-15, etcetera) would have strongly denounced the above behaviour as idolatrous (cf Jdg 8:27; 17). The aforesaid beliefs and religious behaviour may explain why the early Israelites worshipped stone idols (at Gilgal), which was a definitive step towards venerating the Canaanite gods and their images (cf Jdg 2:11-13; 3:6; 6:25-26; 8:33; 10:6; see also 2.3.5.1-2.3.5.2a-b).

2.3.3 Worldview and lifestyle: mundane and numinous

As already indicated in this chapter, the Sinai Covenant required the early Israelites to follow the divine stipulations and laws (see 2.2.5-2.2.5.5; see also Chapter Three). By these stipulations and laws, the Israelites’ religious and secular lives were determined and regulations for warfare and by which the judicial code was set (see Figure 2.1).

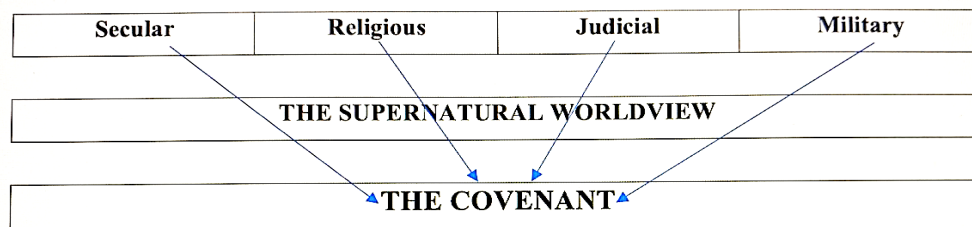


Figure 2.1 Aspects that governed the religious worldview of the early Israelites⁹²

Figure 2.1 shows the aspects of the covenantal stipulations and laws that assisted in fashioning the religious mindset of author/s of the Book of Judges. The author/s of Judges showcase YHWH’s active involvement in the history of the early Israelites prior to settlement in Canaan, as also stated before (cf 2.2.2; 2.2.2.1; 2.2.4-2.2.5; cf Jdg 6:13; 11), and within the land itself (cf Jdg 2:1-5; 4:6-7; 5:4-5, 20; 6:11-34; 7:22; 13:3-19, etcetera).

Thus, the reader of the Book of Judges will discover that in Canaan the everyday lives of certain individuals are permeated with overarching elements of the supernatural (cf Jdg 2:1-4; 3:31; 4:1-24; 5:1-31; 6:11-26, 34, 36-40; 7:2-2 13:1-25; 14:6, 19; 15:14-15; 16:28-30).⁹³ The community

⁹² This figure is compiled from Exodus 20-24.

⁹³ In the ancient Near East, no delineation existed between the secular and the sacred. People’s cultic beliefs were transferred into their everyday lives. Without the religious codes in the Israelite religion there could not be ethical behaviour in the tribes’ lives and without civic morality there could not be proper religious behaviour. This is different

feels YHWH's presence 'enveloped' when they are seeking the LORD's assistance and during times of warfare (cf Jdg 3:9, 15; 6:7-10; 10:10-16; 20:1, 18, 23, 26-28; 21:2-3). A numinous personage, the Angel of YHWH⁹⁴ rebukes the people at Bochim (Jdg 2:1-4; 5:23; 6:11, 14, 36-37; 13:2-20 etcetera; cf Ex 23:20-23; see 2.2.1.1; 2.2.2.1b; 5.3.2.2a, d-e; 6.3.5), Gideon is threshing wheat hidden in a wine press when the Angel of YHWH commissions him to deliver the Israelites from the Midianites (Jdg 6-8; cf 4.3.1.3b; 7.2.3; Footnote 250); the mother of Samson is in a field when the Angel of the Lord announces the birth of her son, Samson (Jdg 13:9-11; cf 3.2.2.1b; 3.4.1.1c; 5.3.2.2e; 8.5.4.1). In addition, various judges are indwelt by the spirit of YHWH (cf 6.3.4). The interaction of the physical environment and the supernatural realm in Judges is symbolic of two disparate worlds: the human realm, that is despairingly frail and fragmented because of the broken covenant and the other heavenly realm that is of transcendent power and focused on restoration of the covenant (see Table 2.2).

Table 2.2: The cyclical breaking of the covenant⁹⁵

The Broken Covenant /Sin	Judgement	Rescue/Rule of Judge
Judges 2.1-4	The Angel of the Lord appears at Bochim - predicts an unhappy future	
Judges 2:10-13, 17-20		Judges appointed with supernatural power to make war and lead the Israelites
Jdg 3:5	Oppression under the king of Aram – 8 years	Jdg 3:9-10 – Othniel
Jdg 3:12	Oppression under Eglon, king of Moab – 18 years	Jdg 3:15 – Ehud
Jdg 3:31	Enmity with Philistines	Jdg 3:31 – Shamgar
Jdg 4:1-3	Canaanite oppression – 20 years	Jdg 4:6-16 – Deborah and Barak
Jdg 6:1-6	Midianite oppression – 7 years	Jdg 6:11 – Gideon
Jdg 10:1, 3-5		Tola, Jair
Jdg 10:6	Oppression under Philistines and Ammonites – 18 years	Jdg 11:1 – Jephthah
Jdg 12:8-13		Ibzan, Elon, Abdon
Jdg 14:16	Philistine oppression – 40 years	Samson – 20 years

The cyclical phases of apostasy and idolatry are always juxtaposed by that author/s of Judges with the perennial faithfulness of YHWH and the divine attempts to preserve His covenant and His people (cf Table 2.2). It is the condition of the covenant relationship that is continuously emphasized and articulated in Judges through the lens of the mindset informing the author/s of Judges (Gerstenberger 1965:38 cf Jdg 2:1-2; 4; 6:11; 10:6:16; 13). Nonetheless, the Israelites consistently showed their inability to respect their covenant and to demonstrate the most ideal form of worship to their Canaanite neighbours.

in the western world where clear distinctions are made between religious laws and civic law. However, in many regions of the world the secular and the sacred domains remain very much intertwined; a fact that is evident in the use of certain language and behaviour. In these parts of the world djinns (spirits) exist alongside people and can affect their everyday lives. The western mind is dominated by its rationalism that focuses on the material and is mostly (in the scientific world) unfamiliar with the (ancient) mind that can incorporate both the spiritual and the physical (cf 1.2).

⁹⁴ I shall use both terms: Angel of YHWH and Angel of the LORD.

⁹⁵ This is my own compilation based on the Book of Judges.

The appointment of judges as leaders, ideally, was not YHWH's plan for His people (Jdg 2:11-19). It was primarily a sign of a covenant in trouble, the fact that the early Israelites did not allow or trust YHWH to be their King and Saviour. The raising of judges was YHWH's attempt to restore the integrity of the covenant and align it with His plan to establish His kingdom in Canaan (cf 2.2.3.1c). YHWH's actions of the raising up of judges were actions of grace to an undeserving people. But, as indicated previously in this chapter (cf 2.2.2.1; 2.2.3.1e) the judges cannot permanently prevent the people from serving the Canaanite gods.

In what follows next, specific sites will be investigated for markers of the religious mindset of the author/s of Judges and their tribesmen and tribeswomen. Yahwistic religious sites mentioned in Judges as Shiloh, Bethel, and Mizpah, will be looked at. The idea that Shechem may have been home to, initially, unadulterated worshippers of YHWH and then idolatrous Israelites will be examined. Gilgal as representing a Yahwistic and later an idolatrous worldview will also be discussed. But first Israelite dwellings and the natural environment will be discussed.

2.3.4 Markers of a religious mindset

2.3.4.1 Dwellings and the natural environment

a. Israelite houses

In the archaeological record, household architecture reveals the Israelites' preference for a particular style of domestic dwelling that fulfilled their religious beliefs, attendant worldview and lifestyle as the reader will find out below. The villagers (Jdg 5:7, 11) and those who cultivated terraced fields (Jdg 5:18) may have lived in a house style known as the four-room house. Houses are also mentioned in Judges 11:31, 34; 19:20-21 which may have been of the same building style.

It is very probable that the design of their houses benefited Israelite women. The floorplan of the four-room house, for instance (see Faust and Bunimovitz 2003:22-31), facilitated a woman's times of ritual purity and piety (Faust and Bunimovitz 2003:411-423). The four-room house was divided into three long rooms by pillars and a broad room at the back (Netzer 1992:193-201). The main room provided access to all the rooms on the ground floor. It has been proposed that the house was designed particularly with back rooms in mind because of the privacy they allowed women who were menstruating and women who were giving birth (Ebeling 2010:70; Willett 2001; Faust and Bunimovitz 2003:22-31; Faust 2013:80; Sha 2018:234; cf 7.2.1).

Faust (2001:129-155) and Faust and Bunimovitz (2003:29; 2014:43-64) describe the cosmological aspects of this type of dwelling. The aforesaid authors maintain that the houses of the early Israelites were not only designed for functionality but also to represent their cosmological worldview. The early Israelites' cosmological worldview which was associated with their covenant ideologies that was, for example, reflected in the eastward orientation of the dwellings (Faust 2001:129-155;

Faust and Bunimovitz 2003:29; 2014:43-64; cf Sha 2018:233; see also 4.5.3 in which the cosmological aspects associated with the direction east is discussed). The Tabernacle was orientated towards the east (Avner 2001:30-41; Rosenberg 2004:4-13; Homan 2007:38-49). As a result, the orientation of the four room houses of the early Israelites paralleled that of the Tabernacle because it was believed that east was the direction favoured by God (Faust 2001:129-155; Faust and Bunimovitz 2003:22-31). Of the Iron Age I houses excavated at Ai, Khirjat Radanna, Tell Masos, Nahal Yatir, 'Izbeth Sartah and Giloh more than fifty percent are oriented towards the east (Faust 2001:134; Sha 2018:266). According to Ryken, Wilhoit and Longman (2010:225) the eastward orientation is prevalent in most of the biblical literature, which affirms that blessing and relief originate in the east (Gn 2:8; Rev 7:2-3). Ryken, Wilhoit and Longman also state that 'the Semitic cultures of the ancient Near East tended literally to orient themselves; that is, to face east.

The eastward orientation of the houses suggests that the inhabitants of the dwellings were immersed in the ideals symbolized by the dwelling, and the Tabernacle, and its sacred values (Faust and Bunimovitz 2003:29; Sha 2018:232-233). As previously indicated, a family's religious values were expressed 'architecturally' in the form of the four-room home (Faust and Bunimovitz 2003:29) since it may be assumed that the basic principles of sacred proportions and orientation by which the Tabernacle were built were also followed by means of a similar household architecture. Consequently, the four-room house constituted a form of 'non-verbal communication' that conveyed to the general community the religious ideals of 'holiness, unity, and order' of its inhabitants and so symbolized the absence of chaos and unholiness in the larger the society (Faust and Bunimovitz 2003:29; cf Sha 2018:233).

The heretical and anti-covenant, cultic corners and cultic objects uncovered in domestic settings are indications of the functioning of either an anti-Yahwist or syncretic worldview operative in the lives of the Israelites (see Herzog 1992:224; Willett 2001; King and Stager 2001:332-339; cf Albertz and Schmitt 2012:80-84; see also 2.2.3.1e). As stated before (see 2.2.3.1e), in the worldview of the author/s of Judges, the idols mentioned in Judges 17 17:1-4 represented a grave covenantal violation on behalf of Micah and his household. The graven image and molten idol were probably used in anti-covenantal rituals and thus condemned by the author/s of Judges. It is possible that these idols were installed in the house shrine of Micah (Jdg 17:5) for divination or possibly as apotropaic devices and were also icons of worship (cf Jdg 8:27; 18:30-31).

b. The environment

Nature, natural objects and the external environment that were accessible to all people may be imbued with the supernatural (cf Jdg 2:1-5; 5:4-5, 21; 6:11-40; 13:1-24). YHWH not only sends the rain that fertilizes the land and yields abundant harvests but in Judges the rain and thunderstorms are utilized to save the Israelites from their enemy (Jdg 5:4-5, 21; cf 6.3.6). In Judges 6:19-20 and 13:19-20 altars are transformed into displays of the miraculous (cf 4.3.1.1b).

The environment may also display an alternative, anti-covenantal, religious worldview. As stated before stone pillars became cultic objects of worship among the unfaithful Israelites in the Book of Judges (Jdg 3:19, 26; see 2.3.2.1; 2.3.4.3). However, before I go into detail about these locations, I would like to show the reader the religious sites of the early Israelites that served as exemplars of the Yahwistic worldview.

2.3.4.2 *Israelite religious sites*

a. Shechem

Many years prior to the Israelites' conquest of Canaan, YHWH had made a covenant with their ancestor Abraham in Shechem (Gn 12:7; cf 2.3.1; 2.3.2.1c). At the great tree of Moreh (or oak of Moreh),⁹⁶ YHWH granted Canaan as a heritage to Abraham and his descendants (Gn 12:6-7). At Shechem, Abraham built an altar to commemorate the event (Gn 12:7). As mentioned before (see also 2.3.1; 2.3.2.1c), it is possible that Joshua reconfirmed the Sinai Covenant and placed the stone, that would be a 'witness' of the Israelites' unfaithfulness, under the same oak of Moreh near the sanctuary of the LORD (Jos 24:26) because of the sites association with the patriarchal traditions (see also below in this section). Toombs (1996:1007) describes Shechem as one of the earliest Israelite places of worship (see Gn 33:18-29 also Campbell and Ross 1963:3-4; Mulder 1999:141). When Jacob arrives in Shechem after his sojourn in Paddan Aram, he bought the land upon which he pitched his tent from 'the sons of Hamor the father of Shechem' for 100 pieces of silver (Gn 33:18-20). Following in the footsteps of his grandfather, Abraham, Jacob subsequently built an altar at Shechem which he dedicated to YHWH and naming it El-Elohe-Israel (El is the God of Israel or mighty is the God of Israel [see also 3.5.2.1]; Gn 33:20; see also 2.3.2.1c).

It is understandable that, given Shechem's earlier history and cultic symbolism (Gn 12:6-7; 33:18-20), the sanctuary of the LORD might be a reference to a religious structure dating back to the time of Abraham's covenant and construction of an altar (Gn 12:6-7) and Jacob building an altar there (Gn 33:18-20; see 2.3.1; 2.3.2.1c).

At Shechem, Dinah, Jacob and Leah's daughter, was raped by the son of Hamor the Hivite, the king of Shechem (Gn 34) who was subsequently killed along with the townsmen by Jacob's sons, Simeon and Levi. Toombs (1996:1007) explains that Hamor means 'ass' in Hebrew. At the east gate of Shechem, the 'decapitated skeleton of a donkey' was discovered with the apparent bones of a sacrificed animal. Toombs (1996:1007) suggests that the ass may have been 'the sacred animal of the city and the names of the father and son may symbolize the city itself.' The Israelites buried the mummified body of Joseph in a tomb near Shechem (Jos 24:32). Also, at Shechem Abimelech

⁹⁶ The *ASV* and the *KJV* translate the great tree of Moreh as the oak of Moreh (Gn 12:6; see also 4.3.1.2b)

declared himself king (Jdg 9:1-6) against covenant traditions that held YHWH to be ‘the only king in Israel’ (Jdg 8:22-23; Toombs 1996:1007-1008).⁹⁷

Considering the association of the sanctuary in Joshua 24:26 with YHWH, God of the covenant, the rituals in the sanctuary were purely according to covenant stipulations and therefore ‘strictly Yahwist’ (Gottwald 1999:563-567). It is believed that this Israelite religious site was situated outside the city of Shechem, and contemporaneous with the temple of Baal-*berith* (Jdg 9:4, 27) located within Shechem. Pottery dated to the Late Bronze and Iron Age was unearthed at Tel er-Ras, on Mount Gerizim near Shechem. Pottery has also been found on the east side of Mount Gerizim dated to the 12th or 13th centuries BC. This indicates Israelite settlement in the region of Shechem and consequently the existence and use of the Israelite sanctuary of the LORD (Campbell 1983:264-267; see also Sha 2018:165).

Gottwald (1999:563-567) describes the sanctuary of the LORD at Shechem ‘as consisting of a tree, a stone and a sacred building.’ This description apparently illustrates a somewhat architecturally simple cult site compared to the more elaborate temple or house attested to in the uncovering of the site (see Figure 2.2) that the Canaanites may have built and that is mentioned in Judges 9:4, 27. Scholars are divided over whether the temple in Judges 9:4, 6 and 27 is the same as the tower of *El-berith* in Judges 9:46-49 or if these structures are two different buildings (see Mulder 1999:142; Gottwald 1999:563-567; Stager 2003:26-35, 66, 68-69; Wood 2003:277). Mazar (1992:167) identifies the *El-berith* tower in Judges 9:46-49 as a *migdal* or tower temple in the monumental architectural style preferred by Canaanites and discovered at various Canaanite sites in Israel. Toombs et al (1961:13) and Campbell and Ross (1963:1-27), however, point out that the identification of *migdal-Shechem* in Judges 9:46-49 is a challenging matter (see Sha 2018:194 also Boling 1969:81-103). Gottwald’s (1999:563-567) description of the sanctuary of YHWH also may fit the anti-covenant installations on the Canaanite *bamot* which were frequented by the Israelites probably because they seemed like familiar (Yahwistic) religious sites (cf Jdg 6:25-31; see Figure 2.3 that show the ruins of a *bamah* uncovered in Shechem).



Figure 2.2 Remains of the Shechem temple (Stager 2003:26-35)

⁹⁷ Campbell and Ross (1963:1-27); Campbell (1983:263-271); Toombs (1996:1007-1008) provide a further discussion on the history of Shechem. Wright (1971:572-603); Mulder (1999:140-143) describe the cultic functions of the city.



Figure 2.3 Remains of a high place at Shechem (Toombs 1996:1007)



Figure 2.4 Khu-Sebek stele (Hansen 2010)

An inscription on the *Khu-Sebek stele* that references Shechem shows the significance of the city as a strategic location in Canaan (Hansen 2010; see Figure 2.4).⁹⁸

At the time of Gideon, Baal-*berith* was the primary god of the city of Shechem whose inhabitants included idolatrous Israelites according to the Book of Judges (cf Jdg 9; see also 2.2.5.8). Baal-*berith* (Baal of the covenant) was either the patron of a political treaty or the guardian of a religious or cultic covenant between Shechemites and other city states or the Israelites who either lived in Shechem or in the surrounding area (Mulder 1999:143; see also Clements 1968:29). Based on the narrative in Judges 9 and considering the Israelite propensity for venerating the Canaanite deities and making treaties with the inhabitants of the land (cf Jdg 2:2; cf 2.2.1.1; 2.2.2.1), it is therefore likely that Baal-*berith* functioned as either the witness or the possible patron in either a cultic treaty or a political treaty between the Shechemites and Israelites (cf Jdg 2:2). Based on the term *berith*, the nature of Baal-*berith* and his functions within a treaty as well as his identification as a local Shechemite god, Mulder (1999:143) argues against the suggestion that the Israelites worshipped

⁹⁸ The *Khu-Sebek Stele* is an extra-biblical mortuary stele that refers to Shechem and dated to the Middle Bronze Period. Khu-Sebek was an Egyptian dignitary during the rule of Sesostris III (1878-1840 BC). According to Shea (1992:39), Sesostris III reigned at the time when Jacob was in Egypt and he assigned troops as protection and some officials to accompany his body to be buried in Canaan (cf Gn 50:1-22). Shea (1992:44) is of the opinion that one of these officials was Khu-Sebek who recorded his experiences of the military campaign of Sesostris III to a land called Shechem as the Egyptian entourage accompanied Jacob's body to Canaan for burial purposes (see Shea 1992:34-44; see also Hansen 2010; see Figure 2.4).

YHWH in Shechem as *Baal-berith* in the Judges narratives as suggested by Kaufmann (1961:138-139). The reasons for Mulder's (1999:143) argument have been outlined previously in this segment (see Gottwald 1999:563-567; Campbell 1983:264-267 also Sha 2018:165).

b. Shiloh

Shiloh was the central location of the unadulterated official Israelite monotheistic religion – ‘the seat of the sanctuary’– and associated rituals rigidly formulated by the covenant (Lapp 1996b:1014).⁹⁹ At Shiloh, the tribal political organization was set up and the tabernacle was instituted (Jos 18:1) in which the Ark of the covenant was installed (Miller and Hays 1986:132-133). Miller and Hays (1986:132) comment that Judges does not indicate Shiloh to be an important political and religious centre in the early history of the Israelites (cf Jdg 19:18; 18:31, see also Chapter Four). Stripling (2016:89, 93) reports on the archaeological evidence such as pottery, cult vessels and ‘pit deposits of bones’ that belong to the Middle Bronze II (ca 1668-1560 BC) and Middle Bronze III (1560-1485BC) period in the Shiloh region that are identified as Amorite (Nm 13:29; Jos 7:7; see also 6.3.2.2a; 7.5.1.1f). These relics indicate Shiloh as a significant cultic centre under Amorite¹⁰⁰ control (Stripling 2016:89; cf Chapter Six). Stripling links the pit deposits of animal bones to the Israelite cleaning of the remains of Amorite sacrifices on the site if the early date for the Conquest of Canaan is accurate. A late date for the Conquest would similarly ascribe an Amorite association to the animal bones (Stripling 2016:89). A horned altar uncovered also demonstrates the ancient sacrificial practices at Shiloh and further identifies it as a cultic site (Stripling 2016:93). A fragment of a broken four-horned altar discovered at Shiloh makes for compelling evidence that the Tabernacle may have once stood in Shiloh (see Flurry 2022).

Shiloh was the location for the apportionment of the tribal land by lot, and where the Levites were allotted their cities (Lapp 1996b:1014). The priesthood was installed at Shiloh and consecrated by YHWH to preside over and control the rituals at the tabernacle altar (Ex 29:44; Nm 18:8). They were also given the responsibility to decide and teach the proper religious rites in accordance with the covenant statutes (Lv 10:10-11; Watts 2016a:1). Watts (2016a:1) remarks that Aaron and his sons as priests were given the ‘monopoly’ over the altar of the sanctuary. The Levites (Jdg 17; 18; 19) were given subordinate roles in the tabernacle in accordance with Numbers 18:21-32.

⁹⁹ I have discussed Shiloh at length in Chapter Four.

¹⁰⁰ The term Amorites (Akkadian: amurru, Sumerian: mar.tu) was frequently used to refer to the different Semitic tribes that lived to the west of Mesopotamia. These people were viewed as barbarians who ‘know not grain, who build no houses and who are given to raiding the towns and villages of Babylon and Sumer’ because of their nomadic or semi-nomadic lifestyle. Following the fall of the Ur III ‘empire’, the Amorites expanded their influence in the countryside and cities, established stable governmental structures, and finally, under the leadership of Hammurabi (ca 1794-1750 BC), the Amorite or First Babylonian Dynasty was established (Leick 2003:168; see also Mendenhall 1992:199-202).

Stripling (2016:89) describes the main purpose of the tabernacle at Shiloh as amphictyonic.¹⁰¹ Excavations at Shiloh have revealed its occupation during the Late Bronze Age and (that of Israelite settlement during) the Iron Ages (Moorey 1991:60; Hess 2007:221; Stripling 2016:89-94).¹⁰² At Shiloh, YHWH revealed his immanent presence by means of the earthly throne carried by the two cherubim. The cherubim covered the Ark of the covenant placed in the Holy of Holies of the tabernacle (Mackenzie 1996:1078).

c. Bethel and Mizpah

In the pre-monarchic period, YHWH was also worshipped at Bethel (Jdg 20:18) and Mizpah (Jdg 20:1) and for those faithful Israelites who lived far from these places, worship probably occurred at home (cf Jdg 6:24; 13:19; 17). Bethel, as a cultic site, dates to Genesis 12:8 where Abraham had built an altar and where he ‘called on the name of the LORD’ (Gn 12:8; see also 2.3.2.1c). Judges 20:27 also reports the Ark of the Covenant as being in Bethel. It is possible that it was brought there from Shiloh for purposes of warfare similar to what happened in the war against the Philistines in 1 Samuel 4 when the Ark of the Covenant was transported from Shiloh to the Israelite camp at Ebenezer.

The patriarch Jacob also constructed an altar at Bethel (Gn 28:18-19; 35:1-7; cf 2.3.1; 2.3.2.1c; 4.3.1.1a). Archaeological excavations reveal that Bethel was a prosperous town in the Middle Bronze Age (2000-1500 BC; see also Chapter Six).¹⁰³ Numerous cult articles and a stone sanctuary were uncovered at Bethel (Drinkard 1996b:116; cf Barstad 1984:51-52). These remains indicate the status of Bethel as an existing and ancient cultic site at the time the Israelites gathered to enquire of YHWH in Judges 20:18, 26 about going to war against their tribesmen, the Benjamites.

In the Old Testament, a site called Mizpah dates to the time of Genesis 31:44-54 where Laban and Jacob made a peace treaty, setting up stone pillars, with God as their witness (cf 4.3.1.1a). Jephthah had the elders of Gilead sworn an oath at Mizpah of Gilead (which may be the same place as Mizpah of Gilead in Genesis 31:44-54; Arnold 1992:879-881), promising to give him leadership over them should he defeat the Ammonites who were waging war against the Israelites (Jdg 11:4,

¹⁰¹ As mentioned before, it lies outside the framework of this study to discuss the different possible models for the social organisation of the Israelite tribes. However, as an amphictyonic sanctuary the tabernacle would have served to unite the tribes (Cundall 1965:4-27).

¹⁰² Collared rim store jars are seen as markers of Israelite identity and settlement in the highlands by some scholars (see London 1989:43 see also 4.2.1.1). However, London (1989:44, 51-52) argues that the location of collar rim jars in the archaeological record of Israel does not indicate Israelite ethnicity or settlement. In my opinion, the intermingling of the Israelites with the Canaanite populations as recorded in the Book of Judges may have led to the sharing of all types of pottery types among the various population groups. Excavations at Shiloh have uncovered six collared rim jars in a layer of ash. This destruction is ascribed to the presumed Philistine destruction of Shiloh in Samuel 4 (see Finkelstein et al 1985:126; see 4.2.1.1).

¹⁰³ Meyers (1996a:1107) comments that the ‘House of El’ of the patriarchal narratives cannot be connected to the remains uncovered at Bethel. Kloppenborg (1996:554) believes Micah’s shrine (Jdg 17) to have been located in Bethel.

9-10, 29). It is possible that the site of the religious (and military) assembly at Mizpah in Judges 10:17 and 11:11 is the same Mizpah of Benjamin in Judges 20 and 1 Samuel 7.

Tell en-Nashbeh and Nebi Samwil are two sites that could possibly be the Mizpah of Benjamin in Judges 20:1 (Drinkard 1996a:691). The leaders of the tribes convene an assembly at Mizpah where the Levite describes the suffering and eventual death of his concubine caused by the Benjamites in Judges 19 (Jdg 20:1). The tribes make war on the Benjamites after they refuse to hand over the men in their tribe responsible for the crime against the concubine of the Levites for punishment. At both Mizpah and Bethel the Israelites participated in religious acts of oath making, fasting and sacrifices and offerings as they seek YHWH's council during the war effort against the Benjamites. During the war the Israelites' are upholding certain covenant stipulations: the offer of a peaceful resolution to the Benjamites (Jdg 20:13) and the presence of a priest (Jdg 20:28). Mizpah was also used as a homebase by the prophet Samuel (1Sm 7:5-6).

d. Gilgal

Gilgal ('circle of stones') was initially a Yahwistic cultural and religious site. In Joshua 4:1-24, YHWH gave the Israelites the order to erect a monument of stones after they had miraculously crossed the Jordan River to enter into the land of Canaan. The monument consisted of twelve stones (representing the twelve tribes) and was erected at Gilgal, the first Israelite encampment in Canaan, east of Jericho (Jos 4:19).¹⁰⁴ The purpose of the stone edifice was to commemorate the miraculous stopping of the flow of the river Jordan for the Israelites to enter Canaan (Hubbard 2009:162-163).

The stones at Gilgal also served as a message to the other nations (during Joshua's time), that YHWH is on the threshold of establishing His kingdom in Canaan (Gentry and Norman 2015:964-966). Thus, the erection of stones by the Israelites at Gilgal represented the dominion of YHWH over the land where it was built. This was similar to the representative image of a deity, which symbolized the god's rule over the land where it stood (Gentry and Norman 2015:965).

2.3.4.3 *Idolatrous sites*

a. Gilgal place of idols

The Book of Judges indicates that the twelve stones at Gilgal set up in Joshua 4 later possibly become a site of idolatrous worship (Jdg 3:19, 26). In the archaeological record the twelve stones at Gezer (dated to 1500 BC; see Figure 2.5; see Myers 2010:79; Shanks 2010:104; Arnold

¹⁰⁴ The precise location of the biblical Gilgal remains undetermined. Two sites have been proposed: Khirbet en-Nitleh about three miles southeast of Jericho and Khirbet Mefjer, more than a mile north of Jericho, of which only the latter has revealed evidence of Iron Age occupation (Bennett 1972:111-122; Frick 1996:379; Miller 1997:332; cf Mauchline 1956:19-33).

2014:95) and circular arrangements of stones at Galgal Refa'im (circle of giants/wheel of ghosts) located in the Golan Heights of Israel (Figure 2.6) might be reminiscent of the stones in the monument at Gilgal (cf Jos 24:26).¹⁰⁵ The circular arrangement of the stones at the aforementioned sites may suggest a possible circular arrangements of the stones at Gilgal (cf Jdg 3:19, 26). The Yahwistic site at Gilgal (Jos 4:20-24) would become a centre of religious syncretism and idolatry in later epochs of Israelite history (cf Jdg 3:19, 26; see also 2.3.2.1c).



Figure 2.5 Standing stones at Gezer (Tveberg 2015). These standing stones may resemble the ones at Gilgal



Figure 2.6 Galgal Refa'im. This stone structure is in the Golan Heights of Israel – a possible antecedent of the stones at Gilgal (Chamish 1997)

Miller (1997:332) comments that Gilgal was a major cultic centre (of the early Israelites) at the time of the Angel of the LORD's judgment of the Israelites (Jdg 2:3; cf Dt 29:22-27; cf Frick 1996:379). During the 8th century BC Gilgal became the location of a 'corrupt sacrificial cult' (Frick 1996:379; cf Am 4:4; Mi 6:5).

¹⁰⁵ The massive stone circles are known as Galgal Refa'im (wheel of ghosts) or Galgal Refa'im (wheel/circle of giants), and in Arabic Rujm el-Hiri in Arabic (stone heap of the wild cats). Although the stone circles are dated to 3600 BC they may allude to the biblical giants (cf Gn 14:5; Nm 13:28; Jos 15:13; Jos 14:15; 1 Sm 17:4; see Zohar 1989:18-31; Mizrachi et al 1996:167-195; Aveni and Mizrachi 1998:475-496; Akkerman 2016:46) perhaps even Og of Bashan who in Deuteronomy 3:11 is described as the last of the Repha'im (see Figure 2.6; see Unger 2006).



Figure 2.7 Massebot. A Massebot circle located in the Uvda Valley after its reconstruction (Avner 1984:115-131)¹⁰⁶

It is possible that this cult arose from the idols worshipped at Gilgal; the cultic site mentioned in Judges 3:19, 26 (of the Moabites?) and Amos 4:4; 5:5 might be the stone memorial that became a site for the practice of idolatry. Upon his return from delivering the tribute of the Israelites to their oppressor, Eglon, a Moabite king, Ehud encounters the stone statues situated at Gilgal. At Gilgal, Ehud retraces his steps to Eglon with the intention of assassinating the king and liberating the Israelites from their state of subjugation. It is possible that the narrator/s of Judges mention Gilgal specifically. It is likely that Ehud engaged in Yahwistic divination practices at Gilgal (see 5.3) in order to seek divine guidance, hence this raises questions over his choice to do so at a site associated with idolatry. Is it possible that an unadulterated Yahwistic shrine exists at Gilgal (see below; cf Jdg 17:5; 18:30) and Ehud is provided with divine guidance from the LORD.

The particular arrangement of the twelve stones in the monument in Joshua 4:8, 20 is not clear. The style of a second edifice of twelve stones placed in the middle of the Jordan (Jos 4:9) is also not stated. It is possible that the Israelites piled them up in a mound (see LaRocca-Pitts 2001:54-55). Since the word Gilgal means ‘circle of stones’ (see Kotter 1992:1022-1024) it is probable that the twelve stones were placed vertically and probably arranged in a circle which was the tradition in the ancient Near East (see Figures 2.5-2.7). As mentioned before, the site may have been transformed into a site of idolatry (cf Jdg 3:19, 26) and the acquisition of an altar could have transformed it into the sacrilegious sacrificial place described by Frick (1996:379).

In the cultic tradition of the Canaanites, Gilgal probably became a numinous place of magic rites (see above) and was thought to be a place assembly of the gods and a meeting place for gods and men. The gods were believed to visit the earth at certain places (cf Jdg 2:1-3; Gn 28:16-17; Cooley 2011:282). It is possible that the stone monument at Gilgal was transformed into a place of astral worship where the celestial bodies/gods were worshipped (Cooley 2011:281-288). Cooley (2011:282) refers to Ugaritic cultic texts that mention ‘astral deities.’

The *KTU* 1.43 text depicts a group of gods visiting the ‘temple of the star gods’ where they made sacrifices and offerings to celestial bodies (Cooley 2011:282). The text found in the library of the

¹⁰⁶ Avner (1984:115-131) describes the *massebot*, open air sanctuaries and cairn lines in the deserts of the Negev and Sinai.

high priest ‘describes an official sacrificial ritual in which the cultic images of a group of gods [‘*Attartu*, *Ḫurri*, and the *Gaṭarūma*] travel to the ‘temple of the star gods’ [*bt ilm kbkbm*]’ which was apparently a temple in the royal palace. The star gods to whom sacrifices were made are the ‘*Šapšu*, *Yariḫu*, *Gaṭaru* and ‘*Anatu*. *Šapšu* and *Yariḫu* that are obviously the sun and moon.’ *Gaṭaru* and ‘*Anatu* are identified as either planets, stars or star constellations (Cooley 2011:282-283). The behaviour of these gods may be evocative of a similar ritual lifestyle practised by their human followers (cf 4.5.2-4.5.3.6).

Cooley (2011:283) further states that these cultic texts rather than illustrating an astral religion in the ‘Syro-Canaanite religion of Ugarit’ show astral features in the Ugaritic religion. Cooley adds that it is believed that the astral religion of the Israelites was related to celestial divination analogous to and based on the astral cults and related celestial divination in the ancient Near East (see also Chapter Five in which the topic of astral divination is discussed).

It is possible that the stones might have been inscribed with magic incantations (cf 2.3.2.1a-c). An analogue may be found in the Ugarit stele with astral symbols from the Late Bronze Age that was probably used for divination purposes (see Figure 2.8; Doak 2015:80).

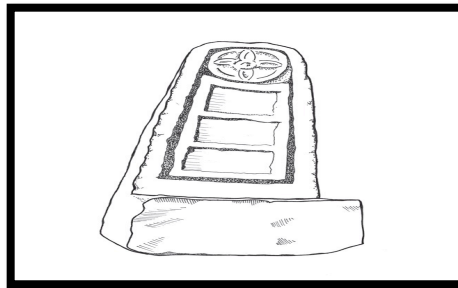


Figure 2.8 Stele at Ugarit with astral symbols (Doak 2015:80)

The Angel departing from Gilgal might symbolize YHWH’s presence leaving a corrupted place of worship or that the Ark of the Covenant if it was located at Gilgal, was moved from there. The twelve stones at Gilgal apparently became a corrupted cultic site from which YHWH’s holy presence had to depart (see below; see Zevit 2001:261). If the stones at Gilgal, however, were an original Canaanite cult site, the Israelites would still be in breach of the covenant according to which they had to demolish the Canaanite cultic installations including any stone pillars and cult images (Ex 23:24; cf Jdg 6:25-26).

Deuteronomy 4:28 illustrates the assessment of the stone idols as inanimate and powerless to affect the lives of people (cf Is 37:19). However, the Yahwistic worldview was quite rapidly abandoned upon arrival in Canaan (cf Jdg 2:10-18). Although Gideon’s destruction of his father’s high place, (the altar of Baal and Asherah pole in Oprah [Jdg 6:25-26] which presumably was erected on either a *bamah* or an elevated platform [see below 2.3.4.3b]), demonstrates a Yahwistic worldview that

set itself in opposition to the Canaanite cultic traditions, the people forgot YHWH after a while and entered into another cycle of idolatry after the death of Gideon (Jdg 8; see Table 2.2).

b. High places/*bamot*

The narrative in Judges 6:25-30 (cf also Jdg 2:10-18; 3:6; 6:8-10; 8:33; 10:6-10) presents a model for the syncretic religious worldview and the nature of Israelite worship that occurred on the popular cultic Canaanite high places (*bamot*).

‘Archaeologically, a “high place” was often simply an elevated stone platform on which the altar was located’ (Van Vuuren 2023:206). In the religious mindset of the ancient Near Easterners and the early Israelites these elevated places symbolized the dwelling place of the God or the gods in the same way that mountains and hilltops represented divine abodes (see Van Vuuren 2023:206; cf 4.3.1.2a).¹⁰⁷

The *bamot* were the cult sites associated with the worship of the foreign gods (Ryken, Wilhoit and Longman [eds] 2010:337; Carpenter and Comfort 2000:86). Idolatrous cultic activity outside Israelite households would have been taken place at the *bamot* or high places – elevated open-air cult sites.¹⁰⁸ The *bamot* which appear in the Old Testament as emblematic of Israelite idolatry (cf Jdg 2:3) were not restricted to rural areas but were also found in city centres (Barrick 1992:196-200). Although there is no conclusive verification for it, archaeological discoveries of platform structures in the Levant might be interpreted as *bamot* and perhaps typical of the high places on which the idolatrous practices of the Israelites occurred (Barrick 1992:196-200).¹⁰⁹ Judges 1:27 states that the tribe of Manasseh did not expel the people of inter alia Megiddo where the ruins of a *bamah* was found. Haran (1985:21-22), however, questions the high place at Megiddo as an authentic *bamah* since the architecture of a high place remains unknown. According to Haran (1985:23) high places are associated with altars but not temples.

The high places mentioned by the Angel of YHWH are frequently referenced in the Old Testament as popular places for religious assembly by the idolatrous Israelites. Two *bamot* near the Shechem hills, Mount Ebal and the Bull Site, have been identified as Israelite (McNutt 1999:69; Killebrew

¹⁰⁷ Van Vuuren remarks that local shrines in early Israel typified high places (cf 2 Ki 17:9). ‘Zion as the site of the temple is described in the Hebrew Bible as a ‘mountain’ (Ps 3:5; 48:2; 99:9), because that is the kind of place where a deity such as Yahweh should dwell, even though the physical geography of Jerusalem cannot actually be described as more than a hill (Van Vuuren 2023:206).

¹⁰⁸ Golden (2004:187) mentions that the *bamot* are referenced over a hundred times in the Old Testament. Scholars debate about ‘what the *bamot* actually were and how they were used.’ They were elevated cult sites that geographically mimicked the sacred mountain/environment where the gods resided and where these gods were worshipped.

¹⁰⁹ Barrick mentions that identified cultic sites in Syria-Palestine do not reveal a stringent difference between *bamot* in rural areas ‘and more architecturally sophisticated urban centers’ but that this archaeological evidence has not diminished the contrary view that there is a clear distinction between urban and rural *bamot* (Barrick 1992:196-200).

2005:159; cf Volkmar 1995:70; cf 2.3.1).¹¹⁰ The Bull Site is the oldest known cultic site that is thought to be Israelite and demonstrates to a certain degree a continuance with former Canaanite ritualistic customs (see Bloch-Smith and Nakhai 1999:76-77; King and Stager 2001:322; Zevit 2001:177-179; Miller 2000:64; Golden 2004:188; cf Dömeris 2018:127-128). According to the Book of Judges this continuity was the result of the Israelite appropriation of intact *bamot* (or partially intact *bamot* as in the case of the Bull site) (cf Jdg 6:25-26). The Bull Site according to Dömeris (2018:128) appears to be a place where possibly YHWH or Baal was worshipped along with Asherah.

The Bull Site (located at Dhahrat et-Tawileh, in the West Bank) is named after a bronze figurine of a young bull that was discovered and that looks to be connected to an open-air ritual site that is described as an elliptical area overlaid with flat stones and comprising a huge standing stone, possibly a *masseba*, along with pieces of an incense burner and animal bones (King and Stager 2001:322; cf Mazar 1982:27-42). The bull was a symbol of the Canaanite god El and the bull calf represented the Canaanite god Baal, according to King and Stager (cf 2.3.2.1b). Later, Jeroboam I (1 Ki 12:18-33) introduced at Bethel and Dan syncretic form of YHWH worship that included images of bulls (cf King and Stager 2001:323; cf 2.3.2.1b).

Presumably on these high places the forbidden Canaanite rituals were performed such as those the prophet Jeremiah (Jr 7:9, 18; cf Jr 7:30-31) would come to accuse the Israelites of (see Dömeris 2018:123-139). It can be imagined that the very same allegations lay behind the messages in Judges 2; 6 and 10 – the incense burning to the gods (Baal; cf Jr 7:9) and the offerings of food and drink (cf Jdg 6:19; Jr 7:18). If the Bull Site was indeed a syncretic Israelite cult site, the archaeological evidence of cultic activities may represent the cultic performances at the communal *bamah* dedicated to Baal at Ophrah (Jdg 6:25). These rituals may have comprised divination (see Holland 2009:267; Harrisson 2015:89-90; cf DeJong Ellis 1989:135) and Pongratz-Leisten 2013:44).

As indicated before, it is possible that the early Israelites practised an astral cult on the Canaanite high places (cf 5.4.5). The aforesaid is possible since in Canaan, Baal was not only a fertility deity but also associated with the sun and worshipped together with the other celestial bodies (Mulder 1999:141-144). The *Enūma Eliš* shows the gods' close association with star constellations. The 'astral cult of Baal,'¹¹¹ which involved astral divination and rituals, in all probability was practised on the Canaanite high places (cf 2 Ki 23:4; cf Jdg 6:25-26). Mulder (1999:141-144) concurs that the worship of Baal was connected with solar cults. The Sumerian god Nergal and his Ugaritic equivalent Rešep were associated with the planet Mars (Cochrane 2017:82; cf Jastrow 1919:64-83).

¹¹⁰ However, Volkmar (1995:70) has declared the reconstruction of the altar on Mount Ebal as an altar built by Joshua as 'pure fantasy.'

¹¹¹ My term.

The *bamot* and its installations and the Canaanite cult practiced there were anti-covenantal and destined for destruction (De Vaux 1997:336; Smith 2002:160; Cresson 2015:554). The Israelites had been instructed by YHWH to destroy the ‘sacred stones’ of the Canaanites (Ex 23:24, 33; Nm 33:52; cf 2.3.2.1c). Exodus 34 explicitly states ‘you must tear down their altars, smash their sacred stones, and chop down their Asherah poles’ (Ex 34:13). However, the Israelites in violation of their covenant, appropriated the Canaanite high places intact (cf Jdg 2:2; 6:25-26; Ex 23:24; see DeVries 1997b:380). The *bamah* in Judges 6 (Jdg 6:25-26) is an example of the violation of the divine instruction to destroy the Canaanite *bamot*.

The *bamot* at Ophrah was an idolatrous Israelite site where the people at Ophrah worshipped the observable appearance of Asherah in the form of a tree or a pole (cf Jdg 6:25-26, 28, 30; see also 3.6.1.1e). In Judges 6:25-26 the Angel of the LORD instructs Gideon to demolish the altar of Baal and cut down and burn the Asherah pole and to build a proper altar to YHWH on that same site (Jdg 6:25-26). This altar to YHWH remained but it is possible that the site once again became a place of idolatrous worship when Gideon installed the golden ephod, made from the war booty claimed from the Midianites, at Ophrah (Jdg 8:27). The *bamah* at Ophrah was characterized by the connection between the divine (the Asherah pole) and fertility that the early Israelites found to be extremely irresistible (cf Chapter Six).¹¹² White (2019b) remarks that it was one of the ambitions of the covenant to install the religion of mono-YHWH on the destroyed Canaanite high places. However, as Judges shows (Jdg 2:1-3), it was among others the failure of the Israelites to fulfill the aforesaid instruction that led to their cyclical idolatry a pattern that not even the dire prediction of the Angel of YHWH could break.

A *bamah* was uncovered in Megiddo and at other sites that date back to the Bronze Age indicating their ancient use at the time of the Israelite invasion and appropriation of the Canaanite cult sites (Kempinsky1992:56). Reich (1992:16) reports on the steps that ascend to a *bamah* in temples found at Lachish and Bet Shean. According to the covenant regulations no steps were to be built leading up to the altar in order to prevent the priest from exposing his nakedness on them (cf Ex 20:26). This stipulation was set in place to prevent the carnal activities that occurred at the temples of the foreign gods and on the Canaanite high places (Yee 1998:209; Day 2010:215; McQuilkin and Copan 2014:190).

It can be imagined that the venerated Baal and Asherah might serve as divine witnesses or as the patron deities of any potential treaties made by Gideon’s family and the people in the city of

¹¹² It has been proposed that the *Sit-shamsi* (sunrise) dated to the 12th century and discovered in Susa (Iran) may represent an Iron Age *bamah* (Fletcher 2015b). The small model shows two naked figures; perhaps a priest, holding a vessel (perhaps it is filled with a cleansing agent – water) and a devotee with outstretched hands participating in a purification rite. Three trees (*asherahs* or perhaps even Asherah poles)¹¹² as well as several cultic objects, basins, and a big *pithos* (storage jar) for drink and grain offerings and two stelae are visible in the model (Potts 1999:239; Fletcher 2015b).

Ophrah. Mazar (1992:170) remarks that the *bamah* in Stratum XII at 10th century BC Arad, an open cultic place and identified as Israelite, may resemble the high places in Judges: the cult sites at Shechem, Bethel and Beersheba (Stern 1999:246; Aharoni 1963:233-249; 1968:1-32; Aharoni and Amiran 1964:43-53; Herzog et al 1984:1-34). These open cult sites were built by the patriarchs: Shechem by Abraham (Gn 12:6-7), Beersheba by Isaac (Gn 26:23-33 and Bethel by Jacob (Gn 35:6). Following in the tradition of the ancestors it can be imagined that the rocks used as altars by Gideon (Jdg 6:24) and Manoah (Jdg 13:19) would turn into religious sites for the family and subsequent generations.

2.4 CONCLUSION

The mindset informing the author/s of Judges is fundamentally rooted in the concept of covenant. The worldview of the author/s, therefore, is influenced by obedience and loyalty to the Sinaitic Covenant and the associated lifestyle. It is a mindset that is expressed predominantly in a domain filled with idolatry, apostasy and lawlessness. The aforesaid worldview, its religious ideology and aspects are embedded narratives throughout the Book of Judges. Consequently, the primary significance of the worldview held by the author/s of Judges lies in its persistent advocacy for the exclusive worship of YHWH and covenant keeping within a community that is susceptible to idolatry and general mayhem.

The mindset of the author/s of Judges is derived from the Abrahamic and Sinaitic Covenants which may have their origins in the genesis of humanity in the Garden of Eden. The Book of Genesis provides evidence that YHWH had a predetermined intention to confer blessings upon humans from the very inception of creation. The initiation of this relationship can be traced back to individuals' loyal adherence to the divine directives outlined in Genesis 2:15-17, coupled with YHWH's corresponding commitment and devotion. Some scholars argue that this association had characteristics akin to a covenant (see Block 2021; cf Brandon 1963:120-121; Clifford 1994:4). According to Block (2021) the covenant-making seeds planted in Eden were expanded into a covenant of cosmic redemption following the Edenic rebellion (cf Horton 2002:233; Dumbrell 2009:101-102; Parker and Lucas 2022). The Old Testament chronicles this process of redemption from Eden after the 'fall' to the Abrahamic and Sinaitic Covenants which entails the restoration of all individuals through a specific group of people residing in a specific geographical region.

Both the Abrahamic and Sinaitic Covenants serve as evidence for the divine efforts to pursue a relationship with (the early Israelites and ultimately) all humanity (Mills 1998:72; see 2.2.2.1). The Abrahamic Covenant emphasizes the importance of complete dedication, unwavering obedience and absolute loyalty to YHWH as the sole focus of the early Israelites' devotion (Enns 1991:16; Block 2021; cf Morales 2020:8). The Sinai Covenant promises blessings to the Israelites in accordance with the original promise made to Abraham (Gn 12:2-3), incorporates additional laws, stipulations and rituals pertaining to worship as well as everyday living. The Israelites were

chosen by YHWH with a special purpose namely to fulfill the divine promise made to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3 and, in the broader sense to facilitate the reconciliation of all humanity with YHWH.

Considering the aforesaid, the author/s of Judges' preoccupation with the preservation of the covenant becomes clear. Latvus (1998:54) observes that the early Israelites were left limited opportunity for individual beliefs or compromises: 'the law of God had to be obeyed in the form expressed and interpreted by the leaders.' Hence, it can be argued that each individual belonging to the Israelite community was bound by the terms of the covenant to construct their religious and secular existence based on the explicit monotheistic principles outlined within the covenant. This commitment to monotheism was clearly manifested in the various customs and regulations associated with the covenant (Ex 6:7; 20; Jos 24:16-18; 21-24).

Nevertheless, once establishing themselves in Canaan, the early Israelites exhibit a notable inclination towards engaging in idolatrous practises. One possible explanation for this phenomenon may be attributed to the conflation of the Canaanite deities' cultic images with the ancient Israelites' concepts of YHWH, some of which bore striking resemblances to the beliefs held by neighbouring ancient Near Eastern societies (cf 2.3.2.1a-c). Considering the foregoing, the religious sites of the early Israelites can be seen as manifestations of two distinct worldviews and corresponding ways of life prevalent during the period of the Judges. One worldview is characterised by the exclusive worship of YHWH, as evidenced by the religious practises observed at Bethel, Mizpah, and Shiloh (cf Jdg 19:18; 18:31). The other worldview embraces polytheism and involves the worship of Canaanite idols, as seen in the religious activities at Shechem and possibly Gilgal.

CHAPTER THREE

MONOTHEISM: MONO-YHWH WORSHIP

3.1 INTRODUCTION

According to the covenant between YHWH and ‘His people’ (see 2.2.5-2.2.5.5), the early Israelites were commanded to worship YHWH above all other gods (Ex 20:3-4); to love and serve their God wholeheartedly (Dt 6:4-19). Hill and Walton (2010:201) contend that it was impossible for them not to worship this God who revealed His majesty to His chosen people. YHWH had, after all, planned their escape from Egypt by way of the plagues, separated the sea before them, given them ‘his law at Sinai, sustained them in the wilderness, and brought them into the land of Canaan and settled them there’ (Hill and Walton 2010:201; cf Jdg 6:13). However, once in Canaan, the Israelites persistently engaged in the worship of the Canaanite deities. The accounts in the Book of Judges consistently demonstrate the strong support of the author/s for the rigorous adherence to the religious beliefs that formed the foundation of their worldview. Paradoxically, the focus of the author/s on religious fidelity is frequently highlighted by the presence of idolatrous practices among the Israelites (see also Chapter Two).

This chapter aims to investigate the revolutionary nature of the worldview presented by the author/s of the Book of Judges. It will explore the various features associated with this particular aspect of the worldview held by the author/s. Several themes and questions arise from the given information: Which definitions offer a deeper understanding of the worldview held by the author/s of the book of Judges? To what extent did this particular mindset exert a radical influence on and shape the early Israelites’ sense of identity? What are the distinguishing factors that separate the religion of the author/s of Judges from the Canaanite cults? Throughout this chapter it will become clear why the author/s of the Book of Judges believed that their worldview was the only one that was acceptable.

This study supports the concept of progressive revelation regarding the nature of God, as evidenced by the Israelites’ realization during the period of the judges that YHWH may not always intervene in the manner or timing they desire (cf Jdg 6:8-10; 10:6-16). This present study subtly illustrates the idea of progressive revelation through the various covenants made by YHWH, showcasing the evolving perception of YHWH’s character by the Israelites (see Chapter Two). Moreover, the Israelites gain experiential knowledge of YHWH through encounters with His justice and judgment in Canaan for the first time (see Chapter Two, Four, Five, and Six). Additionally, this Chapter highlights how God discloses Himself to the Israelites through discussions on His attributes and names in Chapter Three (see 3.3-3.3.6.3). In terms of the progressive development of the Israelite religion, it is important to note that it does not necessarily follow a trajectory from primitive to more complex organizational systems. Contrary to this assumption, the biblical worldview suggests that the early Israelites already possessed a fully developed religion, which was rooted in the

principles outlined in Deuteronomy. Therefore, the concept of progressive revelation played a significant role in the Israelites' continuous growth and deepening understanding of their laws, their relationship with YHWH, and their own identity in relation to YHWH.

YHWH.3.2 YHWH ALONE IS GOD

3.2.1 Background

3.2.1.1 *A monotheistic message*

The covenant made at Mount Sinai presented the early Israelites with an entirely new concept: the exclusive worship of one Deity' (under a covenant relationship) (Hill and Walton 2010:201; see 2.2.5). Within the framework of ancient Near Eastern polytheistic religions, this concept was revolutionary enough to significantly alter Canaan's religious landscape in a way that lasted into modern times. As the reader will discover in this chapter monotheism was not only the primary requirement and stipulation of the Sinaitic Covenant but it also established a fundamental basis for the Israelites' worship and everyday lives.

Monotheism redefined the identity, nature, and the self-revelation of Deity to humanity (see Walton 1990:237; Walton and Hill 2010:33) YHWH as sovereign creator and King of the early Israelites would redefine the identity of His followers and their experience of the divine. Mono-YHWH worship was the sole worldview held by the author/s of Judges. The most essential message expressed by the narrator/s of Judges was the concept that the lives of the Israelites, first and foremost, had to rest upon a mono-YHWH (YHWH alone) foundation as stipulated in the Sinaitic Covenant for anything other was adjudicated to be profoundly pernicious (cf Jdg 2:1-3; 3:12; 4:1; 6:1; 8-10; 10:6-15; 13:1).

The reader of the Book of Judges, therefore, will find that the author/s in the formulation of the book's layout [the double prologue (Jdg 1:1-3:6), the primary body (Jdg 3:7-16:31), and the binary epilogue (Jdg 17-21; Guest 2003:190; Coogan et al [eds] 2007:393)] converse powerfully with the theme of monotheism, a sacred legacy of Deuteronomy (see 1.1). Block (2011:96) asserts that Deuteronomy 6:4-5 itself calls for the Israelites to be united in a covenantal allegiance to one God (see 2.2.4; 2.3.1). Anderson (2015:7) observes that the Book of Judges is based on the notion of a pure version of monotheism¹¹³ which began with Moses but was despoiled by contact with the Canaanites after the Israelites entered Canaan (cf Hill and Walton 2010:201).

¹¹³ I will in addition to the term monotheism, a modern construct, also use the appellation mono-YHWH worship or mono-Yahwism to refer to the unadulterated worship of YHWH. Gottwald (1999:491) uses the term 'Yahwistic' as a unifying factor that brought about 'Israel's ... identity as one people under one God...' Accordingly, the mono-YHWH religion unified the mixed variety of people who came together (according to the archaeological evidence) on the highlands during the 13th-12th centuries under the banner of a mutual so-called proto-Israelite community and a common cult (cf Taylor 2013:112). Gottwald (1999:618-619) moreover describes mono-Yahwism as a 'strengthening'

As already indicated (see Chapter Two), the Israelites abandoned YHWH as soon as the generation who lived in the time of Joshua passed away, only to turn back momentarily to YHWH after being oppressed by an adversary as a divine judgement against their covenantal infidelity ((Jdg 2:1-5; 2:10-19; Anderson 2015:7; cf Jantzen 2008:100; McCann 2011:25; cf 2.3.3; cf Table 2.2). Nonetheless, Israelite devotion and loyalty to YHWH alone, ideally, marked a sharp distinction between the religion of the early Israelites and the (polytheistic) cultic beliefs of the ancient Near Eastern nations (MacDonald 2012:46). The strong criticisms of Israelite idolatry by Judges' author/s (Jdg 2:1-3; 6:8-10; 10:6-14) serve to emphasize the preceding idea.

3.2.2 Definition

Monotheism as it pertains to the early Israelite religious creed refers to their devotion and loyalty to mono-YHWH; that is the worship of YHWH exclusively (Hill and Walton 2010:201). Monotheism is the foundation of the Abrahamic and Sinaitic Covenants. Based on the expression יהוה אחד –YHWH [is] one – monotheism may be defined as ‘the view that there is only one God’ (cf 3.4) who alone possesses ‘an omnipotent and omniscient goodness’ (cf 3.3) and who (alone) is the ‘creative ground of everything other than itself’ (Wainwright 2021:1; cf Sommer 2021:241). Judges, similar to Deuteronomy, however, does not deny the existence of other gods (Jdg 2:17, 19; 3:6-7; 6:10; 8:33; 9:27; 10:6, 13-14; 11:24; 16:23-24; cf 2.2.5.8). Judges, however, adamantly ascribes sovereignty to only one such Deity, the Covenant God of the Israelites (who alone is the one true God) (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:177). Exodus 15:11 reads: ‘Who among the gods is like You O LORD? Who is like You – majestic in holiness, revered in praises, performing wonders?’ The God of the Old Testament is therefore a unique Deity who has no equivalent.

element that served to create and unite the Israelites internally under an egalitarian socio-political system and at the same time acted as an ‘effective united front’ against external enemies. Similarly, Boer (2002:144) arguing from a Marxist viewpoint, asserts that mono-Yahwism was an ideological function generated by the Israelite social system that maintained the coalescence of the Israelite society. Attributing mono-Yahwism and the Israelite political and socio-economic system to Marxist processes, is the result of the rationalistic worldview of modern scholarship that cannot accept the biblical supernatural worldview for the creation of Israelite religion and socio-economic systems (Brueggemann [1997:50-54] provides a description of the ideas of Gottwald). The theology of the Old Testament is entirely generated by economics and the everyday needs of the Israelites. This perspective sees Israelite history as a product of societal and economic needs. In the Old Testament, YHWH creates and controls history often times in a numinous manner. The reverse: that history or the economic needs of the Israelite society controls YHWH or created the Israelite God is the view of evolutionary rationalism that underlines Marxism. Modern secular worldviews applied to the Bible have fragmented the theology of the Bible, separated it from the New Testament and by destroying this unity, it cannot see the integral completeness of the entire Bible and its message. The Old Testament is a book of the revelation of the supernatural and its theology continues in the New Testament. The fact that this makes the Bible an integrated unit – an integrated message system – that never once deviates from its divine message (that a loving God offers humanity His redemption) should, instead of instant dismissal, at least lead to a curiosity into the supernatural worldview it proclaims. According to the Old Testament, in the Book of Judges for example, YHWH plans and directs history and knows its outcome (cf Is 46:9-10). According to Gottwald (1999:491, 618-619) this unity is entirely socially and economically driven and excludes the supernatural as a causative agent. The Book of Judges shows differently as demonstrated also throughout this study.

According to Sommer (2021:241), the primary essence of monotheism is ‘God’s uniqueness rather than God’s oneness’ (see above [Ex 15:11]). Sommer provides the following explanation:

What distinguished the Bible from other religious texts known from the ancient world is not that the Bible denies that Marduk and Baal exist – it does not (see Is 44:6-19) – but that it insists that Yhwh is qualitatively different from all other deities: Yhwh is infinitely more powerful. Monotheism, then is the belief that one supreme being exists, whose will is sovereign over all other beings. These other beings may include some who live in heaven and who are in the normal course of events immortal; but they are unalterably subservient to the one supreme being, except insofar as that being voluntarily relinquishes a measure of control by granting other beings free will.

Walton, Matthews and Chavalas (2000:177) identify distinct categories of monotheism that may have typified the beliefs of many Israelites in different eras: ‘*philosophical monotheism*: there has only ever been one God in existence’ and which the authors also label as ‘*the ultimate monotheism*’ (my emphasis). *Henotheism* recognizes the existence of other gods but asserts that only one God is supreme: in other words, all other gods are venerated although only one is elevated above the rest. *Practical monotheism* might admit the existence of various deities, but religious and worship behaviour are mostly concentrated on one particular god. *Monolatry* is defined as the consistent worship of only one deity even if other gods exist (Eakin 1971:70; Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:177; see also Keener and Walton 2017). The concept of monolatry is distinct from exclusive (philosophical/ultimate/practical) monotheism which is the belief in the existence of only a single god, other gods are either false gods/*shedim* or do not exist at all (see McConkie 1979:351; see 2.2.5.8). In early Israelite monotheism this single, one true Deity is identified by the personal name YHWH [יהוה] (the God/name of the covenant) (Ex 3:14; Jdg 1:2, etcetera; cf Gn Ryken, Wilhoit and Longman 2010:583), as well as by His generic name אֱלֹהִים – ‘*’ēlōhîm*, the sovereign creator God (Gn 1:1; 3.5-3.5.2.3; Jdg 2:12; 5:5; 6:8; cf 2.2.5.8).¹¹⁴

Given what has been said thus far, it can be concluded that Israelite monotheism, which was also more in line with monolatry, as expressed in the Book of Judges was essentially mono-YHWH worship, or the worship of YHWH alone or the veneration of YHWH above all other gods (see above). Through mono-YHWH worship the early Israelites mandated ultimate power to only one God, YHWH (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:177). The concept of monotheism essentially expresses the uniqueness of this supreme being, YHWH (Sommer 2021:241), the sovereign creator that rules supremely over His creation (Wainwright 2021:1; see also Sommer 2021:241 presenting a description of the uniqueness of YHWH earlier in this segment).

3.2.2.1 Monotheism and the early Israelites

¹¹⁴ In addition to the personal name YHWH, the God of the Israelites is also identified by nouns with the general denotation ‘god [’*el* in Hebrew] and its longer forms and Greek *theos* (Ryken, Wilhoit and Longman 2010:583).

YHWH's revelation and covenant with Abraham and later at Mount Sinai with the Israelites (see 2.2.4-2.2.5), determined the Israelites to be adherents of mono-YHWH when they entered Canaan and first settled in the land. Judges 2:7 reads: 'The people served the LORD throughout the lifetime of Joshua and of the elders who outlived him and who had seen all the great things the LORD had done for Israel.' These early Israelite settlers would have practised the sort of monotheism that is defined as monolatry (see 3.2.2).¹¹⁵ Wainwright (2021:1) asserts that most mainstream Old Testament scholars believe that the religion of the early Israelites was neither monotheistic nor polytheistic but 'monolatrous.'

Judges, however, shows that the Israelites were polytheistic for numerous recurring cycles in which they worshipped many deities (Jdg 2:10-19; 3:5-7, etcetera; cf Table 2.2). As indicated previously (see 2.2.5.8), the deities worshipped by the Israelites were the gods of the Canaanites labelled by Deuteronomy as false gods or demons/*shedim* (Dt 32:17, 21; Dt 28:64; Lv 17:7; Jdg 5:8; Ps 106:37). The Sinaitic Covenant expressly forbade the Israelites from worshipping these (false) gods/*shedim* (Ex 20:2-3; Dt 5:7; Jdg 2:1-2; 6:10; cf Jos 24:15; 2 Ki 17:35; Is 44; 45). Dumbrell (2002:77) remarks that Israelite idolatry demonstrates the total religious failure of the tribes and their inability to maintain mono-YHWH worship throughout the Book of Judges (cf Jdg 2:1-3, 10-19, etcetera).

In light of the aforesaid fact, the author/s of Judges report that after the death of Joshua (Jdg 2:10), the Israelites frequently did not adhere to any of the aforementioned types of monotheism (see 3.2.2); instead, as stated before, they were a polytheistic community for a considerable part of the pre-monarchic period depicted in Judges (cf Jdg 2:1-3; 3:5; 6:10; 10:6; Sommer 2021:243). The larger Israelite community consisted of fully-fledged polytheists (Jdg 2:10-12) while others practised a household syncretic religion that included the veneration of YHWH alongside Canaanite deities (Jdg 2:1-3; 6:25-26; 17:5; 18:30-31).

Although the Book of Judges narrates times of cyclical idolatry, there were indeed Israelites who faithfully worshipped mono-YHWH; a remnant of devoted Israelites such as the judges – Othniel (Jdg 3); Deborah (Jdg 4:4-5), Gideon (initially [Jdg 6-8]), the minor Judges (Jdg 10:1-5; 12:8-15), and Samson whose belief in YHWH never wavered despite his carnality (Jdg 13-16). Other people who displayed a belief in mono-YHWH, apparently, were the parents of Samson (Jdg 13:1-24; cf Jdg 14:1-3).

Those loyal devotees of YHWH, consequently, would have had a belief in the existence of a transcendental Deity who acted outside the physical laws of their world to guide, instruct, aid and deliver them since He was a God who had full control of the universe. This God was their YHWH,

¹¹⁵ Israelite monotheism is defined in this research as the worship of mono-YHWH (YHWH alone), and this meaning is kept in mind whenever the term is mentioned or referenced.

their Creator, and Covenant God (cf Jdg 3:9-11; 4:4-7; 6:11-40; 13:3-25; cf Jdg 16:28). As mentioned before (see 3.2.1.1), Israelite monotheism not only (re)defined the concept of deity in the ancient Near East (see also 3.2.2.1b) but also the identity of YHWH's people, and their sense of self and existence in relation to their covenant God (see below).

a. Early Israelite identity

Mono-YHWH worship had to be the defining characteristic of the early Israelites' identity; their religious and secular existence in order for the tribes to receive the blessings YHWH had promised them earlier in their history (cf Ex 19; Dt 28:1-15).). This is what the author/s of Judges are fiercely contending for throughout the narratives of Judges. In order for the early Israelites to receive YHWH's blessings they had to maintain their identity as YHWH's chosen people and their covenantal relationship with Him. However, given the early Israelites' predilection for the Canaanite gods, obeying YHWH and His covenant proved challenging and, instead of blessings, oppression from their enemies follows. Mono-YHWH worship, therefore, did not perennially did not define the Israelite identity in the Book of Judges. The early Israelites' identity as the 'imagers' of YHWH has already been discussed (see 2.2.5.8c; see also see 3.2.2.1). In this segment, the identity of the Israelites in Judges will be discussed in terms of the words 'forgetting' (idolatry) and 'remembering' (faithfulness to YHWH).

Judges 3:7 relates: 'The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD; they forgot their God, and served the Baals and the Asherahs' (cf Jdg 2:1-5,11; 6:25-31; 10:6). The author/s of the Book of Judges aim to convey a particular message to the reader of the Book through the use of this narrative. Beldman (2020) remarks that the Hebrew word נָשָׁח – *šākah* [forgot] 'appears in the Book of Judges only here in 3:7 but that should not diminish its significance.' In Deuteronomy the word also appears more than a dozen times as Moses warns the Israelites not to forget, 1) 'what they have seen YHWH do for them' (Dt 4:9), 2) the covenant that YHWH had made with them (Dt 4:23), 3) their own insurrection against YHWH (Dt 9:7), and finally, 4) YHWH Himself who delivered them and brought them out of Egypt (Dt 6:12; 8:11, 14, 19; 32:18; Beldman 2020; cf Butler 2009:63; see also 3.1). These aspects are also stated in Judges (Jdg 6:8-10; 10:11-12; cf Jdg 2:1-3; 6:13).

In the biblical worldview this kind of remembering and forgetting (see the points 1-4 given above) is not just 'cognitive;' it also shapes the identity of the early Israelites (Beldman 2020). Remembering YHWH and what He had accomplished on their behalf would direct their individual and communal lives towards YHWH and loyalty to Him (Beldman 2020). Kim (2016:101) agrees that YHWH 'the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, gave the Israelites both a religious and community identity ...' Each time this historical fact was evoked, the covenant between YHWH and His chosen people was realized (cf Jdg 2:1-3; 6:8-10; 10:13-14; Kim 2016:101). Beldman (2020) states that the fact that the Israelites initially forgot about YHWH and then turned to serving Canaanite

idols follows a certain logic. The early Israelites had arranged their lives in line with obedience to the Canaanite gods (Butler 2009:63) by forgetting their identity which, as stated before, was formed in reference or '[a covenantal] relationship' to YHWH (insertion mine; Beldman 2020).¹¹⁶ Beldman (2020) avers that the early Israelites forget that they were called to be 'a holy nation and a kingdom of priests' (cf 2.2.3.1d; 2.2.5.3; 2.2.5.7), they forget YHWH and venerated the Canaanite gods (Jdg 2:10-19; 3:5-7, and so on).

Neely (2014) remarks that despite the fact that the LORD did great and righteous things for the early Israelites (Jdg 1:1-2; 4:6-7,14; 5:4-5; 7:22; 13:5; see 3.1) they often forgot the LORD their God (cf Jdg 2:12; 3:7). Neely (2014) further comments that forgetting YHWH was a 'conscious choice to disobey God' (cf Dt 8:11; Jdg 2:12: 3:7) and the early Israelites' decision was to serve the gods of the Canaanites (cf Dt 8:19; Jdg 3:6; 6:10; 8:33;10:6). However, YHWH always desired the restoration of His covenant (cf Jdg 10:15:16; Stamps 2014:351; 2.2.3.1c). The LORD's strategy to counteract each cycle of departure from Him was to sell the Israelites to their enemies as punishment (Jdg 2:14; 3:8; 4:2; 10:7; Neely 2014). According to Neely, the metaphor of selling conjures up the idea of slaves being bought and sold in a marketplace. But the LORD's acts of deliverance become a major theme that permeates the narratives of the Book of Judges (McMath 2014). The deliverance of the early Israelites by YHWH was always intended to guide them towards forming a covenantal relationship with Him. According to the author/s of Judges' worldview, the restoration of the Israelites' identity as YHWH's chosen people was necessary to set them on the divine path to fulfill the divine plan of cosmic redemption (see 2.2.2; 2.2.3.1c; 2.2.4.2; 2.2.2.1).

b. YHWH upholds the monotheistic identity

YHWH's deliverance of the tribes from their idolatry was crucial for the re-emergence of monotheism and the Israelite identity upon which it was built during a cycle of covenant restoration (cf Jdg 2:10-19; see Table 2.2). The author/s of Judges indicate that YHWH will Himself bring about deliverance even if the Israelites do not cry out to Him or call upon Him (cf Jdg 13:7; McCann 2011:95). Still even an imperfect hero such as Gideon, who made an idol (Jdg 8:27) and Samson who loved non-Israelite women – were both imbued with the Spirit of YHWH (Jdg 6:34; 13:24-25) and could play a part in YHWH's plan to deliver the Israelites. YHWH's selection of deliverers (judges) to save the early Israelites from their enemies (see also 2.3.3) also demonstrates the uniqueness of the biblical worldview that could conceive of the Deity acting outside the ancient

¹¹⁶ The ancient Near Eastern nations believed that their gods were 'one with their culture and national identity' (Patterson [ed] 2006:965). To desert a deity was akin to denying their personal identity. 'Yet Israel had abandoned [their devotion to] the living God' (insertion mine; Patterson [ed] 2006:965). They had, in effect, lost their unique monotheistic identity and their love for YHWH and instead made covenants with and served the Canaanite gods (cf Jdg 2:1-2; 2:10-19).

Near Eastern dominant cultural worldview in which the cult statues was the ultimate manifestation of the gods (cf 3.3.2.1).

In the ancient Near East, the role of saviour of the nation was ordinarily ascribed to the king (Thompson, TL 2014; Wilson 2021; cf McKenzie 2009:84) as also attested to in Mesopotamian texts (see, for example, Meek 1969:163-165). YHWH, on the other hand, in addition to Gideon and Samson (see above), chooses to make heroes of Othniel, a Kenezite whose tribe is affiliated with the early Israelites (Jdg 3:7-11), Ehud (Jdg 3:15-30; see below) and Shamgar (a possible worshipper (son) of Anat (Jdg 3:31) to deliver the Israelites from the enemy. It is worth noting that not all of the judges chosen by YHWH fit the typical mould of a hero in terms of background, appearance, and character. The Hebrew interpretation of Judges 3:15 describes Ehud, a Benjamite, as Ehud ben (son) of Gera (son of the right hand), a man, ‘restricted at his right hand.’ Clearly restricted at the right hand means left handed (Marais 1998:92). Marais remarks that the wordplay is evident: ‘that is, Ehud is a left-handed son of the right hand’ (cf Jdg 20:16). The Hebrew word for restricted – *itter* – means impeded, shut up or maimed (that is to characterize physical deformities). In light of the aforesaid, Bakan (1990:36-37) argues that being left-handed was considered a blemish in the Old Testament. Guest (2003:191) concurs that Ehud was possibly crippled in his right hand. Guest observes that Ehud’s physical disability immediately displays conflicting emotions about the situation; things are not as they should be, prompting questions about his ability to achieve a military victory. Ehud’s adversary is Eglon, a Moabite king (Jdg 3:12) whose name has a phonetic connection to the Hebrew word ‘*egel*’ meaning calf (Guest 2003:191). ‘Combining this with the information that Eglon was fat results in a confrontation between an Israelite hero and a fattened calf’ with the consequence being inevitable (Jdg 3:21-22; Guest 2003:191).

Samson’s inordinate passion for women outweighed his obligation towards YHWH to deliver the early Israelites (Crenshaw 1978:136; cf Carvalho 2006:146-147; Butler 2009:349-350). According to the words of the Angel of YHWH, Samson was destined to be a Nazirite from birth and ‘would begin to deliver the Israelites from the Philistines’ (Jdg 13:7; Crenshaw 1978:136; cf Carvalho 2006:146). This was a wonderful prophecy related to Samson’s personal life and his position in public life (Crenshaw 1978:136; see also Butler 2009:319). Manoah and his wife, thus, held the expectation that their son would ‘bring honour to their family and rest to a weary people’ (Crenshaw 1978:136).

Neither expectation came true: instead, Samson brought shame and left the early Israelites under the leadership of the Philistines (Crenshaw 1978:136; cf Butler 2009:319). Unlike Carvalho (2006:146) who sees Samson as a ‘tragic hero,’ McCann (2011: 95) calls him a ‘flawed hero’ who is more preoccupied with pursuing his attraction for Philistine women (Jdg 14:1; 16:1) and exacting retribution on the Philistines (Jdg 14:19; 15:14-17) than he is with defending or delivering the Israelites (cf Amit 1999:267; Exum 2014:29). Even the conclusion of the story involves seeking personal retribution (Jdg 16:28; McCann 2011:95). McCann hails the mother of Samson as the

‘true hero of the story’ and states that she not he is the epitome of mono-YHWH devotion, loyalty and ‘attentiveness to God and the divine revelation that she has been honored to receive’ and that she simply demonstrates common sense (Jdg 13:3-5; 23; McCann 2011:95; cf Le Roux 2016:501-523; Sha 2018:92-93).

Following the death of Ehud (Jdg 4:1), the Israelites are led by Deborah (דְּבוֹרָה – *dəbōrāh*) a prophetess of YHWH and a mother of Israel (Jdg 5:7; see also 3.2.3.3b).¹¹⁷ Deborah’s name means ‘the Bee’ (Lang 2021:38),¹¹⁸ which may be an appropriate designation for the prophet since in the ancient Near East ‘bee women’ have been associated with ‘prophesying’ (Rosen 2023).¹¹⁹ According to Lang (2021:40), Deborah’s reputation was gained via the strength of her moral character, the speed with which she was able to determine what was right in cases that were brought before her, and her ability to see into the future. Lang (2021:40) further comments that Deborah’s prophecy under the palm tree (Jdg 4:4; see 4.3.1.2b) ‘superseded that of the *Urim and Thummim* of the priest in Shiloh.’ This state of affairs most likely stems from the corruption of the priesthood during another period of decline as recorded in the Book of Judges (4:1-3; cf Jdg 2:1-3, 10; 3:5-7, 12, etcetera; cf 4.3.2). It is probably for this reason that the author/s of Judges mention the specific location of Deborah’s prophecy-giving and ‘where the Israelites would go up to her for judgement’ (Jdg 4:5). Schneider (2000:53) argues that Deborah’s story highlights the continuation of a downward spiral, exemplified by Barak, who should have been the judge and primary hero.

When the Israelites are oppressed by Jabin, king of Hazor, YHWH gives the Israelite military leader, Barak, orders to lead the Israelites in a campaign of battle against Jabin and his army general, Sisera (see 6.4.1). Deborah brings Barak the message from YHWH (Jdg 4:5-7). Contrary to the war edicts (Dt 20; cf Jdg 4:9), which called for the presence of the priest to address the troops prior to battle and the requirement that only male soldiers fight, Barak demands the prophetess’ presence immediately upon receiving the message (Jdg 4:8). The prophetess also says that a woman named Jael will have the honour of slaying Sisera due to Barak’s disregard of the war protocols (Jdg 4:9, 17-22). Deborah and Barak will eventually lead the Israelites to victory against the Canaanites (Jdg 4:23; see 6.4.1). The author/s utilize the narrative of Deborah and Jael to highlight the lack of heroic and effective masculine leadership, which contributed to idolatry and the ensuing danger and chaos (cf Jdg 5:6-8). Although Deborah has proven herself to be a heroine, in the worldview of the author/s of Judges ultimately the victory belongs to YHWH. This is shown in her victory song when Deborah swears her allegiance to YHWH attributing the war victory to YHWH alone (Jdg 5). Judges 5:31 records that another cycle of peace and covenant restoration

¹¹⁷ Bible Hub 2024. Deborah.

¹¹⁸ Deborah’s name derives from the Hebrew word דָּבַר – *dabar* – which means ‘to speak’ (Bible Hub 2024. *dabar*) and also refers to YHWH speaking to people.

¹¹⁹ Rosen remarks that ‘bee women’ in the ancient Near East also were also known for casting spells on people and for healing. A substance called ‘mad honey’ was used by soothsayers and prophetesses in the oracles at Delphi (Rosen 2023).

follows. After a period of forty years of peace, the Israelites fell into a cycle of idolatry. They are oppressed and impoverished by the Midianites and other groups from the east. The Israelites cried out to YHWH for deliverance from their oppressors. (Jdg 6:1-10). YHWH raises up Gideon to lead the Israelites in a successful war against the Midianites.

Perhaps the narratives in Judges 13 to 16 can be viewed as a microcosm of certain types of characters that appear throughout Judges. First, Samson's mother represents people who obey and serve mono-YHWH (cf Jdg. 13:3-7), followed by Gideon and Samson's character for those who retain their monotheistic identity but within a defective or syncretic (covenantal) lifestyle (cf Jdg 17:5; 18:30-31). Given their fallibility, ultimately, only YHWH can restore the Israelites' identity as His chosen people in a world in which mono-YHWH worship is uniquely Israelite.

3.2.3 Monotheism in the ancient Near East

Monotheism in an obvious form, practical and conceptual, was extant in the 15th-14th centuries BC (ancient Near East) (Keener and Walton 2017). An Egyptian hymn to Amun (ca 15th-14th BC) heralds Amun as the 'creator of the other gods' (Keener and Walton 2017). About a century later, pharaoh Akhenaten (1352 BC-1336 BC) endeavoured to elevate the sun god Aten as the only god, declaring all other Egyptian gods to be non-gods (Keener and Walton 2017; see also Budge 1969a:139-140; Ridley 2019:13-15). Monotheism, however, was rejected in that region of the ancient Near East. Widely unpopular for his religious reforms, Akhenaten was considered a heretic (Hornung 1992:43-49; Redford 2013:9-34). Many believe that Akhenaten, also known as Amenhotep IV before his drive to promote sun worship, had monotheistic tendencies from which biblical monotheism emerged (see also Budge 1969b:68-84). The idea that Moses derived Israelite monotheism from Akhenaten is based on terminology used in Psalm 104 said to parallel the *Sun-Hymn inscription of an Amarna tomb* and which may be credited to Akhenaten (North 1977:246-248; cf Redford 2013:11). However, Fagan (2015:42-49, 70-71) emphasizes that the contrasts between Akhenaten's monotheism and Biblical monotheism show that they are unrelated to one another. Niehaus (1995:82) makes the case that the alleged 'solar-monotheism' of Akhenaten was likely a form of henotheism.

Budge (1969a:140) discusses the view that Egyptian texts validate that the Egyptians believed in 'a God who was One, and was without a second, and was infinite and eternal.' The meaning assigned to the Egyptian word for God, *neter* was the 'highly philosophical meaning quoted above.' Budge (1969:141) proposes that the God addressed in the moral principles adopted by the Early (Egyptian) Empire embraces a status comparable 'to that held by Yahweh...' Budge provides the *Shema* as evidence for this: 'Hear, O Israel, Yahweh our God [literally gods], is Yahweh One' (see 3.2.4) and the Egyptian *neter uā* "One God" as far as the application and meaning of *uā* is concerned, is identical with that of the Hebrew word יְהוָה in that of the text quoted' (cf 3.2.4.2). The phrase " יְהוָה יְהוָה " is commonly interpreted as a statement of monotheism. While some scholars

have used evidence from ancient Near Eastern texts to support this view (see Budge 1969a:140-141), others, such as Block (2011:96), argue that the Shema is better understood as an affirmation of covenant commitment, rather than a great monotheistic confession (see the discussion of the Shema in 3.2.4). However, even though Budge (1969a:140-141) has presented concepts of Egyptian monotheism that are similar to Israelite monotheism (cf 3.2.3.1), the covenant/s of YHWH as stated by the author/s of Judges (2:1-3; 6:8-10; cf Jdg 10:10-14) still unequivocally declares that the God of the Israelites is the one and only God that must be worshipped.

3.2.3.1 *Variances in the concepts of monotheism and polytheism*

Given the polytheistic nature of worship in the ancient Near East (3.2.4.1; 3.2.4.3a), monotheism whenever it was adhered to in the period of the Judges was clearly a very distinctive religious position for the early Israelites to maintain (Johnson 2010; cf Ex 15:11). A definition of monotheism has been provided (see 3.2.2). Sommer (2021:241) defines polytheism as ‘a theology in which no one deity has ultimate power over all aspects of the world’ (cf 3.4.4.2a-b; 3.6.1.1;). The ancient Near Eastern pantheon of gods typically consisted of a supreme god who ruled over the other gods; but did not exercise sovereignty over the entire cosmos (Moorhen 2022; cf Penchansky 2005:78; see 3.4.4.2a-b). There is a multiplicity of divine powers that exercise authority over ancient Near Eastern lives. Judges (Jdg 2:1-3, 11-19; 3:5-6; 10:6, etcetera) mentions that the idolatrous Israelites ‘served the Baals and the Ashtoreths, the gods of Aram, Sidon and Moab, and the gods of the Ammonites and Philistines.’ Perhaps because of the exclusive worship of YHWH, it was not acceptable to associate YHWH with a female companion; instead, reverence of a deity with a consort, like Baal, was more realistic and enticing. This kind of dualistic nature is common in nature and among humans (cf 2.3.2.1a-c). In the temple in Judges 9:27 other deities, in addition, probably Asherah as a consort of Baal, could be worshipped even if the temple was dedicated to Baal-*berith* (cf Jdg 6:25-26).¹²⁰ Judges 17:5 also indicates the worship of a several gods in a household shrine. According to Judges 6:25-26, Baal and Asherah were venerated in the same sacred location at Ophrah.

In the ancient Near East, the supreme god may not necessarily be a creator deity, omniscient and omnipotent. Baal, for example, appropriates the kingship from his father El (cf 3.4.4.2a; Wood, A 2008:65; Green 2003:255; cf Walsh 2019:28). Archaeological evidence for the Ugaritic (Ras Shamra) pantheon of gods comes from the corpus of *cuneiform tablets* discovered in northern Syria (Penchansky 2005:78). In the Ras Shamra texts, El is the chief god who reigns over the other gods including Baal and his consort Asherah, deities commonly worshipped by the idolatrous Israelites during the pre-monarchy (Jdg 6:25-26).

¹²⁰ Dated to a later period (10th century BC) an inscription registers the dedication of a building, a possible temple, by Yehimilk, the king of Byblos to Ba’lshamen and the gods of Byblos who would also have been worshipped in the temple (see Rosenthal 1969:653).

The polytheistic worldview, naturally, stands in stark contrast to the biblical worldview that presents YHWH as the creator of the universe who wields absolute authority over His creation (Hill and Walton 2010:201; Johnson 2010; Wainwright 2021:1; cf Sommer 2021:241; cf 3.3.3-3.3.5). In Judges, the supremacy of YHWH over the Canaanite gods is clearly demonstrated, for example, when YHWH aids the Israelites in their military campaigns and achieves victory over their oppressors (Jdg 3:9-11, 15, 28-31; 4:23; 5:31; 7:22-25; 11:32; cf 3.2.2.1b; 3.2.3.3b; 6.3.4-6.3.5; 6.4).

3.2.3.2 YHWH requires worship of Him alone

YHWH demands undivided worship in accordance with His covenants made with Abraham and the Israelites at Mount Sinai in order to bless His people (see, for example, Dt 6:4-19; Longman 2014:94; see Chapter Two). Longman (2014:94) remarks ‘He may not be replaced or supplemented by other gods.’ This distinctive commandment is very ‘radical’ in the ancient Near Eastern context of polytheism and the veneration of a multiplicity of deities (Longman 2014:94; see also 3.2.1.1). Longman emphasizes the insistence of the commandment upon the unadulterated worship of YHWH ‘even if’ there are a multitude of other gods (cf 3.2.2). Although YHWH sovereignly maintains all creation (McFarland 2014:165; see 3.3.5.1), it is the choice of every nation whether or not He is exclusively worshipped. By narrating the cycles of idolatry and peace, the author/s of Judges demonstrate YHWH’s desire for every sovereign act to be recognised by His people and constructively impact upon their lives and, in fact, the entire universe (see 3.3.5.1). Deborah undividedly acknowledges and celebrates YHWH’s sovereignty in a song of praise to God for their victory over the Canaanites in Judges 5 (McCann 2011:59; see also 3.2.2.1b; 6.4). McCann elaborates that the most potent ‘earthly sovereigns,’ ‘kings’ and ‘princes’ are summoned to ‘hear the praises presented to God;’ to give God tribute essentially means to concede and submit to God’s sovereignty (Jdg 5:2-3; 3.2.2.1b; 3.2.3.3b; see 3.3.5.1). Apparently, his mother’s contribution to upholding monotheism through her devotion and obedience to YHWH, surpassed any contribution by Samson in the narratives of Judges 14-16 (see 3.2.2.1b).

3.2.3.3 Two case studies of the differences between polytheism and monotheism

In this section, I will compare and contrast two different religious worldviews using the Hittite Queen and Deborah, the judge of the early Israelites. I also do this because in a patriarchal world these were extraordinary women. It must be emphasized that during a cycle of idolatry, the Israelites in Judges, similar to queen Puduḥepa, would have prayed to the diverse gods/*shedim* that they worshipped (cf Jdg 2:1-3, 11-19; 3:6; 6:10; 8:34, etcetera) for their everyday needs and to appease as many of the lands’ gods as possible. Naturally things would have been completely different during a cycle of peace and covenant restoration.

a. Queen Puduḥepa

A prayer made by the 13th century BC Hittite queen Puduḫepa¹²¹ encapsulated the ancient Near Eastern polytheistic beliefs and religious behaviour (see also 3.2.4-3.2.4.1) and possibly those uttered by the Canaanites and idolatrous Israelites in Judges to Baal and Ashtoreth/ Asherah (Jdg 2:13; 3:7), Baal-berith (Jdg 8:34); Dagon (Jdg 10:6; cf Jdg 16:23), Chemosh (cf Jdg 11:27).

Puduḫepa petitions the sun goddess to shield her husband King Hattusilis III from the harmful wrath of several gods and the alleviation of dissent within the royal court as well as the wider society (see Figure 3.1; see Bryce 2002:14; cf Jackson 1999:336). Puduḫepa also expresses her misgivings to the sun goddess about offerings made to other gods with the intent to bring about the king's downfall (Goetze 1969b:393). The prayer is emblematic of the fear, suspicion and treachery that surrounded life in the ancient Near East and that caused division between people. People worshipped different gods with disparate personalities and ethics each demanding allegiance from their devotees. In keeping with ancient Near Eastern tradition, Puduḫepa herself would have made offerings to the many gods in the Hattian pantheon, of whom the goddess, Hepat, as described above (Bryce 2014 see Figure 3.1) was one.



Figure 3.1 Queen Puduḫepa. On this rock-relief at Firaktin in Southern Turkey, Puduḫepa (on the right) makes an offering to the goddess Hepat (Bilgin 2010)

Roberts (2002:48) observes that the prayer pattern in Mesopotamia of invoking one deity to arbitrate with another deity is imbedded in polytheism. Often individuals in distress will petition their personal god to intervene on their behalf to a superior god or the other way around (Patrick and Diable 2008:21-22).¹²² Supplicants would pray to several different gods to pardon their transgressions (see 3.2.4.3a).

Roberts (2002:48) adds that the prevalence of fixed procedures in Mesopotamian prayers that convey the trepidation of evil omens or imputing personal suffering on the practices of sorcerers ‘owes a great deal to the multiplicity of independent powers in a polytheistic universe.’ A Sumero-Akkadian ‘Prayer to Every God’ addresses all known and unknown gods: ‘May the god whom I know or do not know be quieted toward me; May the goddess whom I know or do not know be quieted toward me’ (Stephens 1969:391). The aforesaid prayer models the polytheistic mindset of the

¹²¹ Queen Puduḫepa (ca 1275-1250 BC) who co-ruled the Hittite empire with her husband Hattušili III was one of the most influential figures in the ancient Near East in the Iron Age I period.

¹²² Patrick and Diable (2002:21) state that a supplicant, for example, petitions Marduk to return the supplicant to the personal gods: ‘Commend me into the hands of my (personal god) and my (personal) goddess for well-being and life.’ Thereafter the supplicant seeks absolution from a variety of gods.

individual to whom a multitude of gods could cause suffering for any infraction committed whether wittingly or unwittingly (Stephens 1969:391; see 2.2.5.8d).¹²³

Regarding the supplication of a multitude of gods, Patrick and Diable (2008:22) remarks that ‘obviously the Israelite had no such luxury in prayer;’ that, is the covenant prohibited them from praying to a multitude of deities. However, as stated before, Judges shows that the Israelites did worship the Canaanite gods and would have prayed and sacrificed to these deities (cf Jdg 2:10-19; 3:5-6; 8:27; 10:6, and so on). Judges 6:25-26 mentions the altar of Baal and the Asherah pole which may provide an example of a site where such cultic activities occurred.

The idolatrous Israelites prayed to Baal-*berith* (Jdg 9:33) who in Judges 9:27 is also shown to be a god of fertility and vegetation (Mulder 1999:143; cf 2.3.4.2a; 2.3.4.2b). Here it should be noted how this state of affairs, the worship of the other gods, each with their own requirements and value sets that have been in conflict which would have destabilized the internal cohesion of the tribal community (cf Nm 25; 31:6; cf Hezser 2023:217; cf 3.3.5.1). The Israelites would have been divided in their loyalty to each other while serving different deities. This could be a possible reason why some tribes did not participate in the Canaanite war waged by Deborah and Barak in Judges 4 and 5 (cf Nm 25; 31:6; cf Hezser 2023:217).

In Shechem both El-*berith* and Baal-*berith* were worshipped (Jdg 9:4, 46). According to Mulder (1999:142) the fact that El and Baal are mentioned in the same area (Shechem) in the narrative of Judges 9 may suggest that the two deities have a close relationship in the Shechemite pantheon analogous to the relationship between Baal and El in the Ugaritic pantheon. If this were the case, it is possible that the early Israelites who worshipped Baal-*berith* (as mentioned in Judges 9:33) might have adopted the questionable value system of this deity, as described in the *Ugaritic Baal Cycle* (cf 3.3.5.1). This value system would have been in conflict with that of YHWH, leading to significant ethical issues for those who followed this syncretic religion in many aspects of their lives. Molech, the Ammonite god (cf Jdg 11) frequently linked to a vow (Tore and Ndolu 2021) may provide a parallel for the previously mentioned scenario (Judges 11). Tore and Ndolu remark that ‘within the logic of the Deuteronomic law, Jephthah’s intention to make a vow to offer a human sacrifice to YHWH was a form of cult syncretism.’ Judges 11:34-40; 19; 20; 21 provide horrific and deadly examples of the consequences of idolatrous and syncretic devotion.

As stated above, Puduhepa’s prayer needs were focused on easing tension and discord in her community and within the royal court that most likely resulted from the polytheistic worship of people. In contrast, biblical monotheism pursued and promoted unity and loyalty among the twelve tribes through their allegiance to a sole deity, YHWH. In Canaan, religious cohesion allowed the

¹²³ The prayer reveals the writer’s awareness that he is suffering for sinning against the divine law but does not know what the sin is exactly and who the god is that he has offended and thus the writer addresses the prayer to all known and unknown deities in order find relief from his suffering (Stephens 1969:391).

establishment of tribal cultural unity (Glassman 2017:636). In addition, the roles of the judges, all faithful to YHWH (see 3.2.2.1b), were to maintain tribal unity, arbitrate the disputes of the Israelites, avert the forces that continuously endangered the tribal league and unite them militarily when an exterior menace surfaced (Glassman 2017:636). This is not to say that the tribal unity did not have the propensity to disintegrate (unaided by external forces), as indicated before (cf Jdg 5:7, 16-17) or that it could not be given over to feuding and reciprocal ‘clan justice’ (cf Jdg 8:1-3, 5-8; 9; 12:1-6; 18; 20-21; Glassman 2017:636). The author/s of Judges, however, indicate that idolatry and the tribes’ alignment with the Canaanite nations and gods are the primary causes of the Israelites’ strife (Jdg 2:1-3). Elders and priests are also designated as idolaters; their role was to uphold the covenantal way of life by worshipping only YHWH (Glassman 2017:636; see also 2.2.2.1). A Levite priest is installed in Micah’s house shrine with the idolatrous idols as a means of justifying his syncretic worship activities (Jdg 17:10-13).

b. Deborah: leader of the Israelites

The polytheistic worship of queen Puduḥepa may be contrasted with another powerful woman in the Iron Age I, Deborah, leader of ‘Israel’ and her devotion to mono-YHWH (Jdg 4:4). In one of the oldest military songs in the Old Testament and in history (Jackson 1999:114), Deborah (ca 1224-1184 BC), credits YHWH with the Israelite war victory over the Canaanites (see also 3.2.2.1b; cf 6.4). Judges 4:1 narrates that the Israelites were once again entangled in idolatry. As divine punishment, they were handed over to Canaanite oppression. In their efforts for liberation from Canaanite tyranny the Israelites, ultimately, had little choice but to recognize the sovereignty of their covenant God (Jdg 4:3). When they cry out to YHWH, the Israelites acknowledge that He alone is supreme and their Redeemer. And when YHWH rescues them from the Canaanites, He is true to His nature as the faithful covenant God of Israel demonstrating that indeed ‘there is no one like the LORD’ (Ex 8:10; cf Jdg 5:4-5).

It is devotion to mono-YHWH, a monotheistic impulse, that drives Deborah to sing her song in Judges 5 in which the prophetess extols YHWH for granting the Israelites the victory over the Canaanite general Sisera and his army. When she praises the might, grandeur, and sovereignty of her God with the words ‘the earth shook, the heavens poured, the clouds poured down water’ (Jdg 5:4; cf Jdg 5:31), she is almost duplicating Deuteronomy: ‘There is no one like the God of Jeshurun, who rides across the heavens to help you and on the clouds in his majesty’ (Dt 33:26; *NIV*; see also 3.2.4.2).

The worship of mono-YHWH, was the very cornerstone of the religion of the early Israelites in the same way that the physically grand and lofty temple that housed the image of the god (cf Jdg 9:27; 16:23) was the foundation of the ancient Near Eastern religions. Temples in the ancient Near East and their splendour were the residences of the gods, places of contact between heaven and earth where the power of the gods were made available to the populace ‘to bring security in an

otherwise insecure world’ (Foster 2021:32; cf Kirkegaard 2016:934). In these grand temples opulently decorated with articles of precious metals and other valuable items (Bryce 2002:106), the ancient Near Eastern elites such as, undoubtedly, queen Puduḥepa invoked the gods standing in front the richly adorned statues.¹²⁴

Deborah and Barak most likely sang their victory song in a less elaborate setting such as the ancient Near Eastern temple, but the site would have been particularly sacred since the holy God, YHWH, Himself, was being honoured (cf Jdg 6:11; 13:3-20). It was a victory song that, as stated before, acknowledged the supremacy of YHWH (cf Jdg 5:31) as the only God (Dt 6:5). Deborah sang or chanted these words: בָּרַכּוּ יְהוָה (Yahweh bārākū - bless YHWH!) (Jdg 5:2) in adoration of YHWH’s majesty: two humble words of gratitude that focused solely on the splendour of YHWH, the one true God.

3.2.4 The *Shema*: YHWH our God YHWH [is] one

In this segment, the statement יְהוָה אֶחָד (‘YHWH [is] one’) and its interpretations will be discussed. Within the context of the covenant (see Chapter Two) the *Shema* served both as a monotheistic instruction and mnemonic for loyal obedience to mono-YHWH. It is very probable that the author/s of Judges and the Israelites that they depict in the Book of Judges, given their familiarity with their historical past (cf 2.2.1-2.2.1.1; 2.2.2.1), understood it as such.

The significance of the *Shema* expresses the idea that there is only one God; יְהוָה אֶחָד. In this sense it serves as a formula for loyalty and devotion to YHWH alone (Dt 6:5), the essence of ‘Israel’s covenantal relationship with YHWH’ (Dt 6:4-5; cf Chapter Two). Block (2011:73) understands Deuteronomy 6:4-5 to be ‘a call for exclusive covenant commitment to YHWH’: ‘Hear Israel, Yahweh our God Yahweh [is] one’ [יְהוָה אֶחָד יְהוָה אֶלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד].¹²⁵ ‘And you shall love Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength’ (*NIV* Interlinear). To reiterate, the *Shema* is thus a unique advocacy for obedience and devotion to one deity; יְהוָה אֶחָד (‘YHWH [is] one’). Goodman (2002:250) observes that to obey the words of the *Shema* is to follow YHWH’s teaching and to imitate YHWH as teacher (cf Block 2011:73-74).

Towner (2015:50) remarks that the thought expressed by the statement יְהוָה אֶחָד, and the *Shema* as a whole, is the oneness or unity of YHWH [mono-Yahwism] (Towner 2015:50; see below). Through the author/s’ promotion of YHWH’s covenant/s and the monotheistic message that permeates Judges, the *Shema* is deeply ingrained in the Book. The *Shema* conveys the idea that early

¹²⁴ In the megalithic rock sanctuary of Yazilikaya in ancient Hattuša [near modern Boğazkale in Anatolia], rock reliefs show the Hittite pantheon of gods that may have been worshipped by Puduḥepa (see Bryce 2002:158-162; cf Nossov 2012:44-45; see also Haroutunian 2002:51).

¹²⁵ This statement is known as the *Shema*. The original Hebrew does not include a verb. Block (2011:77) remarks that scholarly consensus is that this should be interpreted as one or two verbless present tense clauses.

Israelites will identify with this aspect of YHWH's unique nature (His oneness or unity) and represent the divine nature ideally as a unified monotheistic tribal community.

3.2.4.1 *A mnemonic of covenantal faithfulness*

A recitation of the *Shema* at the Tabernacle would have served as a means never to forget their covenant God and to follow Him faithfully (cf Jdg 2:10). If the *Shema* was recited by the priests at the Tabernacle at Shiloh as part of their diurnal prayers¹²⁶ they would have accordingly placed 'themselves under the sovereignty and kingship of YHWH' (Block 2011:75-76). The *Shema* appears in a second century BC liturgical text and in a first century phylactery text from Cave 8 at Qumran where it is written in 'a rectangle and surrounded by other texts' (Block 2011:75). 'To this day Orthodox recite the *Shema* twice daily as part of their prayers' (Block 2011:75). Reciting the *Shema* could be a tradition that stems from earlier times in the history of the Israelites. The priestly blessing (Nm 6:24-26) was discovered inscribed on two small *silver scrolls found at Ketef Hinnom* (Yardeni 1991:194; cf 8.5.5.2) and dated to the seventh century; it may provide a parallel for the possible use of the *Shema* in earlier eras, in the epoch of the judges for instance.

According to Deuteronomy 6, the Israelites were to live their lives in accordance with the *Shema* and other covenantal rules at all times. Deuteronomy 6:8-9 reads: 'Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and your gates.' Levinson (2004:381) argues that since the command 'to write upon the doorposts is intended literally', the Israelites were possibly expected to wear parts of the text on their body. There is archaeological proof for the aforesaid practices. 7th-6th century BC silver amulets with the text engraved on and not in them have been discovered at Jerusalem (Levinson (2004:381; cf 8.5.5.2). These traditions may have their origins in earlier times. Ancient Egyptian and Mesopotamian art and literature also depict similar amulets. It is likely that these amulets in the ancient Near East served as apotropaic devices and were worn to ward off evil (Levinson 2004:381). Levinson remarks that 'in Deuteronomy, the objects have a different function: The text is worn to express the wearer's dedication and obedience to the Torah.' Deuteronomy in repurposing the wearing of text on the body, takes over a well-known tradition and wholly changes its meaning (Levinson 2004:381).¹²⁷

¹²⁶ Similar to Block, Alexander (2020:331) also reports on the earliest evidence of the practice of instruction verses with a particular set of words coming from Qumran where tefillin slips and casings were found dating between the second and first centuries BC. Alexander (2020:331-332) provides a comparison between the Qumran tefillin and Rabbinic tefillin. See also Levinson (2004:381) and Elliot (2017:28-29).

¹²⁷ Levinson also remarks that similar relegation of older traditions to Deuteronomy occurs in other passages (cf Dt 6:9; 12:13-19; 17:14-20; 18:15-22). Levinson, furthermore, notes that the Greek rendition 'phylakterion,' the origins of phylactery, in fact, means amulet and implies an association with magic that Deuteronomy rejects. Archaeological evidence reveals that the texts may have been engraved on metal and shown in full view (Levinson 2004:381).

Levinson (2004:381) reports that the doorways of temples and houses in the ancient Near East and ‘Israel’ were thought to be important transitional places ‘where divine images might be stored’ and where ‘religious-legal ceremonies were performed’ (see 4.3.1.3a). For example, Exodus 12 in which passage the doorways of Israelite houses became the barrier space between death and life. The entrance of Jael’s tent (Jdg 4:18) spells life or death for Sisera. Once the Canaanite general steps inside her tent, he crosses over from life to death. Similarly, when Jephthah’s daughter passes through the doorway of her house to meet him, she is transitioning from life to death (see 4.3.1.3a; see also Jdg 19:27). Inscribing these liminal places with cultic invocations was a widespread tradition in the ancient Near East. Deuteronomy embraces the same tradition but demotes the doorway as a cultic sacred space and places it under ‘the authority’ of the law in Deuteronomy (Levinson 2004:381; see also 4.3.1.3a).

3.2.4.2 *The Shema points towards divine nature*

Scholars have debated the meaning of יהוה אֱלֹהֵינוּ and the way in which אֱלֹהֵינוּ is understood (Block 2011:80-81; MacDonald 2012:71-73; cf Smith 2014:3). According to MacDonald (2012:71), if יהוה אֱלֹהֵינוּ is interpreted as YHWH is one, unique and ‘YHWH is our god, YHWH is one/alone,’ these translations deliver a sound superb meaning in the context of Deuteronomy 6:4 and its theme of loyalty to ‘YHWH alone’ by declaring the numerical oneness of YHWH and the resultant denunciations of polytheism (prevalent in Canaan, as alluded to in Judges) (cf Block 2011:80-82 Smith 2014:3; Keener and Walton 2017).

Another interpretation of ‘YHWH our God is one YHWH’ (see Dt 6:4) reads the statement as a mnemonic device that ‘YHWH the God of Abraham, YHWH the God of Isaac, and YHWH the God of Jacob all represented a single deity (cf Ex 3:6, 15; 4:5; Block 2011:79; cf 2.2.4.2). It is possible that the early Israelites understood *Shema* to mean exactly this. In Judges 6:13 Gideon uses the word אֲבוֹתֵינוּ (‘ābōtēnū) – our fathers or ancestors¹²⁸ when he speaks about to the presence and miracles of YHWH in their lives. YHWH responds¹²⁹ to Gideon’s remonstrations and doubt in 6:13 and 15: I will be (אֲהֵיָהּ – ‘ehyeh) (see also 3.4.4.1b), YHWH is saying that He is that same God (cf Ex 3:6,14-15).

Still another interpretation renders the statement ‘YHWH our God is one YHWH’ as an assertion of the integrity of YHWH, ‘a cryptic reference to his internal consistency and fidelity, that is, morally and spiritually he is one’ (Block 2011:80). Block (2011:81) remarks that the word אֱלֹהֵינוּ, although it has the meanings described above, certainly does mean the number one.¹³⁰ Thus, is it

¹²⁸ See Bible Hub 2022. ab.

¹²⁹ The Hebrew reads: אֵלֵינוּ יְהוָה נִאמָר – wayyōmer ‘ēlāw Yahweh [and YHWH said to him]. See Bible Hub 2022. Interlinear: Judges 6:14.

¹³⁰ Regarding the meaning of אֱלֹהֵינוּ Block (2011:80) remarks that in response to those commentators who assert that if ‘alone’ (in the rendering of the *Shema* as: ‘Hear, O Israel, YHWH is our God; YHWH alone’) was the proposed meaning then the declaration would have read יהוה לבדו (ləbaddōw Yahweh – YHWH alone). The more common word

possible to assume that לְכָל represents the divine number of YHWH and conveys a certain aspect of His nature?

In the ancient Near East, a deity could be associated with a particular number that in itself referred to certain traits and responsibilities of the deity (Lieberman 1987:174-175). Accordingly, the number 30 is associated with the identity of Sîn and refers to a description of the god that is related to his nature and role in the pantheon. Baal uses the word *ahidy* in the statement ‘*ahidy, dymlk ‘l ilm*’ (I am the only one who rules over the gods) to proclaim his rule over the gods in the pantheon (Smith and Pitard 2009:692; see 3.4.4.2).¹³¹ Smith and Pitard (2009:692) explains that the first word *ahidy* in the statement ‘*ahidy, dymlk ‘l ilm*’ is (a combination of) the number ‘one’ plus (the letter) *y* and refers to Baal’s singular status in relation to the pantheon. Smith and Pitard add that it is possible that a similar claim of divine status is made in Deuteronomy 6:4 in which לְכָל is interpreted as referring to God as one. However, it is also possible that it was a statement that refers to ‘Israel’s attachment’ to God alone: ‘Yahweh is our God, Yahweh alone’ (Dt 6:4; Smith and Pitard 2009:692; cf Keener and Walton 2017). Nevertheless, the statement by Baal convey the idea of the supremacy ‘of that god’s rule’ (Block 2011:81n, 30; Keener and Walton 2017).¹³² The

for alone is, לְכָל (cf 2 Ki 19:15, 19; Ps 86:10; Smith 2014:3; cf MacDonald 2012:71). The actual word referred to in 2 Ki 19:15, 19 and Ps 86:10 is לְבַדְדָּהּ (*lābaddēkā* – alone) and contains the word לְכָל (*lakāl* – of all). לְכָל (*lakāl*) in itself is derived from the root word כָּל (*kol* – all) also has the meaning of the whole/completeness (see Bible Hub 2022. Kol.) and in this sense it is possible that לְכָל may express a compound unity or used to express an absolute value. לְכָל , has several other meanings, it can denote a numerical value: one (Gn 1:9; 42:11) or first (Gn 1:5; 2:11). It can also mean ‘the same’ or ‘one and the same’ (11:6; 40:6); signify oneness as ‘singleness’ (Ex 12:46; 37:22); interpreted as an undivided oneness; that is, unity of purpose (Ex 24:3); or understood as a word that means uniqueness (2 Sm 7:23) (Sumner [sa]:1-11).

Block states that לְבַדְדָּהּ is an adverb and because ‘the *Shema* consists of nominal clauses the word is inappropriate in this sense.’ However, Block notes that to interpret the word as ‘alone’ is not as extraordinary as scholars believe it to be since the dictionary definition of the word לְכָל certainly is ‘one.’ Scholars ‘have identified a variety of texts scattered throughout the Old Testament,’ for example: Joshua 22:20; 2 Samuel 7:23; 1 Chronicles 29:1; Job 23:13; Zacharia 14:9 where the לְכָל ‘functions as a semantic equivalent to לְבַדְדָּהּ , ‘unique, only, alone’ (Block 2011:80). Parallels of the ‘exclusive use of לְכָל ’ can also be found in extra-biblical texts and ancient Near Eastern languages (Block 2011:81n30).

¹³¹ Ancient Near Eastern Texts, at times, refer to gods and kings by means of number cryptograms (Hays, Duvall and Pate 2007:180). The gods manifested themselves by means of numbers. Cosmological phenomena could be understood by means of (the) numbers (of the gods). Hebrew numbers often were used emblematically by the biblical authors as well (Hays, Duvall and Pate 2007:180; cf Block 2011:80). (A parallel for לְכָל as referring to the oneness or unity of God is found in Genesis 2:24. The word one in the verse is אֶחָד – ‘*ehād*’ that is the numeral one in Hebrew) (Bible Hub 2022. Genesis 2:24).

The Old Testament writers often make use of a literary device known as *mashal*, allegory in the Biblical text (Lieberman 1987:162). Jotham, for example, uses *mashal* to tell the story of the trees that wanted to anoint a king over them (Jdg 9:7-15). In this sense לְכָל acquires a (spiritual or symbolic) meaning that may be understood to reveal aspects about the nature of YHWH. Taking the above mentioned into account, לְכָל is the number of YHWH as 30 is the number of Sîn. Since the number 30 reveals aspects of the character of the moon god, so does the number one reveal aspects about the nature of YHWH.

¹³² Analogously, an ancient Near Eastern supplicant prays to the goddess Ishtar and acknowledges her supremacy by praising her as the valiant daughter of Sîn who has no rival (Stephens 1969:385). The supplicant addresses the goddess by the name Irnini which was another name for Ishtar in her fierce and violent aspect (Kovacs 1989:113). When Enlil and Baal make their statements, they are revealing aspects of their nature. Unlike modern society where names and

words of Baal quoted above do not imply that there are no other gods but that Baal is unsurpassed, are unique in ability and unequaled in his rule.

Similarly, the statement יהוה אֱלֹהֵינוּ does not rule out the existence of other gods, rather, it affirms that there is only one God, who is unique in both essence and character (see 3.3; 3.4). Thus, אֱלֹהֵינוּ may denote the uniqueness of YHWH in relation to His eternal, exclusive sovereignty which is what the early Israelites recognise when they called on YHWH in their times of need (cf Jdg 3:9, 15, 4:3; 6:8-10, etcetera). Considering the foregoing, the monotheistic ethos ingrained in the *Shema* allows YHWH alone to possess all the attributes of the supreme God. The *Shema* therefore points towards these divine characteristics:

- YHWH is omnipotent (see 3.3.5). However, ancient Near Eastern texts, for example, an Egyptian prayer, reveal the vulnerability of a god: ‘The finger of Seth is drawn out of the eye of Horus, [so that] it may become well’ (Wilson 1969a:325).¹³³ YHWH on the other hand is יהוה אֱלֹהֵינוּ and without equal or rival; YHWH is all-powerful. In Judges, YHWH Himself overcomes the enemy (cf Jdg 5:4-5; 7:22). Since the LORD’s power is innate, He does not require magical spells to bring an intended result (see Snell 2010:107). Unlike the other gods who were inextricably linked to magical practices (Arnold 2013), YHWH exists free from magical influences. He is Himself the source of power (Snell 2011:107; cf 3.3.3-3.3.5.1; cf Footnote 134). Ancient Near Eastern nations believed that prescribed (magic) recitations and imitative acts could control and use the powers of the divine and physical realms (Arnold 2013).¹³⁴ Judges demonstrates that YHWH cannot be manipulated in the same manner (Jdg 5:4-5; 7:22; 6:11-40; 13:3-20).

statements made by individuals are not descriptions of their personalities, in the ancient world, it was the converse and statements, although not always necessarily truthful, revealed something about the divine personality.

¹³³ The prayer is directed at Amun-Re by an Egyptian high priest in the ritual of waking up Amun-Re and preparing the god for his daily activities as they are described in brief extracts of texts (Wilson 1969a:325). One extract describes the waking of Amun-Re of Karnak each morning and preparation of the god for his daily activities. Another extract relates the preliminary burning of incense and a further two texts deals with the opening of the sanctuary in which the god resides ((Wilson 1969a:325-326).

¹³⁴ Formulaic magic words were frequently used by people to invoke a god so that the god would successfully complete a task that the people needed. Consider an Akkadian incantation, for example, that would be pronounced before the performance of a magic rite that would unleash the god’s power: ‘You are the created bull, created by the great gods. You were created for the service of the great gods’ (Sachs 1969:336). Through these practices people thought that they could achieve gains for the human realm that would otherwise be impossible. In this way nature and the gods were viewed as being under the sway of magic (or supernatural) forces. On the other hand, Israelite monotheism and idea of transcendence (see also 3.3.6) made this an impossibility (Arnold 2013; cf Elwell 1984:1172). Rabbi Schorsch (2002) asserts that: ‘Its [magic] underlying premises was the pagan idea that the gods, like humans, were subject to fate, a meta-divine realm that predated and transcended them. Magic exploited divine weakness by activating meta-divine forces to induce or compel the gods to heed the bidding of mortals.’ Schorsch (2000) continues: ‘The Torah bristles at such contamination of its overarching monotheism, ‘You must be wholehearted with the Lord Your God, is the way Deuteronomy summed up its indictment of magic.

Thus, it can be said that the *Shema* functioned independently of any magic practices; the words by themselves were not part of a formulaic invocation uttered during a magic rite to release the power of YHWH and neither could it be used to summon YHWH or control the LORD at the behest of people. As indicated above, unlike ancient Near

- The statement יהוה אֵלֵינוּ expresses the idea that YHWH has an unchanging nature and an unfailing integrity; He is always faithful, ‘just and right,’ without iniquity (Dt 32:4; Roberts 2002:123; see 3.3-3.3.6.3). The statement יהוה אֵלֵינוּ, juxtaposes the divine persona of YHWH with that of the other gods who have capricious natures and unethical mores (see 2.2.5.8c; cf Footnote 138).¹³⁵ The statement ‘YHWH is one’ is, thus proposed to be a confirmation of YHWH’s diachronic, or historical unity, in other words, ‘he is one and the same to Israel throughout her generations’ (MacDonald 2012:73).
- The view that ‘YHWH is one’ may allude to the idea that ‘YHWH is alone without a divine family’ (MacDonald 2012:73). YHWH does not extend His love towards other gods or a divine family such as the one in the Ugaritic pantheon and neither does God have a consort¹³⁶ for ‘YHWH is one’ (see Smith 2001:62; Mills 1998:72; cf 2.2.3.1d; 3.6.1.1d; 8.2.2.2b). Mills (1998:72) remarks that YHWH is a single male deity with no divine partner and no divine family of named children in the Old Testament – a reality which makes it possible for humans (the early Israelites in Judges) to fill the vacuum left by the absence of a divine family (cf 2.2.3.1d).¹³⁷
- The statement ‘YHWH is one’ may reveal God’s protective covenant love for His people, His human family (cf Jdg 2:16-19; 10:16; cf 2.2.3.1d-e). Urbrock (1992:755-761) remarks

Eastern beliefs that centred on releasing power from the divine realm by means of magic influences (Kroeger and Evans 2002:107) and which most certainly would have involved the image of the deity, were never attributed to the utterance of YHWH’s name. Arnold (2013) remarks that ‘magic was tantamount to human rebellion that unlocked divine secrets, making humanity equal with God.’

¹³⁵ YHWH is a God of truth who does not lie nor does He change His mind (Nm 23:19; 1 Sm 15:29); ‘what he says he will do, and what he promises he will bring to pass’ (Roberts 2002:123; cf 3.3; 3.4). People were inclined to doubt the ‘divine words and promises’ (of the gods) and the polytheistic world of the ancient Near East provide people with increased validation for distrusting divine promises (Roberts 2002:123). Roberts remarks that if the god of a city is only one deity in an entire pantheon, how can people be assured that he will be able to fulfill his promises?’ Furthermore, how can people be certain that the divine assembly will not override the god’s desire and his promises to bless the city and its residents? Ancient Near Eastern texts reveal the bewildering proclivities and power displays of the gods; their penchant to be perennially embroiled in conspiracies and deception, extreme immoral activities; incestuous behaviour was not above these god, gratuitous bloodshed, hedonism, overindulgences, and nonsensical undertakings (see Kramer 1969a:37; cf 2.2.5.8).

¹³⁶ Archaeological discoveries the Kuntillet ‘Ajrud inscriptions from the ninth or eight century BC, for example, that mention YHWH and ‘his Asherah’ have led scholars to conclude that YHWH and Asherah were worshipped as a pair (Ackerman 1999). However, this would have been a practice severely condemned in the Old Testament. See also Van der Toorn (2018:11-12). I have not discussed the purported association of YHWH with Asherah at length in this study (see 8.2.2.2a) since this would not have been a feature of the unadulterated Yahwistic worldview expressed by the author/s of Judges but rather a facet of the syncretic cult that existed in the pre-monarchy (see also Finkelstein and Silberman 2002:242; Sha 2018:193).

¹³⁷ Ancient Near Eastern religions included the pervasive idea of the divine couple whose sexual union brought about the fertility of humans, animals, and the natural environment (Liverani 2014b:267; cf 2.2.3.1d; 7.4.4.1; cf 2.2.5.8b; 8.4.3.1; cf Footnotes 36 and 38). Late Bronze Age texts (ca 1500-1200 BC) from Ugarit, describe the god El, as ‘the creator’ and his consort, Asherah, in her role as the mother goddess, as the ‘creatress of the gods’ (Ackerman 1999; cf Smith 1994:xxiii; see also 3.6.1.1; 8.2.2.2a). In the Hittite religion the sun-goddess of Arinna and her consort, the weather god/storm god of Hatti ruled over the Hattian pantheon (Wasilewska 2000:103; cf 3.2.3.3a). The ever-popular Baal and Ashtoreth/Asherah (Jdg 2:13; 3:7; 10:6) represented the divine couple in the lives of the idolatrous Israelites (see also 8.2.2.2a).

that divine blessing may be appreciated as the continuous propitious working of YHWH ‘to bring about good in the world of nature and the life of individuals and families’(cf Langer 2016:146). By contrast, ancient Near Eastern people may have found life to be superstitiously terrifying and overpowering since they attributed all natural events and forces to the actions of their capricious gods (Perry 2016:20).¹³⁸

Utilizing the language of Deuteronomy 6:14, the author of Judges castigates the Israelites for frequently ignoring the instruction against idolatry. Judges 2:12 reads: ‘They followed and worshiped the various gods of the peoples around them’ (see also Jdg 3:6-7; cf Dt 6:14). The existence and worship of the gods/*shedim* mentioned in the Book of Judges (cf 2.2.5.8) posed a threat YHWH’s relationship with the Israelites in the warning given in Deuteronomy 6:14: ‘Do not follow other gods, the gods of the peoples around you’ (MacDonald 2012:72). With this in mind, the *Shema* and the rest of Deuteronomy may be construed as a polemic against the worship of these deities in Canaan. The covenant (Dt 5:2) binds YHWH as a ‘*baal*’ (*b’l*) a word that means master or husband to the Israelites (cf 2.2.5.3; 2.2.5.8; 3.6.1.1c), establishing YHWH as the master or husband of the tribes (Bracke 2000:22; cf Brueggemann 2000:103; Bullock 2007:118; Dille 2004:154). It is their loyalty towards YHWH that brings about covenantal prosperity, abundance and ideally equality in society but the Israelites will continuously forsake their husband (Bracke 2000:22).

The above association of the word קַוֵּנוּ with YHWH refers to His omnipotence which also entails His omnipresence and omniscience as evinced in Judges. The next sections should demonstrate to the reader how monotheism allowed people's conceptions of Deity to change, especially those of the early Israelites who lived in a polytheistic Canaan.

3.3 THE DIVINE NATURE

3.3.1 Introduction: The unique God

Monotheism defined the concept of deity in the ancient Near East as indicated before. Monotheism allows YHWH who is not part of a pantheon of gods to possess the unique qualities described in 3.3-3.3.6.3. Israelite monotheism acknowledges YHWH to be the one/unique God who cares for His people in His covenantal role as their sovereign King, provider and protector (see also Chapter Two).¹³⁹ All the Israelites needed to do to maintain their covenantal relationship was to keep to

¹³⁸ The ancient Near Eastern world was filled with magic and shadowy beings – demons and gods that ruled the natural world and the celestial sky, controlling every element therein, including the ‘sun and stars, rivers and mountains, the wind and lightning’ (Perry 2016:20; cf Wilson 1969c; cf Footnote 141). Perry comments that the Babylonians, for example, thought that the scorching breath of the Bull of Heaven caused droughts. Environmental catastrophes were thought to be the god’s punishment upon humans (Perry 2016:20).

¹³⁹ In an apparent role-reversal, the ancient Near Eastern deities demanded people to take care of them – to dress and feed their statues in the temples. Walton, Matthews and Chavalas (2000:120) observe that in some of these cultures sacrifice was a means of caring for the gods by providing food by means of, amongst others, the ritual sacrifices of their worshippers. Walton, Matthews and Chavalas (2000:120) add that the earliest archaeological evidence for

YHWH's 'terms and conditions' (Adeyemo 2010:297; see also Chapter Two). The following principles contributed to the uniqueness of the monotheistic mindset worldview presented in Judges: (1) YHWH's active involvement in the history of the Israelites (Jdg 2:1-3; 5:4-5; 6:11-40; 7:22; 13:3-20), (2) the realism of YHWH to the Israelite mind,¹⁴⁰ (3) the Israelites' understanding that YHWH would be faithful even if they were not faithful (Jdg 2:1; 6:8-10; 10:10:6-16, etcetera; cf 2.2.1-2.2.1.1). Another unique feature of the monotheistic worldview expressed in Judges was the idea that YHWH existed independently of nature (see below 3.3.3-3.3.5.1). In contrast Canaanite deities, such as the divine couple Baal and Asherah (see below), were essentially nature deities, a prevailing concept of deity among ancient Near Eastern people (Hill and Walton 2010:201).

3.3.2 YHWH is not a nature god

As previously indicated (see 3.3.1) the early Israelites were aware of what was expected of them, that they were to experience and worship YHWH as the supreme (and sole) giver of life; the guarantor of fertility, abundance and prosperity within the covenantal lifestyle in Canaan (cf Ex 19-24; Grintz and Sperling 2007:483; see Chapter Two). The ancient Near Eastern nations did not have similar divine assurances of fertility and abundance (Walton 2018; see below) since the gods did not possess full sovereignty over the land or the lives of their followers (MacDonald 2012:46).¹⁴¹

sacrifice goes back to the Ubaid period in the fourth millennium BC. The scholars also note that ritual sacrifice in Assyrian and Babylonian societies were performed to acquire the entrails that were thought to contain omens.

¹⁴⁰ In modern times the realism of YHWH in the texts of the Old Testament has been severely questioned and the consensus among some scholars is that, as a 'fictional character,' YHWH, was invented by the authors of Bible in order to fulfill a certain 'religious tradition' held (Gericke 2007:408; see also Havea 2020:81; Romer 2015a:3-4; cf Romer 2015b:255-272). See Carroll (1991:38) and Brueggemann (1997:58-59) describing the attitude by some that biblical texts must always reflect credibility (that fit with Western rationalism to the exclusion of the supernatural), if not they must be discarded or explicated. According to this view, the Old Testament texts are not always reflective of reality and must be rationalized to be acceptable: either by means of a sociological approach or a rhetorical method. The latter methodology allows for texts to be appreciated within the framework of 'artistic imagination and intentionality.' It can be concluded that this interpretative tactic permits a supernatural understanding of the texts to account for inexplicable events that do not fit within a socio-political dominant context (see Brueggemann 1997:58-59). I assume that it is for this reason that Brueggemann finds the sociological approach to textual analyses to be more acceptable since it does not tolerate any supernaturalism in the texts.

¹⁴¹ Nature contained tremendous power that could be unpredictable (and thus the gods were regarded to have incredible power and abilities that were either adversarial or beneficial to the lives of their human worshippers (Black and Green 2004:93; see Footnote 138; cf 2.2.5.8; 3.3.6-3.6.3; 3.4.4.2; 3.6.1.1; 8.2.2.2; see also Chapter Four). The gods' inhabitation of the natural environmental spaces might have been too accessible and near humans who greatly feared their formidable power and caprices. People would, consequently, attempt to assuage these gods with their sacrifices and offerings. The natural environment was also thought to be particularly energized by the gods and rituals were more effective when performed at special stones, trees and rivers (Bryce 2002:185; cf 4.3.1.2a-b). The wellbeing, prosperity and longevity of the people would depend on whether these deities who could be belligerent found the sacrifice acceptable or not (Putthoff 2020:86-87). By means of the theophanies in nature and their perceived influences on the human lives, the ancient Near Eastern peoples believed the gods to be active in nature and their history. Middleton (2005:188) observes that the 'nature gods' were frequently 'described in a manner fundamentally similar to the biblical portrayal of YHWH, as bringing historicopolitical judgment or blessing on people and nations' (cf Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:380; Walton 2018). Elsewhere, it has been noted that the gods could be fickle and capricious and that they could dispense destruction and prosperity in accordance with their impulses (cf 2.2.5.8; 3.4.4.2; 3.6.1.1; 8.2.2.2a; see also Chapter Four). This is also a view that is granted by the ancient Near Eastern texts (Walton 2018).

Unlike YHWH, the ancient Near Eastern gods were tied to nature (and geographical regions) in which milieu they could solely manifest (MacDonald 2012:46).

Since the gods did not have complete control and authority over all facets of human existence, people in the ancient Near East relied on a variety of gods to fulfill their needs (McDowell and McDowell 2017:399; cf Perdue 2012:113; cf 3.6.1.1). The ancient Near Eastern peoples thus as stated before, ascribed roles to innumerable gods, such as the god of the sea, the god of the sun and moon and so forth (Johnson 2010; cf Jdg 2:11-13; 3:5-6; 10:6; cf also 3.4.4.2a).

Hill and Walton (2010:201) comment that YHWH does not manifest Himself in nature; indeed He has full control over all of nature (Hill and Walton 2010:201). Johnson (2010) relates YHWH's sovereignty over His creation and who is unaffected by natural potencies such as wind or fire (cf Hill and Walton 2010:201; MacDonald 2012:46-47; cf 1 Ki 19:11-13; cf Footnotes 138 and 141). Yet despite the limitations of the nature gods (cf also 3.3.3-3.3.6.3), they would enthrall the early Israelites as shown by their adoption of the Canaanite cult of Baal and Asherah.

Curriel et al (2019:52) note that in Canaan people held the notion that the divine couple Ashtaroth/Asherah and Baal (Jdg 2:13; 3:7; 10:6; see 3.3.1; 8.2.2.2b) were the gods who bestowed fertility on people, livestock and the land . However, there was no assurance of the capricious gods' favour (cf 3.3.2.1a-b) (Finkelstein 2000:369; Horton 2008:108). It is still somewhat of a mystery that the early Israelites would abandon YHWH, who had promised in His covenant to be faithful and to bless them (see 2.2.5), and who had demonstrated His sovereign might by delivering them from their formidable enemies (cf 3.2.2.1b; 6.4). The incomplete conquest of Canaan which allowed the early Israelites to co-exist with their Canaanites in the same regions provides a reason (Jdg 1:19-36; 3:5-6; see 1.1.1). Smith (1984:377) remarks that the Israelites' veneration of Baal probably had to do with their development into an agrarian people (cf 3.6.1.1; 8.2.2.2a).

3.3.2.1 YHWH does not have a cult statue

YHWH never manifests His presence in a cult image. According to the Ten Commandments the Israelites were not allowed to make images and 'bow down to them and worship them' (Ex 20:4). Judges mentions the visible cultic image of Asherah, the 'Asherah pole' (Jdg 6:25-26) and the idols of Micah (Jdg 17:5) as well as the ephod created by Gideon which the Israelites worshipped (Jdg 8:27).

YHWH's direct physical presence among the early Israelites refutes the ancient Near Eastern concept of the presence of the (inaccessible) god in the temple who is primarily represented by his cult statue in association with the temple (Walton 2018). There are restrictions on the deity's

According to the Book of Judges these gods held no real power to influence the history of the Israelites (cf Jdg 10:11-13) that serving them only brought disaster (Jdg 2:1-3, 16-23; 3:1-14; 4:1, etcetera; cf Ps 82).

potential for power, presence, and knowledge because the god is limited by his image. This concept is also implied in Judges 10:14 when YHWH tells the idolatrous Israelites to cry out to the gods whom they serve to save them from their troubles. However, for most of their devotees, the gods remain unapproachable despite their cult images. The gods express their inability to communicate with their followers directly by saying: ‘We cannot descend to you nor can you ascend to us’ (Meier 1999:46).¹⁴²

I shall discuss the contrasts between YHWH and the Canaanite gods in terms of divine accessibility, which had a great impact on how the author/s of Judges and people in general perceived the divine nature, in the following sections.

a. YHWH and the unapproachable needy ancient Near Eastern gods

YHWH is the self-sufficient God, a ‘personal God’ who is accessible to His people since He dwells among them (Johnson 2010; cf Jdg 2:1-5; 6:8-10, 11-20; 13:3-20; Ex 29:45-46; Lv 26:11; Nm 5:3; 35:34; see 3.4). As was previously said, YHWH is actively involved in the affairs of His people. This is conceivable in the worldview of the author/s of Judges since monotheism permits it. Judges demonstrates that YHWH Himself becomes the point where heaven and earth converge (Jdg 2:1-3; 6:11-20; 3:3-19; cf Jdg 7:22). There is always a specific purpose behind this conversion: the salvation of the early Israelites for YHWH will preserve His covenant and His unfaithful people (see 3.2.2.1b). Therefore, He extends His assistance to His people often in a supernatural manner. Heaven has come to earth (cf Gn 28:10-28) and this meeting of the divine and the earthly is always connected with YHWH’s covenant/s as shown in Judges (2:1-3; 6:11-20; 3:3-19; see also 3.3.5.1).

The *Enūma Eliš* reveals that the gods dwell in the heavens. Stationed in the constellations the unfathomable gods are visible but inaccessible to the ancient Near Eastern people (see Dalley 2000:255, 259; cf 5.4.4). In the Ugaritic *Baal Cycle*, the gods live on distant Mount Sapan, a paradisaical abode, distant and prohibited to humans (Smith 1994:106, 119, 122-123; Coulter-Harris 2016:9-10; cf Habel 2003:300; Nissen 2011:178). In the ancient Near East, an interrelationship between the realm of the gods and the earthly abode could only be established through the temple

¹⁴² In the Old Testament YHWH-Israelite communication ideally occurs within a relationship of mutual and unconditional love and communion. As stated before, in the ancient Near East divine communication primarily exists in a ‘quid pro quo’ relationship; in return for their blessings the gods, require offerings and adulation and for their needs to be met by means of their statues (Miglio, et al [eds] 2020; cf Walton and Hill 2013:112). Walton and Hill (2013:112) remark on the fact that people could satisfy the needs of the gods which made the gods dependent on humanity, giving people some negotiating power with the gods. By contrast the prophets had to remind ‘Israel’ continually that YHWH did not depend on them for anything (cf Jdg 6:8-10; 10:11-14; Ps 50:7-15; Walton and Hill 2013:112).

Divine-human communication in the ancient Near East functions as a means to maintain the power of the king, the high stations of the elites and importantly to confirm the status of the lower classes since they especially were made to be the slaves of the gods after all (Dalley 2000:260-261). De Jong (2013:313) observes that in the ancient Near East, the prophet would speak on behalf of the state’s interests, rather than necessarily those of the king, but this required that the prophet include ideologies that benefited the state in his message. If the prophet belonged to the state cults, he would also speak on behalf of the gods (De Jong 2013:313; cf 5.3.2.4).

and the resident cult statue (Sommer 2016:221; cf Wallenfels and Sasson 2000:121; Hundley 2013:140).¹⁴³ Inasmuch as the temple is the intersection between the divine and earthly realms, the overarching *raison de' être* for the existence of the sanctuary is to meet the demands of the god (Walton 2015:147; cf Niehr 1997:76; Mettinger 2006:277; see 2.2.5.8; 3.3.2.1a; 3.3.5.1; 3.3.6; 3.3.6.2; Footnote 36; cf 2.2.3.1d). As mentioned before (see 2.2.5.8c) the gods never interact with people in a salvatory manner (cf 3.3.4; 3.3.5.1).

Worship at the temple is solely centred on the cult statue (Sommer 2016:221) and as stated before on meeting the gods' needs (Walton 2015:147). There is social interaction with the cult statue in the temple, but it is limited to the priests who are caring for the statues (Niehr 1997:76). The cult statue/s¹⁴⁴ are hidden in the cool interiors of the temple, accessible to the elites, the priests and presumably the king, but unavailable to the general populace (Wilson 1969c:22). It is possible that an opulent image or images of the god was placed in the temple mentioned in Judges 9:27. Judges 9:27 also mentions the people entering into the temple to celebrate a festival dedicated to the god. It is more likely that this celebration occurred in the temple courtyard since only the priestly officials could enter the interior of the sanctuary. A parallel for the aforesaid is found in a Hittite text that also states temple officials are instructed to employ watchguards to patrol the temple and its premises (Goetze 1969f:209).¹⁴⁵ The Tabernacle at Shiloh could also only be entered by YHWH's priests; however, Judges demonstrates how YHWH would come to overthrow the dominant cultural ideology of the unapproachable deity via the theophanic events in the narratives as stated above.

Both the priests' services in the temple, taking care of the cult statue, and the ordinary individuals' food provisions for the temple offerings and sacrifices reflect the intense religious activities and zeal to appease the needs and demands of the gods and in turn to gain their favour and blessing (Wallenfels and Sasson 2000:121-122; cf Niehaus 1995:20). The character and behavioural aspects of the deities are very human; they eat, drink, sleep, wash and dress (Niehr 1997:76).¹⁴⁶ In

¹⁴³ See also Niehr (1997:76) attributing a similar relationship between the Temple of Jerusalem (also the Tabernacle) as YHWH's residence on earth and heaven as His celestial dwelling place and stating that in this manner an 'interrelation between worship in heaven and the (*Israelite*) cult on earth is established' (italics and insertions mine).

¹⁴⁴ Sommer (2015:221) remarks that Marduk's Babylonian temple in the first millennium, had not only a statue of Marduk but also the stone images of other deities. The occurrence of different cult statues in a temple presents a parallel for the worship of multiple gods in one sacred area in previous eras.

¹⁴⁵ A nightly patrol prevented the ordinary people from entering the temple compound and importantly the theft of the cult statues. Robbery of the storerooms containing the numerous produces, such as grain, wine and sacrificial animals that were part of the daily offerings (Wallenfels and Sasson 2000:54; Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:514) were also averted by assigning watchguards as a security force. The common people could, however, participate in delivering to the temple, the offerings and animal sacrifices which were an integral component of the temple economy and that was required by both the law and personal obligation. An Egyptian source mentions an individual denying guilt in not cutting 'down on the food – (income) in the temples,' of not 'damaging the bread of the gods' and neglecting 'the (appointed) times and their meat offerings' and driving 'away the cattle of the god's property' (Wilson 1969c:34).

¹⁴⁶ Niehr (1997:76) states it is the responsibility of humans to provide for the deity's requirements for food as well as his overall wellbeing (see also 2.2.3.1d; 2.2.5.8; 3.3.2.1a; 3.3.5.1; 3.3.2.1a; 3.3.6; 3.3.6.2; cf Footnote 36) The deity

return for the divine blessings the people's offerings allowed the gods to be fed and dressed as also previously indicated. An Egyptian text describes the opulent appearance of the statue of the god adorned with precious stones/gems and clothing (Wilson 1969a:330). Hittite documents speak of the divine images overlaid with gold or silver, their clothing of 'royal linen' and the wealth (of the treasury) (Goetze 1969b:397). YHWH appears to people in the Book of Judges in human form as the Angel of YHWH (Jdg 2:1-5; 6:11-20; 13:3-20). Although sacrifices are made to Him (Jdg 2:5; 6:19 13:19) they are not eaten by the Angel but instead consumed by fire (Jdg 6:19; 13:19). In the worldview of the author/s of Judges, the sacrifices this demonstrates that people are not able to meet the requirements of the self-sufficient God.

b. Abandonment

YHWH's nature is such that His compassion never fails and therefore He never abandons His covenant people even when they choose to abandon Him (cf Jdg 2:18; 10:16; cf 2.2.1.1b; 2.2.2.1, etcetera). YHWH was easily accessible in the lives of the early Israelites primarily by means of the covenantal relationship (Habel 2003:300; cf 3.3.2.1a) and as Judges demonstrates since YHWH is always involved in the affairs of the early Israelites, He comes to their rescue time and again when they are in trouble (see also above, 3.3.2.1a). The gods, on the other hand, were for the most part indifferent to the challenges faced by their human adherents (cf Jdg 2:10-19; 3:7-8, 12-14; 4:1-3; 6:1-10; 10:14, etcetera; cf 2.2.5.8c; 3.3.5.1; 3.3.4; cf 3.3.2.1a).

Walton (2018) asserts that the vast majority of people in the ancient Near East felt that the great gods did not care about them or pay heed to their prayer requests due to the temple's geographic distance which made it inaccessible to many people (Walton 2018; cf 3.3.2.1a; 3.3.5.1; 3.3.4). Walton adds that the ordinary people were more prone to turn to their ancestral and household gods since these (lesser) gods were more likely to show an interest in them. These household gods (*teraphim*) may be referenced in Judges 17:5 in which the gods are present (in Micah's shrine and thus attentive to their worshippers). In the end, Micah's household gods depart when they are stolen by the Danites (Jdg 18:18, 30-31).

The anguish of the great gods' permanent departure from their temples presumably would have been considerably worse than the idea of the unreachable god. The ancient Near East gods had a reputation for abandoning cities for another god to destroy (Hayes 2012). Kang (2011:20) observes that this motif of divine abandonment has roots at least as far back as the final centuries of the third millennium. The tutelary goddess Inanna, for example, left her shrine in Akkad and used her

represented in the statue needs to be provided with food and drink, and his servants are responsible for waking him up, dressing him, and appeasing him by burning fragrant incense. Rituals, which can be viewed as the social interaction between the priests and the divine statue, govern all of this down to the last detail (cf Mettinger 2006:277). Taking care of the god in the temple is ritualistic behaviour strictly monitored by the prescribed and approved rituals at fixed times. In an Egyptian text the temple priests are charged to do their duties every hour according to the regulations for every day (Wilson (1969a:330).

weapons to attack her own city (Kang 2011:20; Baghos 2021:12).¹⁴⁷ In Assyria the gods abandoned their temples as a judgement on the iniquity, or breach of the treaty by the king (see also 3.3.2.1). Otherwise, when confronted by the more potent gods of the enemy, the gods fled their temples (Niehaus 2008:116). Engaging in their signature enigmatic behaviour, the ancient Near Eastern gods may also leave a city for no apparent cause (Niehaus 2008:117-118).

It may be within the context of the aforementioned ancient Near Eastern tradition that Gideon believes that YHWH had abandoned the Israelites (Jdg 6:13; cf 3.6.1.1). It is likely that Gideon believes YHWH's actions are the same as that of the unfathomable Canaanite gods. It is possible that Gideon is reproaching YHWH for His disloyalty, something that the Israelites had ironically done to YHWH. The Israelites' unanimity in believing in unmerited, unconditional divine protection is reflected in Gideon's question: 'but if the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us' (Jdg 2:1-3; 3:8, 15; 6:9, 10:10, etcetera). Evans (2017) remarks that Gideon is aware of the prophetic words in Judges 6:8-10 concerning YHWH's past deeds for the Israelites, but he makes no mention of how Israel's sin led to their current situation. It is thus also probable that Gideon was aware if YHWH had truly abandoned the Israelites, it was in response to their idolatry. However, it does not appear that the Israelites were alarmed by YHWH's apparent abandonment of the tribes before Judges 6:7, at least not to the extent that the people of Ophrah were following Gideon's destruction of Baal's altar (Jdg 6:28-30).

Niehaus (2008:116) observes that after the gods abandoned their temples and cities, the empire or kingdom – specifically the capital city and its temples – were left 'open to hostile gods and the armies they empowered' (cf 3.3.2.1a). In light of the aforesaid, the gods' departure would have had a disastrous impact on the psyche of those they left behind. One wonders what psychological effects the theft of their household gods had on Micah and his family (Jdg 18:14-17; cf 1 Sm 4:18-21). As previously indicated, the unfaithfulness of Israelites does not mean that YHWH has abandoned His people. YHWH will continue to be faithful to the Israelites. In contrast to Gideon's notion of God who could desert His people, the Book of Judges is full of references to YHWH faithfulness when He delivers the tribes from their enemies (see Jdg 2:16-18; 3:9-11; 4:6-7, 23, etcetera).

3.3.3 Omnipresence

Considering the above (see also 3.3.2-3.3.2.1a-b), YHWH's presence and power are not localized for He is not a nature god and neither is He bound to a cult statue which is also demonstrated in the Book of Judges in terms of YHWH's omnipresence (the presence of YHWH who is everywhere at the same time [Jdg 2:1-5; 5:4-5; 6:11-20; 13:3-20; 18:31; 19:19]), omnipotence (the

¹⁴⁷ The story can be found in the *Curse of Akkad* which dates back to the Ur III era (2047-1750 BC). It describes the conflict between the Akkadian king Naram-Sin (ca. 2261-2224 BC) and the gods (Mark 2014b). Inanna takes up arms against the city because of the destruction of the temple of Enlil by Naram-Sin (Kang 2011:20).

quality of YHWH having unlimited and great power [Jdg 3:10, 31; 5:4-5, 20; 7:22; 6:34, 36-39; 11:29 etcetera) and omniscience (the state of YHWH knowing everything [Jdg 2:3; 4:6-7, 9; 6:14; 7:10-11; 13:5; 20:27-28).

YHWH's eternal existence (see 3.4.3.1) signals His eternal sovereignty and His omnipresence. YHWH is in heaven (Ex 24:9-11) and simultaneously dwells in His Tabernacle (Ex 25:8). YHWH possesses both eternity and physical time and space simultaneously (Bromiley 1986:598). YHWH's transcendence in the Book of Judges (cf 6.3.4-6.3.5) shows that His presence is not restricted to the Tabernacle or the Ark of the Covenant (Jdg 2:1-3; 6:11; 13:3-20; cf Jdg 5:4-5; 7:22). YHWH comes from Seir in Edom (Jdg 5:4-5; see 3.5.1.3). YHWH goes from Gilgal to Bochim (Jdg 2:1-3; see 4.4.1.1b). He appears to Gideon (Jdg 6:11) and to the parents of Samson (Jdg 13:3-20). YHWH manifests His power and presence in the thunderstorm in Judges 5 (Jdg 5:4-5), and as already mentioned (cf 2.3.3; 3.2.2.1b) in the judges Othniel (Jdg 3:10), Gideon, (Jdg 6:34), Jephthah (Jdg 11:29) and Samson (Jdg 14:6) that demonstrates His powerful and supernatural acts in the lives of the early Israelites (see also Chapter Six). Few gods, according to Walton (2018) were omnipresent; instead, as shown above, Baal's presence is localized, bound to weather and the natural environment (Smith 1994:xxii; see 3.3.2, also 3.3.2.1). The Baal with *Thunderbolt* iconography (see Figure 3.2) depicts his reign over the mountains and the sea.



Figure 3.2 Baal with thunderbolt (Couturier 1996)

Unlike YHWH, the four gods in the Ugaritic Baal Cycle: 'Baal, the god of the storm; Athtar, the god of the stars....; Yamm, the god of the sea; and Mot, the god of the underworld,' occupy a separate place in the heavenly realm to which their presence, authority and powers are restricted (Smith 1994:xxii-xxiii).¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁸ The gods of the underworld played an important role in ancient Near Eastern religions (cf Footnotes 52 and 76). Sources from Ugarit (Ras Shamra) refer to Mot, the god of death and the underworld, worshipped by the Canaanites (Cassuto 1962:77-86) and probably the idolatrous Israelites. Egyptian texts mention Osiris as the chief god of death and prior to him, Anubis as a god of death and the afterlife. Kletter (2002:28-48); Mojsov (2008:15, 33-40, 51, 86, 94) and Taylor (2010:84, 107-109, 178) provide further information about the Egyptian ideas about death and the afterlife.

The sacrifices and offerings of Gideon and the parents of Samson (Jdg 6:19; 13:19) indicate that YHWH could be worshipped wherever people called on His name (Chyutin 2006:45; cf Knowles 2001:175). YHWH's omnipresence means that He can appear in the daily lives of people in the ordinary landscape (farm field and a wine press [cf 3.2.2.1b]) whenever there is a need (Kunhiyop 2012:43). This overrides the dominant cultural ideologies of the time according to which YHWH is more likely to appear to the priesthood at Shiloh since this is where the Tabernacle is and specifically the Ark of the Covenant that was held to be associated with God's presence (Dunn 2016:87). Chyutin (2006:45) remarks that Judges 17:6 shows that people could choose where they wanted to worship YHWH (although Micah's syncretic household religion went against the covenant). This idea emphasizes the Israelites' concept of YHWH's omnipresence (cf Jdg 6:19; 13:19) and it is a marker of their monotheistic beliefs of a Supreme Being who is almighty (Kunhiyop 2012:44).

3.3.4 Omniscience

The Book of Judges serves as a precedent of how direct divine revelations (the theophanies in Judges) are prophetic in the sense of predicting the future (Leet 1999:18; cf Jdg 2:1-3; 6:3-34; 13:3-20). The narratives in Judges demonstrate how history in Israel is divinely directed for a purpose and how existing events are influenced and inspired by YHWH's future purpose for the early Israelites (Leet 1999:18). The Angel of YHWH appears to the early Israelites to rebuke them for their idolatry and to predict their future troubles with the Canaanites (cf 2.2.1.1b; 2.2.2.1; 5.3.2.2a, d-e; 6.3.5). The Angel of YHWH instructs Gideon about the war against Midianites (Jdg 6:11-20). The Spirit of YHWH comes down on Gideon, he blows the *shofar* (an instrument when it is blown was 'an immediate revelation of God' [Leet 1999:18]) to call the tribes to engage in warfare (Jdg 6:34; Leet 1999:18; cf 5.3.2.4ai; 6.4.3). In Judges 13, the Angel announces the birth of Samson who will take the lead in delivering the Israelites from the Philistines (Jdg 13:5), transforming the lives of both the mother and Manoah (Jdg 13:3-20; see also Exum 1992:511-512; cf 3.2.2.1b; 3.4.4.1c; 8.5.4.1; cf 6.3.5.3).

YHWH reveals His knowledge of the future through the proper divinatory methods (see Chapter Five), for example, primarily through His prophets (Jdg 2:3; 4:6-7, 9; 7:13:5; cf Dt 31:6; Is 11:2; Niehaus 2008:176; cf Martin 2009:4). Deborah receives essential divine knowledge about the Israelite war against the Canaanites (Jdg 4:4, 6-7; see 3.2.2.1b; 3.2.3.3b; 6.4.1; cf 7.6.1.1).

Omniscience together with the divine attributes of omnipresence and omnipotence are unique characteristics of Deity in Israelite monotheism. The ancient Near Eastern gods are not omniscient despite possessing superior intelligence (Batto 2022). 'They can be surprised,' 'experience uncertainty and confusion' and 'make ill-advised decisions' (Walton 2018). Perhaps as a result of their lack of knowledge, the ancient Near Eastern gods, unlike YHWH, were at times portrayed as not

interested ‘in the affairs of human beings’ (Vogt 2009:184; see 3.3.5.1; cf 3.3.2.1a) and so they are unwilling to save the Israelites from their cyclical oppression (cf Jdg 2:10-19; 10:14).

3.3.5 Omnipotence

Dyrness and Garcia-Johnston (2015) note that YHWH’s indispensable and fundamental ‘nature and vocation in and with creation’ is unequivocally set down in the Old Testament. YHWH’s omnipotence (see 3.4.5) is an integral component of this unique God who could speak and create everything; ‘who is able to create out of nothing and who created even those things worshipped as gods (cf 2.2.5.8; 3.3.2) (Vogt 2009:63; Wenham 1987:37-38).

Monotheism allows people to perceive of YHWH’s sovereign power as a fundamental aspect of the divine essence. Hill and Walton (2010:201) remark that in the system of monotheism ‘God is the ultimate power in the universe’ and He ‘is not subordinate to anyone or anything.’ Hill and Walton (2010:201) further asserts that since YHWH is autonomous and slave to none, He cannot therefore be manipulated by ‘cultic ritual’ to bestow his power on humanity for their benefit (cf Mills 1998:109; cf 2.2.3.1c-d; 2.2.5.3; 2.2.5.1; 7.4.4.1). Consequently, YHWH influences events in the lives of the early Israelites (see above) even if the Israelites do not expect it or foresee God’s actions quite in the way they anticipate (cf Jdg 2:12-16; 6:11-20; 13:3-20; see Mills 1998:109).

As stated before (see 3.3.3), Baal’s power and presence is localized and, as a fertility and storm god, this deity may announce the forces of nature; in the clap of thunder and in the strike of lightning his power is revealed (cf Footnote 138). The people understood these weather phenomena to be signs of Baal’s power that was actuated in the fall of rain sent to fertilize the land in order to bless the people (cf Footnotes 138 and 141). For this reason it was important to appease the gods of the Canaanites and perhaps enter into covenants and make ritual sacrifices to them (cf Jdg 2:1-3; 2.2.1.1b; 2.2.2.1). However, in the worldview of the author/s of Judges (cf Jdg 2:1-3; 6:8-10; 10:10-14, etcetera), Baal is a usurper in Canaan and a *shedim* (cf 2.2.5.3; 2.2.5.8).

The author/s of Judges condemn the worship of the foreign gods because they constitute a dark and corrupt system that viperously seeks to corrupt and enslave the Israelites (cf Jdg 2:1-5; 6:8-10; 10:6-16). The (corrupt) rule of the Amorites’ deity Amurru is likely connected to the sin of the Amorites mentioned in Genesis 15:16 (cf 3.6.1.1). In the biblical worldview, the Canaanite gods Chemosh (Jdg 11:24), Dagon (Jdg 16:23), Baal and Asherah (Jdg 3:7; 6:25-26; see 3.6.1.1) are among those who are subject to YHWH’s judgement, which YHWH desired to execute through the complete ‘conquest’ of Canaan by His elected people (cf Gn 15:16).

The religious worldview held by the author/s of Judges, could construe of God as working either directly or through His people (certain judge) to effectuate His redemption (Wright 2019:431; cf Niehaus 2008:176). YHWH instructed the Israelites to destroy the Canaanite high places which constituted not only YHWH’s removal of the foreign gods’ presence from these territories but also

the shaming of an evil god (cf Jdg 6:25-26; see also 2.3.2.1c). Shattering the stone idols represented their uttermost defeat and the power of YHWH over the wicked Canaanite gods (Bechtel 1994:91; cf Healey 1999:218; see 2.3.2.1c). Bechtel (1994:91-92) recounts the shaming of Dagon by YHWH in 1 Samuel 5:1-5. Niditch (2001:188) affirms the destruction of the temple of Dagon by Samson and thus the shattering, and shaming the statue of Dagon in his temple. It was the ultimate defeat for a nation to have its sacred places, temples and altars destroyed since this achievement represented the powerlessness of their god to save his temple and the people under his rule (Parry 2010:153; cf Jdg 6:28-30). A god's debility is also represented by the construction of the temple of the conquering god on the site of his sanctuary (Hanson 2012:93). The Israelite tribes had to utterly destroyed the Canaanite high places and not merely build over them (Ex 7:2; Ex 34:13; Jdg 2:2; cf Jdg 24-26; cf 2.3.2.1c; 3.4.4.1b). The Hebrew words for utterly (הַחָרַם – *haḥārēm*) and destroy [תַּהַרִים – *taḥārīm*] (Dt 7:2) are both derived from the same root חָרַם – *charam* that can also mean to devote or consecrate (something to YHWH).¹⁴⁹ The destruction of the Canaanite high places corresponds to a longstanding tradition of similar actions in Canaan (Zevit 2002:77). When the townspeople of Ophrah demand the death of Gideon for destroying the Baal altar and Asherah pole, Joash questions Baal's status as a god (Jdg 6:31-32). He points out the powerless state of Baal to defend himself against a mere man such as Gideon, and Baal's reliance on his worshippers to rescue him (Jdg 6:31-32). Joash is declaring YHWH's power and sovereignty over Baal. Grudem ([sa]) remarks that the exercise of YHWH's sovereignty is His reign as King over His creation, over Canaan. The entire universe is involved in the establishment of YHWH's sovereign will (McCann 2011:59-60; cf Grudem [sa]). Similarly, as shown above, the Israelite individuals mentioned are engaged in (re)establishing YHWH's sovereignty and rule in Canaan. According to the mindset informing the narrator/s of Judges, the aforesaid was the divine directive handed to the Israelites by their covenant God.

3.3.5.1 Divine sovereignty in Judges and the ancient Near East

McCann (2012:1) describes God 'as an absolutely perfect being, who as creator exercise complete sovereignty over all that is, was, and will be.' The author/s of the Book of Judges unwaveringly ascribes cosmic sovereignty to mono-YHWH (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:177; cf 3.2.2.1; cf 3.4). McCann (2011:59-60) contends that Judges 5:20 demonstrates that YHWH's sovereignty is not only absolute over the world but extends over the entire cosmos and as a result the focus of the entire universe is establishing YHWH's sovereign will (cf 3.3.5) (Jdg 5:20; McCann 2011:59-60), the early Israelites for example establishing the divine will via the covenantal life in Canaan. Judges shows that even if the Israelites reject His authority, YHWH will exercise His sovereignty in accordance with the divine will and plan for His people. Consequently, YHWH's sovereignty, as presented by the author/s of Judges, 'extends not only the physical world but also over human decisions and actions (cf Jdg 4, 6, 13), over what is moral and what is not (cf Jdg 19-

¹⁴⁹ See Bible Hub 2022. *charam*.

21), over conceptual reality and even reaches to God's own nature' (cf Jdg 2:1) (McCann 2012:1; cf 3.3-3.3.6.3). YHWH as sovereign King of the early Israelite is able to establish guidelines for the behaviour of His people on earth through the Sinai Covenant which aligns with His values (see Finkelstein 1992:370). YHWH assures people's well-being if His will is followed, a benefit that no polytheistic religious system could easily provide (see Finkelstein 1992:370; cf 2.2.5.8c-d).

Since YHWH's sovereignty is part of the divine nature it is never acquired and it certainly can never be lost. As indicated before, YHWH's sovereignty must be exercised in keeping with His value system and to bring about the divine will – to deliver His people from their enemies and ultimately their idolatry. Finkelstein (1992:370) observes that YHWH as Sovereign of His creation is motivated to make decisions that conform to His 'highest ideals' and He is, accordingly, totally free to give everything that occurs in the cosmos His full and unselfish attention. The narratives in Judges show the intense dedication of YHWH's involvement in the lives of the Israelites particularly to correct their covenantal infidelity. Judges 4 and 5, for instance, (according to McCann 2011:60), denotes instituting life 'as God intends it; that is (re)establishing the covenantal lifestyle and the restoration of order in the lives of His people. At the same time, the exercise of YHWH's sovereignty as described above, does not mean that YHWH will impose it on an unwilling people. Finkelstein (1992:370) argues that only man is capable of disobeying the will of God (cf Dt 30:15-20; Jos 24:15), but he does so fully aware of the 'Law' and the eventual results of his decisions (cf Dt 28:1-68; cf Jr 29:11; see Chapter Two). Similarly, the early Israelites have been given the choice to follow YHWH or the other gods (Jos 25:15). As mentioned before, blessings will follow upon covenantal faithfulness while the consequence of disobedience is always oppression as shown in Judges. YHWH exercises His authority over His people when they willingly seek it again (cf Jdg 3:9, 15, etcetera).

The Judges 11 account reveals that YHWH alone sovereignly governs and directs the historical course of the Israelites (Martin 1975:1-3, 14; cf Jordan 1999:47; see 2.2.3.5; 2.3.3; cf 2.2.2; 2.2.2.1; 2.2.4-2.2.5).¹⁵⁰ It is possible that the ancient Near Eastern nations may have held a parallel concept of their gods as interactive in their history. Given the biblical tradition of YHWH's involvement in Israelite history, Jephthah may hold a similar belief about Chemosh and is conveying it to the Ammonite king (Jdg 11:24). However, it is believed that the gods had no interest in the history of the nations that they ruled over (see Finkelstein 1991:370; Walton 2018; cf 2.2.5.8c; 3.3.4; 3.3.2.1a). The ancient Near East gods did not exhibit a divine plan for humanity (cf 2.2.5.8c) and since, they also lacked absolute sovereignty, they, thus, cannot be held responsible for the flow of humanity's history (cf 2.2.5.8; 3.3.1-3.3.2.1; Finkelstein 1991:370). A god or goddess cannot be compelled to act in humanity's best interests; instead, they typically acted in their own self-

¹⁵⁰ YHWH's sovereignty as seen through the lens of biblical monotheism was a rare religious orientation considering the contextual diversity of ancient Near Eastern polytheistic religious philosophies (Benzel et al 2010:39; Walton 2018; cf Sperling 2020:441-443; Smith, JA 2020:3).

interests centred essentially on the acquisition of power and wealth often times through warfare. Finkelstein (1991:370) observes that the conflicting ethics of the gods (cf 3.2.3.3a; cf Footnote 138) that underlie their baser and selfish needs inhibit them from realizing the maximum ideals in their cosmic decisions (see also below). In addition, the gods are capricious (Marshall 1989:50; cf Grant 2008:862), life is random and, in the end, people were responsible for their own lives and fate (Unterman 2017:110; cf 2.2.5.8c; 3.3.5.1; cf Footnotes 138 and 141).

The Canaanite gods may have some sovereignty, over the regions that they rule, for example, the site mentioned in Judges 6:25-26 but the same narrative in Judges also reveals that only YHWH's sovereign activities are effective (see above), whereas those of the other gods are ineffective (Clifford 1994:173; cf McCann 2012:1, 6-7; Arnold 2014:10). As stated before, the gods cannot deliver the idolatrous Israelites from their enemies (cf Jdg 10:14). Batto (2004:144) remarks that the ancient Near Eastern notion of divine sovereignty referred to the universal and absolute supremacy of the 'chief deity over heaven and earth.' Ancient Near Eastern people perceived that their nation's god ruled the cosmos and was superior to all other gods (Batto 2004:144). The Ammonites mentioned in Judges 11, for example, worshipped the god Chemosh whom they considered as their supreme deity (cf Jdg 11:24; Sayce 2015).¹⁵¹ However, the ancient Near Eastern gods are mighty but they do not possess sovereign power as stated above and for all the reasons previously described (see 3.3.2-3.3.2.1) (see Walton 2018; Dalley 2000:241-242). At times a god may acquire supremacy and concomitant power over the other gods in the pantheon. Baal 'rises from slave to kingship' (Habel 1964:53). The execution of the gods' power is not autonomous and depends on the approval of the divine council as well as magic; the casting of spells (Dalley 2000:238, 241-242; cf Footnote 36). Marduk can only overcome Tiamat by means of magic spells and magical weapons (Dalley 2000:249-255).¹⁵² Baal initially cannot overthrow Mot, despite his weapons that include a 'slaughterer' and a 'strike' (Smith 1994:310).¹⁵³

As stated before, divine sovereignty in the ancient Near East existed within a system of reciprocity. Humans receive divine beneficence in return for upholding the temple and taking care of the gods by means of their offerings and sacrifices (cf 2.2.3.1d; 2.2.5.8; 3.3.2.1a; 3.3.5.1; 3.3.6; 3.3.6.2; cf Footnotes 36 and 146). The same reciprocal dynamic functioned in the early Israelites society with one marked difference: it operated through the covenant and the practice of it (Fraade 2011:19).

¹⁵¹ According to Sayce (2015), Chemosh was the sovereign deity of the Ammonites who revered him 'even as almost the only object of their worship.' Sayce goes on to say that *The Moabite or Mesha Stele* carries a monotheistic tone, with the exception of the passage that refers to the commitment of women and maidens to Ashtar-Chemosh.

¹⁵² Marduk and Tiamat battle each other for supremacy (see Whatham 1910:290-333) for further details). In the *Baal Cycle* Yamm sends 'a flaming messenger with a sharpened tongue' to the divine assembly presided over by El (Kaiser 1986:161) to scare the assembly into submitting to his demands (see also Parker 1999b:794-800).

¹⁵³ See Smith 1994:322-323, 335-339 for more on the weapons and symbolism of Baal (cf Kaiser 1986:169; Yon 2006:10).

A rejection of the sovereignty of YHWH always sets the supernatural realm in motion (Jdg 2:1-2; 16; 3:10; 4:6-7; 6:11-40; 7; 13:3-20; cf 3.3.4-3.3.5) and as indicated before (see 3.3.2.1a) divine sovereignty and certain other qualities of the divine nature are directly transferred from the realm of the divine into the Israelite community (Hackenbracht 2019:59). It is unfortunate that the majority of the early Israelites followed the lifestyle of the Canaanite gods that led to the mayhem described in Judges.¹⁵⁴

3.3.6 The divine nature and cosmic order

The sovereignty of mono-YHWH and certain aspects of the divine nature described below create true order in the universe and in the world of the early Israelites in Canaan (cf Jdg 3:10-11; 4:23; 5:31, etcetera). Previously (see 2.2.5.8, also 3.3.2-3.3.5.1), the origins and nature of the *shedim* were discussed. The nature of the *shedim*, will be further expanded upon in the following sections, along with comparisons to YHWH's nature.

Among the Israelites in the Book of Judges, it is YHWH's covenant that determines the value system and codes of societal equilibrium by which the early Israelites can achieve a well-functioning and orderly society (Athas 2020; cf 3.2.3.3a; 3.3.5.1; cf Footnote 138). As was previously said, YHWH is the highest standard bearer, and it is fundamental to who He is to uphold these standards whether or not there is a covenantal connection (Finkelstein 1992:370).

In addition to enjoying a covenantal relationship with Him, YHWH desired that the early Israelites establish a certain order in the land of Canaan. As stated in Chapter Two, the early Israelites were given a set of covenantal regulations to live by and were entrusted with upholding order in their lives and society by their obedience to YHWH's covenant. The aftermath of the Israelites' continuous breach of their covenant, as the reader of Judges is well aware, is recorded in the Book of Judges. Subsequently, it is YHWH's unwavering faithfulness that prevented His unfaithful people from descending into total chaos. Based on the biblical worldview; also that of Judges' author/s, YHWH gave the divine mandate for ruling over the earth, keeping His laws, within a covenantal relationship and maintaining order in the world to the people that He had created (Gn 1:26-28; see 2.2.5.8).

As described in Chapter Two, the deception of the *shedim* can be considered to have continued ever since the fall, when the first parents were misled into disobeying YHWH and 'relinquish' their governing authority of the planet when YHWH drove them out of Eden (see Gn 3; see 2.2.3.1b also 2.2.5.8; cf Is 25:7; Jr 9:6; 2 Chr 3:15-16). Psalm 82:5 states: 'The gods know nothing, they understand nothing. They walk about in darkness; all the foundations of the earth are shaken.'

¹⁵⁴ How great the deception of the Israelites must have been. In modern society the ongoing fraud and deception in religious cults have been reported (See Gomes 1995:79; Stokes 2007:183; Van Twist 2017:47-60; cf Perlmutter 2003:341 on the subject of deliberate religious deception).

The rule of the gods over humanity is calamitous. One could argue that the lives of the early Israelites were indeed shaken by the armies of the Canaanites and other nations in the ancient Near East in Judges and throughout the history of the Old Testament. The reader is already aware that, in the worldview of the author/s of Judges, had the Israelites obeyed their covenant they would never have experienced the rule and oppressive power and chaos of the other nations in Judges. Given the foregoing, the author/s of the Book of Judges believed, as stated before, that the only crucial element that kept the Israelites' world from falling into chaos was consistent covenant keeping.

Similar to the belief that YHWH alone could restore order in their domain, the ancient Near Eastern nations depended on specific 'powers' to maintain the universe's order. The ancient Near Eastern gods are thought to preserve cosmic order; and in more complex religions 'powers' such as 'fate' or 'norms' (*me*, Sumerian, and *ma'at* [also translated as justice or truth], Egyptian) furnish the universe with stability and the divine realms with order (Wallenfels and Sasson 2000:121; cf Wolters 1995:34; Perdue 2008:80). According to Wolters (1995:35), the Sumerian *me* may constitute a set of rules and regulations' given to each 'cosmic entity and cultural phenomena for the purpose of keeping it operating forever according with the plans laid down by the deity creating them' (Wolters 1995:34). The Assyrians and Babylonians adopted the Sumerian concept of *me* and expressed it with the Akkadian terms *parsu*, *mesaru* and *kittu*. Wolters points out 'that *me* refers not only to cosmic entities but also to cultural phenomena' which conforms to the idea that cosmic order in the ancient Near East included systems in human societies and culture (see Walton's [2018] description below) (see also Goelet and Levine 1998:295; McIntosh 2017:28).

However, Walton (2018) observes that the gods can only maintain cosmic order if their needs are taken care of (Walton 2018). People's role in the ancient Near East was also to follow moral behaviour and the practice justice but only to the extent that it ensured an efficient and functional society for the sole purpose of meeting the needs of the gods (Walton 2015:146). An anarchic society is less productive, people are not able to grow crops, raise herds and present their gifts to the gods at the temples (Walton 2015:146).¹⁵⁵ A Mesopotamian text, for example advises priests not to overfeed the gods and so damage 'the basic production intended for the entire community's sustenance' (which reduced people's productivity) (Liverani 2004:20).¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵ See also Bryce (2014) describing the lawless groups of semi-nomads, who dwelled in the mountain regions Amurru – an expanse of land between the Orontes River and the coast of the central Levant, who would bring chaos to that region.

¹⁵⁶ In reality, however, the extreme wealth generated in the temple and palaces remained in the hands of the king and nobles and other elite classes (Liverani 2020:16; cf Aubet 2013:120-121). Accordingly, ethical behaviour and justice exist in the ancient Near East but only insofar as they safeguard the gods' status in the temple and cult and paradoxically creating the socio-economic imbalances that resulted in wealth and status benefits for the elites (see also Chapter Seven).

The power of the gods to sustain cosmic order is also associated with wisdom, and the wisdom of the gods is in turn linked with information gathered from divination (Walton 2018; cf Ps 82, see above). The divinatory wisdom derived from the gods, however, is arbitrary and unable to bring about the maintenance of real cosmic order because the gods are tricksters (cf 2.2.5.8). In addition, Walton (2008b:648) notes that people in ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia did not consider the gods to be responsible for evil or suffering in the world and thus the experience of these adversities that brought chaos to their lives did not have to be resolved in reference to the justice of the gods (cf 2.2.5.8c-d).

In the Israelite community, however, nothing occurred or existed independent of the ‘jurisdiction of YHWH’s sovereignty’ (Walton 2008b:648) and God’s attitude towards sin and cosmic order. The early Israelites understood that they will experience chaos and suffering if they violate their covenant (cf Jdg 2:1-3; 10:15-16). Yet YHWH will deliver them if only they would call out to Him (cf Jdg 3:9, 15, 4:3; 6:7; 10:10, 15; cf Jdg 2:16-19). In contrast to the ancient Near Eastern religious systems, YHWH did not view the early Israelites’ life as centred around ritualistic acts of worship, offerings, and sacrifices – despite their importance. He desired and valued a relationship with Him alone, with the One True God, the only God, Creator and Deliverer of (early) Israel (Goldingay 2006:39; MacDonald 2012:71; Wright 2013:82).

Crenshaw (1993:2) speculates that the ‘interplay of justice and mercy,’ aspects of YHWH’s character, may be of such a quality that ‘human conduct, even willful idolatry’ cannot incite divine anger. However, in stark contrast to the polytheistic ancient Near Eastern lives, YHWH’s wrath will be provoked when His people chooses to worship the gods of the Canaanites (Jdg 10:6-7; cf 3:6-7, etcetera; Sauer 1997:1430-1433). The attributes of YHWH described in the following segments bring about order in the lives of the early Israelites if they choose to follow Him.

3.3.6.1 Divine jealousy, compassion and anger

The gods experience jealousy just like their human worshippers (Wallenfels and Sasson 2000:121; Peckham 2019:90). YHWH’s jealousy is for His people to serve Him alone. He ‘tolerates no rivals’ (Sauer 1997:1430-1433). YHWH’s jealousy (קַנְיָהּ – *qannā*) is like a consuming fire (Dt 4:24; cf Ex 20:5; 34:14; Dt 4:23-24; 32:16; Jos 24:19) demanding exclusive service (Peckham 2019:89) and ready to redeem and save.¹⁵⁷

In the period of the Judges, YHWH’s jealousy is often stirred up by the Israelites’ disloyalty (Peckham 2019:90). Peckham states that YHWH’s ‘jealousy’ does not have the adversative association of human jealousy and is conspicuously dissimilar to the envy of the ancient Near Eastern gods. Not only is YHWH an intensely jealous God (*’el qannā*) (Dt 4:24; cf Ex 34:14) but He is also a

¹⁵⁷ See Bible Hub 2022. qanna.

compassionate God (*'ēl rahūm*)¹⁵⁸ (Dt 4:31; Jdg 2:18; 10:16; cf Ex 34:6-7). It is noteworthy that the Old Testament frequently alludes to YHWH's compassion as a feature His nature: 'his tenderness and his ability to be touched by the pain and the grief of his people' (Jdg 2:18; 10:16; Peckham 2019:91). YHWH's compassion is profoundly stirred by the suffering Israelites in Judges 10:16: '... and he could bear Israel's misery no longer' (cf Jdg 2:18). Israelite rebellion, by serving the Canaanite gods, provokes YHWH to experience powerful and agonizing heartbreak (Peckham 2019:91). Repentance of sin, however, ignites His compassion that leads to His redemptive actions in Judges (2:18; 10:16-18).

YHWH's response to Israelite idolatry is frequently expressed in terms of His righteous anger. Judges 3:8 reads: 'The anger of the LORD burned against Israel' (cf Jdg 4:1; 10:6-8). Latvus (1998:54) asserts that modern concepts of God's anger reflect 'the power relations of the community... and the inner dynamics of society.' Idolatry, as indicated before (see 2.2.2.1), produces an anticovenantal and syncretic lifestyle (cf Jdg 8:27; 17:3-5) that caused oppression (Jdg 3:7-8; 4:1-2; 6:1, etcetera) and impoverishment (Jdg 6:3-6), which disrupted the religion at the Tabernacle, led to carnality (Jdg 14-16), depravity (Jdg 19:26), imprudent decisions and leadership (cf Jdg 11:30-31; 21:16-23) the threat of tribal war (Jdg 18:21-26) and intertribal warfare (Jdg 20). YHWH's anger, thus, is in response to the flagrant disregard of the covenant when 'everyone did what was right in his own eyes,' and the chaos it caused (Jdg 17:6; 21:25; cf Jdg 19:1). Idolatry and attendant lawlessness altered the socio-economic and religious landscape and changed its vibrancy, productivity and prosperity to a state of deterioration and disaster (cf Jdg 6:3-6).

3.3.6.2 *Wisdom*

Perdue (2008:79-80) states that wisdom in the ancient Near East and Israelite societies is knowledge structured on a tradition that encompasses 'an understanding of God, the world and nature, humanity and human society.' Wisdom leads to the formation of character that is shaped through the contemplation (of the character of God), and the subsequent materialization of righteousness in behaviour (Perdue 2008:79-80). This state of 'moral virtue' allows people to live in harmony with the cosmos, society, and the Creator' (Perdue 2008:80). Long life, prosperity and joy became the possession of the one who is wise. Wisdom is the foundation of a cosmology in which righteousness or justice in correct and just actions organized the world and society (Perdue 2008:80). Cosmic order, as it refers specifically to human society, is thus associated with wisdom (Wolters 1995:35). However, as shall be shown below, there are profound differences between the wisdom of YHWH and that of the ancient Near Eastern gods, the *shedim*.

¹⁵⁸ Peckham (2019:90) quotes Psalm 103:13: 'As a father has compassion for his children, so the LORD has compassion (*'rāham*) for those who fear him'. Peckham (2019:90) explains that the Hebrew verb '*rāham*' signifies compassionate love 'and deeply visceral feelings akin to those of a mother for her child, apparently based on the noun womb' (*'rehem*). Divine compassion (*'rāham*) 'is not merely willed affection but responsive emotion that is stirred and roused' (Peckham 2019:90).

In the Israelite society wisdom (חכמה – *hāk̄māh*) which is entrenched in the fear of the LORD (alone) and which parallels the created order is the converse of folly (נבָּלָה – *nəbālāh*) that is an impious defilement of the created order (Wolters 1995:35). Wolters remarks that ‘Corresponding to this religious antithesis between wisdom and folly is the opposition between the righteous and the wicked.’ Wisdom, by which the universe is created, like YHWH’s compassion, is an inherent aspect of YHWH’s character. The divine declaration in Genesis 1:31: ‘God saw all that he had made, and it was very good’ is an announcement of God’s sovereignty and righteousness that accentuate creation and cosmic order. Later in Canaan, wisdom and derivative knowledge of YHWH (cf Jdg 2:10; cf Ps 82:5; cf 3.3.6) through the covenant shapes the character of the early Israelite. It creates the correct order by which Israelite society and which reflects order in the universe as a whole.

Although wisdom is considered one of the most prevalent qualities of the gods in the ancient Near East it is not necessarily related to ethical or moral behaviour (Walton 2018). In fact, there is ‘little evidence in the ancient Near Eastern literature that the ancients consider their gods to be just, wise, good, faithful and gracious, and so on, though they often expressed the hope that the gods will act in those ways’ (Walton 2018). Perhaps the idolatrous Israelites in the Book of Judges had similar and even higher hopes for the Canaanite gods that they served

The wisdom of the ancient Near Eastern gods serves their own needs and is extended towards humanity only as far as these needs are met (see also 3.3.6). The gods, after all, created the systems of socio-economic and religious partiality within the ancient Near East societies that facilitated and sustained their existence in and rule from the temples (Killebrew 2005:24; Ur 2012:544; Liverani 2014b:224; Barjamovic 2022:531; cf 4.2.2.3a-b; 7.4.1.2d).¹⁵⁹ Ancient Near Eastern texts describe the immorality and inconsistencies in the character and behaviour of the gods as also stated before. The goddess Inanna, a bloodthirsty warrior and fertility goddess, tricked Enki into giving her the *me* and consequently brings civilization to the world (McIntosh 2017:28). Some ancient Near Eastern sources show that the wisdom of the gods is often related to their decision-making abilities (Walton 2018). But the gods’ decision-making abilities are often impaired in times of great necessity. An Egyptian text describes the confusion of the gods over rendering a judgment, their lack of wisdom and evasiveness to make a decisive plan and take responsibility for the judgment (Wilson 1969c:14-18). The gods may also confound the judgment and council of their enemies both human and divine. In *Gilgamesh and Agga*, Gilgamesh wishes to confound the judgment and council of Agga, while Gilgamesh himself is accused of having no judgment (Kramer

¹⁵⁹Arikan (2018:65-86); cf Ur (2012:544); Killebrew (2005:24); Liverani (2014b:224); Huddlestun (2016:266-267); Barjamovic (2022:531); Garcia (2022:47-48) provide more information on ancient Near Eastern hierarchical systems. See also Chapter Seven.

1969a:46).¹⁶⁰ Marduk's mind becomes confused, 'his will crumbled and his actions were muddled,' when he tries to find out the military strategy of Tiamat's lover Qingu' (Dalley 2000:352).

In the worldview of the author/s of Judges, people are not able to demonstrate wisdom without their singular devotion to YHWH. The author/s show this idea continuously via the cyclical idolatry of the Israelites. In the biblical worldview the lack of ethics and wisdom may be found among those people from whom it is least expected, for instance, Gideon (Jdg 6-8), Jephthah (Jdg 11), Samson (Jdg 14-16), Micah (Jdg 17), both Levites (Jdg 17; 19) with dire consequences. In the *Hammurabi Code* a law is mentioned by which a corrupt judge is penalized and expelled from his office (Meek 1969:166). It is impossible to imagine the disgrace and regret these individuals must have felt.

3.3.6.3 Justice and judgement

Throughout the Book of Judges, worshipping the Canaanite gods is evil. Judges 3:7 reads: 'The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD; they forgot the LORD, their God and served the Baals and the Asherahs.' Ethically, the evil (עָרָב – *hārā*) of the Israelites constitutes folly (נְבִלָה – *nəḅlāh*) which is antithetical to the wisdom upon which order in the Israelite community is built.

In contrast to the wisdom of the gods that is related to divination (cf 3.3.6) and which denotes their perspicacity and power, YHWH's wisdom is related to his innate ability to judge (Walton 2018). Walton comments that YHWH's wisdom is sometimes associated with His power (Job 9:14; Is 31:2; Dn 2:20-33). 'Mostly, however he acts with wisdom and gives wisdom' (Walton 2018). Nevertheless, the Book of Judges repeatedly demonstrates how YHWH's power and wisdom work together to save His people. The author/s of Judges compare the perfect wisdom of YHWH in saving His people to the imperfect wisdom of the elders in preserving the Benjamites tribe.

YHWH's acts of deliverance in Judges essentially display His חֶסֶד – *hesed* ([lovingkindness], Dt 7:9), which comprised His compassion, wisdom, justice, and redemption which are all features of the nature of YHWH codified in the law of the Sinai covenant (Dt 32:4; Ps 82:3; 89:14; Walton 2018; see also 2.2.3.1d; 7.4.4.1).¹⁶¹

¹⁶⁰ In the Sumerian text of *Gilgamesh and Agga*, Gilgamesh – a demigod (Coulter-Harris 2016:7-21) wishes to confound the judgement and council of Agga (a Sumerian king) while he himself is accused of having no judgment (Kramer 1969a:46).

¹⁶¹ Fischer and Friedman (2021) observes that the three concepts of מִשְׁפָּט – *mišpāt* (justice; Dt 16:19), דִּקְדָּשׁ – *ṣedeq* (justice/righteousness; Dt 16:20) and חֶסֶד (lovingkindness) signify 'a continuum of justice and ethics from form to substance' in which *mišpāt* represents form, *hesed*, signifies righteousness and *ṣedeq* indicating the intersection between the form and substance. Fischer and Friedman (2021) describes *ṣedeq* as 'distributive justice,' that is, righteousness (in the relationship towards YHWH and practised in society and the family in general) (Raphael 2004:11; Grisham 2017) and *mišpāt* as 'retributive justice,' that is, correct judgements made by a true judge (Raphael 2004:11-12). *Mišpāt* can be described as the punishment or regulation of injustices (Grisham 2017). Raphael (2004:11) referring to Deuteronomy 16:20: 'Follow justice and justice alone...' explains that the text occurs in the context of a directive to

These instructions are modelled on the wisdom of YHWH, the perfect example for the practice of proper justice.¹⁶² Walton (2019) comments that ‘Yahweh is a repository of wisdom and a source of wisdom’ (Walton 2018) which results in just rulings. He is the divine judge in Judges whose judgement cannot be perverted in any manner. The early Israelites, therefore, cannot object when God judges them for the evil of worshipping the Canaanite gods. He must judge His people for the sin of idolatry since YHWH’s perfect justice, an essential component of His redemptive and restorative nature, demands it.

As already indicated, the early Israelites expected YHWH’s protection and rescue during times of adversity, irrespective of their unfaithfulness (cf Jdg 3:9, 15; 4:3; 6:6; 10:10; cf 3.3.2.1a). But YHWH has made known His requirements for life via the Sinai Covenant (see Chapter Two). Accordingly, YHWH’s judgement against the idolatrous Israelites is just. The ancient Near Eastern gods do not make their requirements for human life known (see 2.2.5.8c; cf 3.3.6; Walton 2018: cf Hamori 2008:129-130; Hundley 2013:140). The judgement of the gods against people when they trespass against the gods, therefore, cannot be just.

Nevertheless, YHWH’s judgement is intimately tied to His compassion. Because of YHWH’s compassion and saving power the Israelites have an opportunity to end the economic poverty, moral confusion and social upheaval that marked their everyday lives (McCann 2012:10). Gideon will lead the military campaign against the Midianites, but it is YHWH who will be behind all the action in Judges 6 and 7 (Butler 2009:124). Similarly, the prophecy of a deliverer in Judges 13 signifies YHWH’s mercy and compassion towards His habitually unfaithful people.

Manoah and His wife understood the symbolic nature of the phenomenon they had witnessed: the fiery flame that flared from the rock altar and the Angel of YHWH ascending in the flame toward heaven (Jdg 13:20; cf 3.4.4.1c; 5.3.2.2e; 6.3.5.3; 8.5.4.1). They would have recognized that the miracle revealed the identity of YHWH; that the flame was a sign of His forthcoming judgement upon the Philistines. The Hebrew word for flame **הַלְּהָב**– *hallahab* is used in Judges 13:20 to represent divine judgement (cf Is 29:6; 30:30; 66:15). The Hebrew word **הַלְּהָב**– *hallahab* can mean the flashing point of a spear or the blade of a sword (cf Jdg 3:22). Both meanings are probably intended in Judges 13:20 and point towards YHWH’s forthcoming judgment over the Philistines (cf Jdg 16:24, 30).¹⁶³ In the narratives, for example, Judges 6 and 13, mercy and compassion – extended

set up courts of law. The previous sentences instruct judges to judge the people with righteous judgment and combine the words *mišpāt* – *šedeq* with a hyphen (Raphael (2004:11). According to Deuteronomy 16:19 this means that a judge must not ‘pervert justice’ (*mišpāt* or judgement) ‘or show partiality’ (favour) or ‘accept a bribe’ (Raphael 2004:11; cf the corrupt judge mentioned in the *Hammurabi Code* referenced above ; see 3.3.6.2).

¹⁶² The ancient Near Eastern gods were not understood to be moral, ethical or fair, and integrity was not the norm (Walton and Hill 2013:112; cf 3.2.3.3a; 3.3.5.1; cf Footnote 138). A courtroom in ancient Egypt saw a man who felt helpless and confused by the clamour of human injustice resort to the deity Amon for justice (Wilson 1969d:380). Although it is unknown if he obtained divine justice, his petition was directed toward an erratic deity who had the power to decide whether or not to administer justice.

¹⁶³ See Bible Hub 2022. lahab.

towards the suffering Israelites and divine judgement – against the Midianites are both attributes of YHWH’s sovereign and eternal nature (Hiers 2009:84-85; cf Jdg 7:22).

3.4 YHWH: THE DIVINE NAME

This section will discuss the name of YHWH, which serves as a description of God’s eternal nature.

3.4.1 Tetragrammaton

The most significant name in the Old Testament is YHWH (Zannoni 2000:17), the personal designation of the God of the Sinai Covenant (Thompson 1992:1011). The four Hebrew letters *yod*, *he*, *waw*, *he*, known as the Tetragrammaton, are customarily used to write the name YHWH (Thompson 1992:1011; cf Zannoni 2000:17; Abba 1961:320; Ortlepp 2011:16; see Figures 3.3-3.5).¹⁶⁴



Figure 3.3 The Tetragrammaton in Paleo Hebrew (Freedman and Kuhlken 2007:25)



Figure 3.4 The Tetragrammaton in Hebrew (Freedman and Kuhlken 2007:25)¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁴ The tetragrammaton (Greek for four letters; that is, the Hebrew consonants יהוה is read from left to right and represent the Hebrew letters *yodh*, *he*, *waw*, *he* – YHWH) makes its initial appearance in Genesis 2:7 and is the most frequent designation for the Hebrew God occurring about 5321 times in the Old Testament (Parke-Taylor 1975:4-5; Abba 1961:320; Ortlepp 2011:16; Harris, SL 2011:571, 574; cf Thompson 1992:1011). For a Historical and Linguistics approach to understanding the tetragrammaton see Ortlepp (2011:35-47). For a more informative discussion of the forms and etymology of the tetragrammaton see Wilkinson (2015:1-37). In this study, the term יהוה (YHWH) and others in the Hebrew script are taken from the interlinear transcript of the Scriptures together with their phonetic spelling and transliterations in which they occur on the Internet website Biblehub.com.

¹⁶⁵ In this image the Tetragrammaton is written in the ‘square letters of the standard “Aramaic” script’ that was used in the written Hebrew (Freedman and Kuhlken 2007:25).

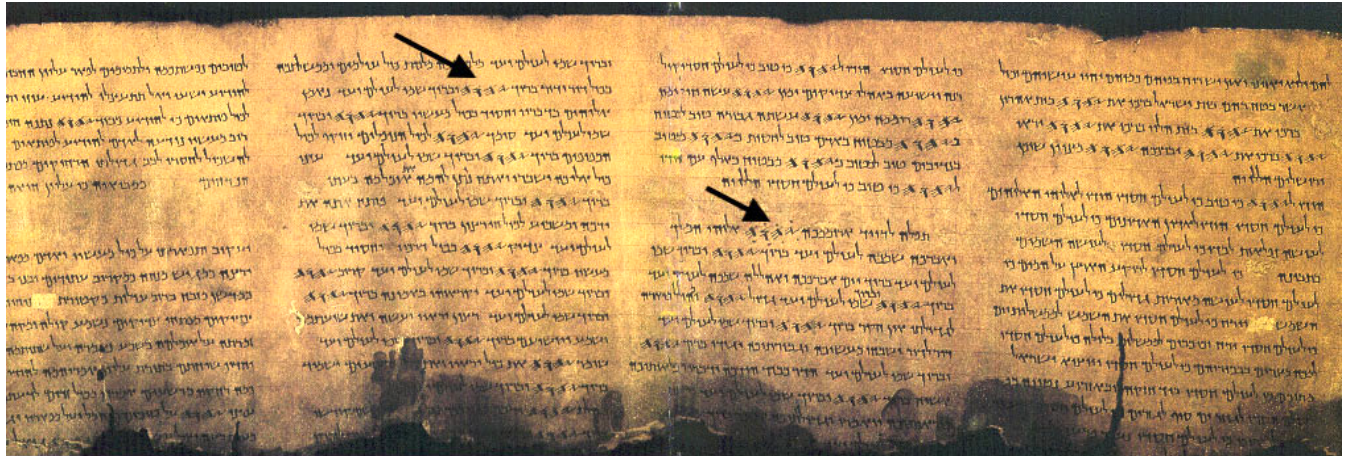


Figure 3.5 The Psalms Scroll (The Psalms Scroll 2022)¹⁶⁶

Abba (1961:320) notes that ‘the original pronunciation of YHWH is uncertain. It seems to have been pronounced Yahweh, which is the preferred pronunciation that is largely in use in modernity (Abba 1961:320). According to Freedman and Kuhlken (2007:25), the name had developed a reputation for being ineffably holy by the end of the Second Temple period (ca 3rd century BC), making it inappropriate for use in public readings although it was still used privately (cf Kox 2007:49-50; Kohn 2009:378). Rather the common Semitic term *Adonai* (Lord) was used in place of the Tetragrammaton (Ortlepp 2011:80; Berlin and Brettler 2004:112; cf Thompson 1992:1011).¹⁶⁷ Zannoni (2000:17) agrees that the Hebrew term *Adonai*, ‘My Great Lord’ was used in place of the Tetragrammaton due to the holiness connected to the name and the consequent wish to avoid its misuse.¹⁶⁸ At the time of the judges, however, the name of the personal God of the Israelites would have been pronounced by the [high] priest and naturally the ordinary people as well (see Kohn 2009:378; cf Jdg 20:27-28). The ordinary men and women calling on His name in Judges and

¹⁶⁶ Adapted from Psalms Scroll 2022: The Tetragrammaton as it appears in the Psalms scroll fragment found among the Dead Sea Scrolls. The tetragrammaton is written in the ancient Dead Sea Scrolls in paleo-Hebrew (see Figure 3.3), while the remainder of the text is written in a more modern form of Hebrew that was in use at the time (see Figures 3:4 and 3.5).

¹⁶⁷ However, it must be noted that scholars differ about the exact time when the Tetragrammaton ceased to be pronounced. Ortlepp (2011:80) remarks that since the Tetragrammaton in the LXX fragments from Qumran was translated by means of *iaou* this means that it was pronounced at that time. Thompson (1992:1011-1012) presents information regarding the pronunciation of the Tetragrammaton. It appears that when the Jews came into contact with the magical practices of the Persians, the ‘Tetragrammaton formed part of magical incantations and spells and the Jewish would feel justified in not pronouncing the Name’ (Ortlepp 2011:81). Kox (2007:49-50) mentions that the pronunciation of the name of God was preserved among a select few and chosen scribes (See also Freedman, O’ Connor and Ringgren 1986:500-502, 505).

¹⁶⁸ Although much later than the period of Judges, the divine Name *Adonai* is said to appear in the Masoretic Text as both a title in and of itself as well as a replacement for the personal name of God, YHWH, according to O’Brien (1992:74). The Masoretes positioned the vowel letters of *Adonai* beneath the consonants of Yahweh to maintain the holiness of the Name. The reader is guided to pronounce the Name as *Adonai* by using the standard substitution technique known as *qere/kethib* (read/written) (O’Brien 1992:74; see also Wilkinson 2015).

throughout the Old and New Testament would have done so uncensored by later diktats that prohibited the pronunciation of the divine Name (see Kox 2007:49-50).

3.4.2 The names of God

The covenant Name of God – YHWH – is mentioned earlier in the Old Testament (Gn 2:4, 7-9; 3; 8:21; 12:1; 15; 16; 18 etcetera) as explained below. Prior to the revelation of the divine Name of YHWH to Moses (Ex 3:14-15), God announced Himself to the patriarchs as El Shaddai (אֱלֹהִים שַׁדַּי – *šaddāy ’ēl*; that is Almighty God) (Mowinckel 1961:121; Yeo 2010:23; Mounce 2009; cf Wilson 1920:460-492):

- In Genesis 17:1: The LORD appeared unto Abraham and said: ‘I am El Shaddai walk before me...’
- In Genesis 35:7-11: Elohim appeared to Jacob and said: ‘I am El Shaddai; be fruitful and increase in number’.
- In the Genesis 48:3: Jacob said that El Shaddai had appeared to him at Luz in Canaan and had blessed him there.
- In Exodus 6:2-3: God appeared to Moses and announced that He had appeared to the forefathers as El Shaddai (Yeo 2010:23).

Exodus 6:2-3 states: ‘God also said to Moses, I am the LORD (YHWH), I appeared to Isaac and to Abraham and to Jacob as God Almighty, but by my name the LORD, I did not make myself fully known to them,’ although the divine Name of YHWH is used in Genesis (see above). Exodus 6:2-3 has been a topic of considerable controversy among scholars (Glisson 1985:135; Yeo 2010:22-24). The text apparently indicates a historical inconsistency with much of the Book of Genesis (for example, Gn 4:26; 12:7-8; 15:8, etcetera, where the name of YHWH appears; Glisson 1985:135) and has thus been used as evidence of the existence of different textual sources or authors (known as Yahwistic [J] and Priestly, [P] sources) in the Pentateuch (Yeo 2010:23; cf Glisson 1985:135-136).¹⁶⁹ Exodus 3:13-15 makes the purported historical incongruity (between Exodus 6:2-3 and Genesis) even more pronounced (Glisson 1985:136; cf Mowinckel 1961:121-133):

¹⁶⁹ The existence of several documents in the Pentateuch has been used to explain this seeming contradiction (Glisson 1985:135). Accordingly, Exodus 6:2 has been credited to be the work of the Priestly source, while parts of Genesis that contain YHWH ‘(except for 17:1 and 21:1b)’ were credited to the Yahwistic author (Glisson 1985:135-136). Others have asserted that Exodus 6:2-3 demonstrates YHWH and El (El Shaddai) to be different deities but that YHWH would eventually usurp the supremacy of El by taking on his name to become the sole God of Israel (Essfeldt 1959:25-37; Glisson 1985:135, n1). But this idea has been dismissed by Wright (1951:13; Glisson 1985:135, n1). Glisson (1985:135, n1) remarks that ‘several scholars now reject the entire Documentary Hypothesis because they are convinced that no distinction can be made on the basis of divine names and titles, for example, (see also Segal 1955:89-115; Enns 2000:174). The Documentary Hypothesis (the idea that the Old Testament was compiled after the Babylonian exile) was popularized by Julius Wellhausen in 1878 (MacDonald 2016:28; see also Zimmermann (1901:2; Bandstra 2009:191; Zeolla 2016:54; see also Footnote 2). Wellhausen's Documentary Hypothesis assumes that the Israelite people's religion has undergone some sort of historical evolution (Carbajosa 2013) as demonstrated by the four

Moses said to God, “Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘the God of your fathers has sent me to you and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ Then what shall I tell them?’” God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’ ” God also said to Moses, “Say to the Israelites, ‘The LORD, the God of your fathers – the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob – has sent you.’ “This is my name forever, the name you shall call me from generation to generation.

However, Exodus 3:13-15 does not demonstrate the revelation of a new divine Name. Scholarly interpretation of Exodus 6:2-3 is used to support this claim. Yeo (2010:23) states that Wilson (1920:460-492) based on Genesis 17:1; 35:7-11; 48:3 deduced ‘that the divine names – Elohim, Jehovah (that is, YHWH) and El Shaddai did not serve as markers of distinct sources’ but that ‘rather, they were used as different attributes for the same person.’ Thus, the divine names Elohim, El Shaddai and YHWH are used in the Pentateuch to reveal ‘different attributes for the same’ God (Yeo 2010:23). The various divine names of God were also revealed in different historical periods of the early Israelites. Enns (2000:174) states that Exodus 6:2 is not the disclosure of a new name of God, as indicated above, but that ‘God’s name is now going to be *fully* known; that is the *significance* of the name is going to be understood in the most pivotal time in Israel’s history.’ In light of this Enns (2000:174) comments that Exodus 6:2-3 might be paraphrased as follows:

I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but only partially – in the capacity of El Shaddai. But who I am fully, which is what my name Yahweh captures, I did not make myself known to them. This is made known first only now, to you, the Exodus generation, who will witness my mighty saving power.

And it is thus this (covenant) Name, YHWH, that the early Israelites will take with them into the land of Canaan and where they will proclaim it to be the name of the one, true God.

3.4.3 The name YHWH

At Mount Horeb, the Angel of YHWH appeared to Moses ‘in flames of fire from within a bush’ (Ex 3:1-2). God called to Moses ‘from within the bush’ (Ex 3:3-4). Moses is instructed to remove his shoes, for the place, he is standing on is sacred ground and God said: ‘I am the Elohe of your father, the Elohe of Abraham, the Elohe of Isaac and the Elohe of Jacob’ (Ex 3:5-6).¹⁷⁰

God instructs Moses to deliver the Israelites from Egyptian slavery and bring them to the land of Canaan (Ex 3:7-10). Moses expresses his reservations about being the right person to deliver the

documents known as the J [Jahwist – dated to 950 BC], E [Elohist – dated to the late 9th century BC], D [Deuteronomist – dated to the 7th or 8th century BC, before the reign of king Josiah] and P [Priestly – dated to the 5th century BC to the time of Ezra] documents or sources from which the Pentateuch is compiled (Viviano 1999:35-56; Carr 2015:434). It is, nonetheless, only a *theory* proven by the fact that there is absolutely ‘no manuscript evidence for that any of the editorial proposed in the “JEDP” theory ever occurred’ (MacDonald 2016:28; cf Keener and Ury 1997:149; cf Carr 2015:434). It falls outside the framework of this thesis to investigate the ‘JEDP’ theory.

¹⁷⁰ Elohe is a variant of Elohim (See Bible Hub 2023. Elohim).

Israelites. However, God assures Moses that He would be with him and when he had brought the people from Egypt, they would worship God on that mountain (Mount Horeb). When given the command to free the Israelites from Egyptian enslavement (Ex 3:13-14), Moses asks God to identify Himself once again. Exodus 3:14 records YHWH's response as follows: equally

And God said to Moses, אֲנִי אֲנִי אֲנִי ['ehyeh 'āšer 'ehyeh – I AM WHO I AM]. And He said, 'Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, אֲנִי אֲנִי ['ehyeh – I AM] has sent me to you' (my insertions).¹⁷¹

As the text indicates, the covenant Name, YHWH, is derived from the Hebrew verb to be אֲנִי אֲנִי (*ehyeh* – I AM which is also the covenant name of God). From Exodus 3:14 scholars propose various interpretations of the name YHWH: 'He who exists', 'He who is present' or 'He who will be' and 'He who causes to be' (Hope and Chidavaenzi 1984:211; Freedman, O' Connor and Ringgren 1986:513-516; cf Thompson 1992:1011-1012). Moses was possibly surprised at the revelation of the name YHWH because of the fact that the Egyptian gods known to him as a rule do not have their names derived from a verb (Van der Toorn 1999a:915; cf Waltke 2007:365; Münnich 2013:97; Ortlepp 2011:16-17).¹⁷² The same was true of the Canaanite gods that the early Israelites would subsequently encounter and come to serve upon inhabiting Canaan (cf Jdg 2:11-13; 3:7; 10:6; 11:24; 16:23).

Pursuant to their understanding of the grammatical form of the verb *ehyeh* scholars (Hope and Chidavaenzi 1984:21) read Exodus 3:14 as:

- in the present tense: 'I AM WHO I AM' and
- in the future tense: 'I WILL BE WHAT I WILL BE'
- collectively in the present and the future tenses: 'I AM WHAT I WILL BE'
- the causative form: 'I CAUSE TO BE WHATEVER COMES INTO BEING' (Hope and Chidavaenzi 1984:211; cf Zannoni 2000:18).

Mowinckel (1961:122-124) observes that Moses could validate his mission to the Israelites only if he could provide them with a personal name of God other than the generic name (Elohim) by which the Israelites were accustomed to calling Him. Pursuant to the polytheistic context of the ancient Near Eastern and Israelite traditions it was important that the Israelites knew their God by His personal and proper name.

¹⁷¹ Hebrew words with their vowels, represented by the diacritical marks below the letters, as in the text above are used while elsewhere Hebrew terms without these diacritical marks are used also.

¹⁷² It must be understood that the true meaning of the divine Name YHWH is not known, and that scholars' analyses of the meaning and the importance of the name are intricate.

Every god had a name in Egypt, a culture that Moses was familiar with (according to the biblical narrative), as well as in the rest of the ancient Near East (see also 3.6.1.1).¹⁷³ The Egyptians placed great value on the names of their gods, each of which had a specific meaning: Ptah, the revealer, Ra the swift, and so on.¹⁷⁴ The ancient Egyptians held that the essence of a thing (a god) could be found in its name (Srinivasan 2011:258). The names of (the aforementioned) deities revealed to their followers the divine attributes and significance, particularly the gods' authority and power. Thompson (1992:1011-1012) remarks that names held 'magical power' (in the ancient Near East). Knowing the deity's name gave one the ability to control him and call him to assistance, for example against the enemy. Moses was aware of the Egyptian custom of selecting a god's name based specifically on the needs and circumstances of their worshippers and this may have indicated 'the question [in Exodus 3:13] which would be the first his own people would expect him to answer' (Thompson 1992:1011-1012).¹⁷⁵ Did Moses also enquire about God's name upon seeing the burning bush and the display of God's mighty power so that he could in accordance with the ancient Egyptian tradition wield control over the LORD Almighty?

As previously indicated each name by which God had revealed Himself to the early Israelites represented some aspect or manifestation of His attributes (Engnell 1970:55; cf Enns 2000:174; cf 3.5.2.1-3.5.2.2). God had only been known to the patriarchs by titles such as *El* or *Elohim*, the Lofty One, or *Shaddai*, the Powerful One or *YHWH*, the (Self) Existent (see 3.4.3.1). These titles had been used with some understanding of their meaning, but none had yet developed into a proper name.¹⁷⁶

Moses, in all probability, requested of God a proper and legitimate name that represents who He is or will be to His people and that will distinguish the LORD from the Egyptian deities known to the Israelites.¹⁷⁷ Zannoni (2000:17) remarks that God's response to Moses (Ex 3:13-14) is both mysterious and revelatory; it simultaneously preserves God's freedom 'to be' in agreement with God's nature, and the assurance that God will be present in accordance with divine promise. Zannoni further comments that the phrase 'I will be that I will be' refers to the mysterious unchangeable nature of God's being. Accordingly, God presents Moses with a distinctive proper Name that, although it contains elements of the mysterious, distinguishes Him from the gods and goddesses of the Egyptian and ancient Near Eastern nations (Engnell 1970:55).¹⁷⁸ YHWH's name, in contrast

¹⁷³ See Bible Hub 2022. Exodus 3:13.

¹⁷⁴ See Bible Hub 2022. Exodus 3:13.

¹⁷⁵ See Bible Hub 2022. Exodus 3:13.

¹⁷⁶ Cf Bible Hub 2022. Exodus 3:13.

¹⁷⁷ See Bible Hub 2022. Exodus 3:13.

¹⁷⁸ Engnell (1970:55) states that the distinguished name of YHWH that sets Him apart from all the other gods is used within certain settings such as the history of the Israelites. Engnell in critique of the Documentary Hypothesis, asserts that it is the different (historical) contexts for the Biblical settings that allows the alternation in the use of God's names in the Old Testament and not an alternation in documents. Within these contexts, as was already indicated, each name of the Deity represented some aspect or manifestation of His attributes (compare the introduction to Genesis) (Bible Hub 2022. Exodus 3:13). See also Ortlepp 2011:16-17 for the various forms of the name YHWH.

to these gods, signifies that He is not subject to human control because it alludes to His eternal self-existence. There is no magic power in His name that individuals can use to change or manipulate their circumstances to further their own ends. YHWH, the self-existent God, would Himself affirm that Moses was truly sent by Him by the use of three supernatural signs demonstrated in Exodus 4:1-9 (Berlin and Brettler 2004:112) and not by any magic force associated with His name as the Egyptians believed of the names of their gods and as probably did the idolatrous Israelites of their Canaanite gods in Judges.

3.4.3.1 *The self-existing God*

YHWH is the self-existing Eternal One, implicit in His name (cf 3.4.3.2). YHWH thus is uncreated unchanging and acts independently of the world. Although the ancient Near Eastern gods are depicted as ‘immortal’, they are created and some may die. Baal has a father who is either Dagon in the Ugaritic texts or the son of El (Wright 1962:106-107; cf Albright 1941:175-176; Kapelrud 1952:77-78; cf 3.4.4.2; 3.6.1.1b, c).¹⁷⁹ The death and destruction of the gods is a main theme in the *Ugaritic Baal Cycle*. Yamm is destroyed by Baal. Mot kills Baal. Mot himself is crushed by Anath and his ashes strewn. Baal is restored to life and forces Mot (also resurrected) to submit to his authority (see Smith 1994). Baal is said to have been worshipped under different guises and variant ways (Stern 2001a:75; Gill 1988:22; see also 3.6.1.1). In the Egyptian pantheon the god Ptah coalesces with other deities, embracing the qualities and roles of these gods (cf 3.4.4.2). Ptah, for example, merges with the gods Tatenen (a god of vegetation), Sokar (a god with a funerary role) and Nun (primeval matter) to become Ptah-Tanen, Ptah-Sokar and Ptah-Nun respectively (Hart 2005:129, 148-149, 154; see also O’Conner 2009:17). The *Enūma Eliš* shows that Marduk is a created god, born from the union of the god Ea and his lover Damkina (Dalley 2000:235). Some of Marduk’s many titles indicate his assimilation with other deities (Dalley 2000:276; see also 3.6.1.1).

YHWH is eternal and uncreated. YHWH too may have a compound name such as the one given to him by Gideon: יהוה שלום [YHWH is peace] (Jdg 6:24). But this indicates that peace is a feature of the divine nature which He desired for His people to experience in their communities. The early Israelites in Judges served a God who is eternal, autonomous and sovereign and whose covenantal promises were thus everlasting (cf 3.5.3) (see Millard 1992:35-41 who describes YHWH as the *Everlasting God*: El Olam (אֵל עוֹלָם); cf Brichto 1998:54).

3.4.4 The early Israelites’ understanding of the divine Name

The character of the God of the Israelites and His role as their covenant God is expressed in the name יהוה (cf 3.2.4-3.2.4.2). YHWH’s name reveals His image. Ben-Sasson (2019:3) remarks:

¹⁷⁹ To reconcile this conflict, Day proposes that Dagon is the literal father of Baal and El perhaps his grandfather (Day 1992a:549; see also 3.6.1.1b).

‘The divine Name serves as the closest representation of God in language.’ Mowinckel (1961:132) comments that ‘The god without a name is an analogy to the god without an image.’ Accordingly, the perceptions that the men and women in Judges held towards YHWH were reflected by their perspectives of His Name (Ben-Sassoon 2019:3). Ben-Sassoon (2019:3) states: ‘Thus attitudes towards the Name became attitudes towards God Himself; sanctification, sacrilege, fear and love are transposed from God to His Name.’ Thompson (1992:1011-1012) elucidates that to the early Israelites YHWH was the God of the covenant. The natural world was created, preserved, and sustained by YHWH and similarly He created and protected the Israelites (Thompson 1992:1011-1012). As a result, the divine Name provided the early Israelites with the assurance that God would always be present among them in Canaan. YHWH’s protection of His people was reaffirmed in the Sinai Covenant (see Chapter Two).

The archaeological record indicates that the Israelites in Canaan were confronted with a hostile terrain fraught with climatic and geographical constraints.¹⁸⁰ Pestilence among crops and destructive insects led to crop failures (see Deist 2001:122-123) and resultant starvation and malnourishment. Amid their intensive struggles to create a sustainable and maintainable environment and livelihood, the Israelites endured high infant mortality rates.¹⁸¹ Diseases and frequent war, in addition lowered Israelite life expectancy (see Meade 1998:18). This amplified the workload on the surviving family members and community. These misfortunes contradicted the image of a prosperous Israelite society within the covenantal promises established by YHWH that was encoded in the Name revealed to Moses at Mount Horeb (Ex 23:20-31; cf Dt 28:1-14). Judges 2:1-3; 3:5-7, 12; 6:8-10; 8:27, 33; 10:11-14 provide a reason for the Israelites’ troubles: idolatry. There are other names referring to God in Judges; however, this section will emphasize the *I am* statements which reflect the Israelites’ understanding of YHWH.

3.4.4.1 The divine ‘*I am*’ statements in Judges

a. Introduction

In Exodus (Ex 3:14) YHWH instructs Moses: ‘This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘*I am* has sent me to you’ (italics mine). YHWH would reveal Himself to the early Israelites by means of *I am* statements in later eras. The *I am* in the first commandment; ‘*I am* the LORD your God’ [Ex 20:2; see 3.5.3] is similar to the first announcement of the personal Name of YHWH in Exodus [3:12-14] and the ‘even more exclusive great revelation of Dt 32:39’ (Kittel and Friedrich (eds)

¹⁸⁰ Deist (2001:122-123), King and Stager (2001:86) and Meyers (1988:54) describe the adverse weather conditions. See also Scheepers (2010:287-293) and Sha (2018:118).

¹⁸¹ Meyers (1997:28) reports on the high infant mortality rate during the Iron Age I; see also Willett (2002:27-42) conversing on the mortality rates of infants. In the archaeological record, osteological evidence of Israelite interments demonstrates the preponderance of infant deaths over that of older children (Bloch-Smith 2009:123; cf Otwell 1977:31-66). For women frequent childbirth and concomitant risks, probable malnutrition and the heavy workload associated with an agrarian lifestyle diminished their life expectancy and few women lived past the menopausal life cycle (Meade 1998:19 and Meyers [ed] (1997:28).

(1985:196 [insertions mine]): ‘See now that I myself am He! There is no god besides me.’ So too is the *I am* saying in Judges 6:10: ‘I said to you I am the LORD your God’ revelatory of this absolute sovereignty of YHWH. The divine *I am* sayings in Judges 6 and 13 (Jdg 6:16; 13:11) indicate that He is the same God who revealed Himself to Moses which He confirmed with a sign of fire in all three situations. It is possible to find in the *I am* statements in Judges 6:14, 16 and 13:11 the idea that it is YHWH Himself who is interacting with the individuals participating in the theophanies narrated in the texts (see Klein 1989:51; cf Niditch 2001:229, 255; cf 6.3.5.2-6.3.5.3). The divine statements in Judges 6:16 and 13:11 will be discussed below.

b. Judges 6:16

YHWH sends Gideon to deliver to the Israelites in Judges 6:14 with a similar statement to that given to Moses in Exodus 3:10, 14 (Klein 1989:51; Webb 2012:227). Judges 6:14 reads: ‘The LORD turned to him and said “Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian’s hand. Am I not sending you?” Exodus 3:10 reads: ‘So now go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.’ The divine statement in Judges 6:14 is intended not only for Gideon but also the larger Israelite society that Gideon is sent to save in the same way that Exodus 3:15 was a statement for all the Israelites. However, Gideon lacks the assurance that he is able to deliver the Israelites from the Midianites.

In Judges 6:16, there is a response to Gideon’s lack of confidence: ‘I will be [אֲנִי אֶהְיֶה – *’ehyeh*] with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites, leaving none alive’ (cf 5.3.2.2d; 6.3.5.2). Nelson (2018:131) comments that ‘Yahweh’ when seeking to fill Gideon with confidence assures him in Judges 6:16, ‘*I will be with you*, repeats verse 12 and responds directly to Gideon’s complaint in verse 13.’ The promise can be interpreted as ‘a reflection of or wordplay on the divine name: ‘I AM (*’ehyeh*) is the one who is with you’ (Nelson 2018:131; see also Webb 2012:227; cf Klein 1989:51). Both narratives (Jdg 6:16; 13:11; also indirectly in Judges 2:1-2) imply that it is YHWH, the Israelites’ covenantal God, as previously stated, who is speaking to Gideon and Manoah. The name YHWH is associated with God’s ‘historical act of liberation’ of the early Israelites that is ‘indissolubly connected with the divine name’ (Mauser 2003:166). This is what the affirmations of the identity of the Angel of YHWH ultimately led to.

c. Judges 13:11

In Judges 13 the Angel of YHWH appears twice to the wife of Manoah and on a third occasion to both Manoah and his wife (Jdg 13:6, 9, 11). The Angel gives Manoah and his wife divine instructions (Jdg 13:7, 13-14) and uses the *I am* statement (Jdg 13:11) to reveal His identity: The Angel, as Manoah will discover, is YHWH Himself! (Jdg 13:18, 20-21; cf 3.2.2.1b; 3.4.4.1c; 3.3.6.3 5.3.2.2e; 6.3.5.3; 8.5.4.1).

When Manoah asks, ‘Are you the man who talked to my wife?’, he is asking for the identity of the supernatural Visitor. The Angel of YHWH replies: ‘I am’ (אָנִי [’*ānī* – I[am]]) (Jdg 13:11). Manoah addresses the Angel of YHWH as a man (of God) that is the designation of a prophet. However, the word אָנִי is a singular pronoun that can have the equivalent meaning of alone.¹⁸² In Deuteronomy the word אֶחָד (one) in the expression אֶחָד הוּא (YHWH [is] one) (Dt 6:4) may also be interpreted as ‘alone/unique’ and is similarly used in this sense by the Angel of YHWH in Judges (Jdg 13:11; see also 3.2.4). The Angel of YHWH is probably engaging Manoah in a type of wordplay that would lead Manoah to the understanding that He, the Angel of YHWH is indeed none other than YHWH Himself.¹⁸³ Manoah rises to the challenge, for upon receiving the Angel of YHWH’s response in verse 11, his next question is: ‘When your words are fulfilled, what is to be the rule that governs the boy’s life (יִהְיֶה – *yihyeh*) and work?’ (Jdg 13:12). The Hebrew word יִהְיֶה – *yihyeh*¹⁸⁴ and the proper name הוּא – YHWH both contain the root verb *hayah* [to be/to become/to come to pass] (Ben-Sasson 2019:44-46; cf Cartledge 1992:170; McKenzie 2008:218; cf 3.4.3).¹⁸⁵ It is probable that both the Angel of the LORD and Manoah are engaging in a subtle wordplay on the divine Name. The Angel of YHWH is presenting Himself to Manoah as the Covenant God of the Israelites who has come to deliver good news; the promise of a deliverer in accordance with His sacred pledge to save His people (see 2.2.7.1-2.2.7.3). Judges 6:16 may provide a parallel to the narrative in Judges 13:11-21.

3.4.4.2 ‘I am’ sayings in the ancient Near East

Divine *I am* statements were common in the ancient Near Eastern religions – in Babylonian rituals and Egyptian writings (Kittel and Friedrich (eds) 1985:197). An Egyptian text with the *I am* formula reads: ‘*I am* Orion’ and in another text appears: ‘*I am* the great god...’ (Morenz 2009:223). Kittel and Friedrich (eds) observe that the aim of divine proclamations is ‘the self-representations, self-glorification and self-commendation of the deity, so that they have a monotheistic thrust.’ However, the gods of the ancient Near East made *I am* declarations that were very different from the one YHWH made in Exodus 3:14 (cf Jdg 6:16; 13:11). The Exodus *I am* statement (Ex 3:14) and all others like it in the Bible are revelations of the divine nature based on the personal name of YHWH which shows the divine nature to be unique, eternal and self-existing (see the discussion in 3.4.2) while no ancient Near Eastern god could make the same claim (see below). The *I am* statement in Exodus 20:2 indicates that universal sovereignty solely belongs to YHWH (cf 3.4.5-3.4.5.1). It never was disseminated among other divine beings, and neither was it restricted or controlled as determined by a pantheon/divine council (Walton 2018). Walter observes that the

¹⁸² See Bible Hub 2022. ani.

¹⁸³ The Hebrew Bible is replete with wordplay (Stern 2021). Marais (1998:92) remarks that the wordplay is evident in Judges 3:15; which in the texts leads to the idea that Ehud is a left-handed son of the right hand...’ Similarly, wordplay is used in Judges 6:14 and 13:11 to indicate YHWH’s identity.

¹⁸⁴ See also Bible Hub 2022. hayah.

¹⁸⁵ See also Bible Hub 2022. Yhvh.

first commandment (Ex 20:3) also reveals that YHWH may elect to delegate His authority ‘but no other beings have divine authority of their own’ (Walton 2018). Kittel and Friedrich (eds) (1985:197) maintains that in the Old Testament writing, the *I am* sayings obtain a ‘specific ring’ when uttered by ‘the self-revealing God of Israel’ (see above, 3.4.4.1a-c).

a. The pantheon and divine power

The concept of the pantheon/divine council alluded to the idea that no god had absolute power, but that power was dispensed among numerous gods (Walter 2018; cf 3.2.4; 3.2.4.2a; 3.3.2.1; 3.4.5.1; 3.6.1.1). Therefore, even if the ancient Near Eastern gods had monotheistic aspirations, it would have been in vain since they belonged to a pantheon (see Kittel and Friedrich [eds] 1985:197).¹⁸⁶

In the Ugaritic text Baal states that he is the only one who rules over the gods (Block 2011:81n,30; cf Smith and Pitard 2009:651, 657, 692; cf 3.2.4.2). This statement of Baal, however, cannot be true since, as had been established, the head of the pantheon is El who rules over the pantheon as king (Wasilewska 2000:111; Flynn 2014:25). Baal’s boast also downplays the authority and spheres of influence held by autonomous goddesses like Asherah and Anath in the Ugaritic pantheon (Day 2002:43, 132).¹⁸⁷

Certain ancient Near Eastern deities were more well-known and well-liked than others (Gonzales 2022). Baal and Asherah in the period of the judges were extremely popular deities among the idolatrous Israelites (cf Jdg 6:25-26). However, no one god held total power over the others. As indicated above (cf also 3.2.3.1; 3.3.2; 3.3.2.1; 3.6.1.1) each god had a sphere of influence that was associated with a particular aspect of nature, such as the sun, the sky, the earth, or the underworld (cf 3.3.2; Gonzales 2022; see also Green 2003:36). McIntosh (2017:28) adds that in the Sumerian pantheon Enlil was the god of the winds that brought the spring rains and was feared for his association with storms and destructive floods. Enki was the god of the Abzu, the source of springs, rivers and rain and embodied the life-giving water in Mesopotamia (McIntosh 2017:28). In an Akkadian prayer to Bel (Marduk), several other deities, represented by the stars, are also invoked for their specific powers and attributes (see Sachs 1969:333).

¹⁸⁶ There is, apparently, a tremendous monotheistic drive behind early Israelite warfare that is not at all found in ancient Near Eastern military campaigns (see below); YHWH’s fighting to restore Israelite loyalty to Him and their sacred covenant (cf Jdg 2:16-19; 10:15-16; 13:5). When a city or a tribe overthrew another in the ancient Near East, the gods of the conquerors had to be worshipped alongside or above the gods of the defeated city or tribe (Ashby 1988:45; Laffey 2012:141; Firestone 2008:29; see also Dillard 1986:201; Van der Spek 2014:233 regarding the destruction of cities in the ancient Near East).

¹⁸⁷ Compared to the limited roles of female deities in the ancient Egyptian tradition, in particularly their involvement in the creation processes, goddesses in Mesopotamia such as ‘Nammu, Ki, Inana, and even Tiāmat were not only independent in their actions but also equal to their male counterparts’ (Wasilewska 2000:103). The same description can be applied to Asherah/Athirat and particularly Anath whose militant actions are autonomous and quite bloodthirsty (Smith and Pitard 2009:145-147; cf Smith 1994:8).

People in the ancient Near East worshipped these gods for the specific powers each possessed according to the role that a deity occupied which also determined his power (cf 3.3.2-3.3.2.1; McIntosh 2017:28; cf Walton 2018). The god's roles within the pantheon complemented each other, and one god needed the other in a way that is comparable to the interdependence of the Iron Age agrarian family members in Canaan.

Flynn (2014:25) asserts that divine power operated only within the scope of the regional gods' own authority, role, and responsibilities in the pantheon. Yet, the rule and power of the gods over their human followers were held to be absolute (Van de Mierop 2020:301). The place name Beth Anath (Jdg 1:33) indicates that a temple to the goddess Anath existed where people came to worship her (Day 2002:43) and was a recognition of her authority and dominance over the local populace.¹⁸⁸ As indicated before, the supreme deity in a pantheon was not necessarily the only god to exercise great authority in the divine realm (cf 3.2.3.1; 3.2.4; 3.2.4.2; 3.3.2-3.3.2.1; 3.6.1.1). Flynn (2014:25) agrees that a chief deity presided as king in the pantheon but, like the Ugaritic principal god El, did not exactly have great power over the other gods or was the only king in the realm of the gods. El's senior status is associated with his role as the father of the gods (Flynn 2014:25). El is specifically 'the father of Baal since Baal is the *bn'il* son of El' (Flynn 2014:25; cf 3.4.3.1; 3.6.1.1b).¹⁸⁹ Divine procreation apparently reveals a paradox in the divine realm since the gods were immortal (cf 3.4.3.1). Procreation was a necessary condition for the perpetuation of mortal beings, such as humans. What purpose would the gods have in reproducing?

YHWH is the father, in a metaphorical sense, of His people (cf Ex 4:22-23; Dt 32:6; cf Ex 4:22; cf 2.2.3.1d; 2.2.5.1; 2.2.5.3). YHWH is also a king, as mentioned before, and a warrior (cf 6.4). Throughout these various divine duties of YHWH, He demonstrates His status as the supreme and eternal God who does not procreate and does not share His sovereignty much less with a human (see below). The early Israelites, as his human family, fulfil every desire YHWH may have for a human family.

Flynn (2014:25), regarding the kingship of El remarks, compared to YHWH's cosmic and absolute sovereignty, El is a weak deity, whose authority is undercut and challenged.¹⁹⁰ Warfare, like the one shown by the Baal-Mot conflict in the *Ugaritic Baal Cycle*, is frequently used to acquire kingship and associated power (Smith, MS 2020). Perhaps as a sign of his own invincibility, a chief god could also allow other kings to flourish in his realm. He could also offer kingship, 'like his

¹⁸⁸Day (2002:43-133-135) also provides a description of the possible origins of the name Shamgar son of Anath (Jdg 3:31; Jdg 5:6). One of these origins is held to be Hurrian which seems plausible since the Mitanni Kingdom, a merging of Hurrians and Indo Aryans, was the most powerful Hurrian nation that existed in eastern Anatolia. Their existence is attested to by a treaty signed with the Hittites [ca 1300 BC]. The Hurrians expanded into northern Syria where Ugarit probably became a predominately Hurrian city (Ramirez-Faria 2007:321).

¹⁸⁹ Smith (2002:385-386) reveals evidence of the god in the material culture.

¹⁹⁰ Flynn is particularly referring to YHWH's kingship in the Book of Psalms (Ps 93-100; see Wasilewska 2000:111; Smith 2002:385; Flynn 2014:25 for similarities between YHWH and El).

very own' to a human (Smith, MS 2020). El offers the human king, Kirta, a kingship on par with his, El's, own (Smith, MS 2020). Kirta despite being able to acquire riches and the equivalent of divine power really desires sons (Smith, MS 2020). Kirta reveals that human ambitions and ideals can surpass and transcend those of the gods.

One of the main functions of a chief god, such as Enlil, was to represent the interest of the other gods in the pantheon (Nissen 2011:143). On the other hand, YHWH, the self-sufficient God (Stone 2000:624), always acts on behalf of His people. Similarly, the Book of Judges portrays YHWH as desiring to meet the needs of the beleaguered Israelites (Jdg 3:7-11, 15, 29-30, 31; 4:1, 23, 5:31, and so on), and He consistently accomplishes this.

b. *I am* statements in ancient Egypt

Similarly, *I am* utterances in the ancient Egyptian tradition do not mean that the gods display the sort of power equal to that of YHWH. Ramses II is marching towards enemy territory to wage war when Amen-Re (see Batto 2004:144) says to him: 'Behold *I am* in front of you my son.' Then the god Thoth (see Budge 1969b:33, 272; 403, 405; Troy 2009:127) says to Ramses II: 'Behold *I am* behind you' (Kang 2011:101). During the 11th-16th centuries BC, Amun-Re held the status of chief deity and texts from the Ramses II era describe the excellence of this self-created deity who is also a creator god (Lorton 1999:184-185). Clearly, the *I am* statements are uttered in a polytheistic setting where the powers specific to both gods are needed for military success.

In the battle of Kadesh, the warrior-Pharaoh Ramses II utters an urgent prayer to the god Amun. Subsequently, Ramses II hears the god's voice encouraging him from behind saying: '*I am* with you, I, your father, my hand is in yours' (italics mine; Pearson 2010:10; Kang 2011:102; Becking 2013:7). The battle of Kadesh was fought against the Hittite Empire (1284 BC). Apparently, the miraculous intervention of Amun secured the Egyptians with the war victory. Scholars note that with both the Egyptians and the Hittites claiming victory, the war outcome, however, remains indecisive and definitely debatable (Pearson 2010:1-20). By contrast, at the conclusion of the battle against Sisera there is no ambiguity regarding the victors!(Jdg 4-5)¹⁹¹

Ryan (2007:26) describes Sisera as a 'dark, bleak, sinister character, who persecutes the early Israelites 'from his lair' named 'woodlands of the unbelievers' – Harosheth Haggoyim (Jdg 4:2) 'with a force of 900 chariots reinforced with iron fittings' (Ryan 2007:26). Sisera is referred to as the '*śar* (army commander) of his army' (his denotes Jabin) (Jdg 4:2; Schneider 2000:60). Schneider states that the term *śar* was quite common and has the intended meaning 'chieftain, chief, ruler, official, captain, prince' (Schneider 2000:61). All of the different ways this word has been

¹⁹¹ Textual sources may provide evidence for the existence of Sisera (Gertoux 2016:277-279). Gertoux (2016:278) asserts that a character of importance, namely Sisarruwa who is mentioned in a treaty between Niqmaddu, king of Ugarit and Aziru, the king of Amurru is the same as the one in the Bible (Jdg 4). See Gertoux (2016:278-279) for a discussion on the confirmation of Sisera in history.

translated imply that the person holding the title is in control of a particular area, but he is not the ultimate authority, as someone else has authority over him and thus he occupies the role of ‘secondary status’ (Schneider 2000:61; see also 3.5.3.2). Gertoux maintains Sisera to be an influential Amorite king who had rented his army to the king of Hazor, a vassal kingdom of Egypt. A letter written by king Šuppiluliuma I (1353-1322 BC) confirms the custom of Hittite kings to hire armies for their penetration into Syrian territory, at times (Gertoux 2016:279). Gertoux remarks that the king of Hazor may have desired to amass resources by means of his collaboration with Sisera in order to plunder ‘Palestine.’ Gertoux further states that these ‘correlations’ (extrabiblical texts) verify the event recorded in Judges 4 and place them in a 14th century BC timeframe (cf 4.2.1.1a-b; cf Footnotes 6, 220 and 221).¹⁹²

3.5 ORIGINS OF THE NAME YHWH

According to some the divine Name YHWH was an invention by the Priestly source through the character of Moses in the invented history of Israel in the Bible (Glisson 1985:135-136; cf Footnote 169).¹⁹³ However, Patai (1973:1183) queries if it is ‘reasonable to assume that this name [YHWH] was a totally original Mosaic invention’ since ‘there is at least one indication that the name Yahweh, too was known to an ancestral group of the Hebrews’ (my insertion) (cf 3.5.1; 3.5.1.1; 3.5.1.4) (cf Mowinckel 1961:121-133; Cross 1997a:9). It is believed that Exodus 6:2-3 (as well as Exodus 3:14-15) is not the revelation of a new name but the declaration of the full meaning of the name by which the Israelites will come to know their God (Enns 2000:174; cf Motyer 1962:689; see 3.5.1.1-3.5.1.4). Previously the antiquity of YHWH’s name was discussed (see 3.4.1-3.4.3) and it was mentioned that apparently the statement in Genesis 6:3 conflicts with Genesis 15:7 and 28:13.

¹⁹² Kang (2011:178-179) comments that based on, among others, the archaeological evidence some scholars ascribe a 12th century BC date to the battle of Deborah and Barak against Sisera based on placing the Exodus during the rule of Ramses II (cf Gertoux 2016:279; see also Footnote 85). For a fuller discussion and other views regarding the dating of the battle against Sisera see Kang (2011:178-179). Gertoux (2016:279) views this date an ‘absurd hypothesis’ since a study of Egyptian documents over the period 1300-1200 BCE shows that the country of Israel already existed before Ramses II.’ See also Gabriel (2003:176-177) on the date for the Israelite battle against Sisera and his army.

¹⁹³ As mentioned before, the generic name of God was El or Elohim before the revelation of the divine Name YHWH in Exodus 3:14. A lot has been written about the El epithet and the characteristics shared between the Ugaritic El and YHWH. (The tradition in modernity is to equate YHWH with the Babylonian Marduk, or Ugaritic El or Baal [see Smith 2002:142; Cross 1997a:69-75]). In Judges 2:12 the term *’ēlōhîm* (‘gods’), is also used to refer to the Canaanite gods (2.2.4.7). An in depth analysis of the topic on the god El falls outside the scope of this study. See Cross (1997a:15-60); for a complete discussion of El and the Ugaritic pantheon, Canaanite myth in the Old Testament. See also Herrmann 1999:a274-280; Rollig 1999:280-281; Pardee 1999:285-288; De Pury 1999:288-291; I and Miller 1999:293-299 who provide a necessary and essential discourse on the subject of the Ugaritic god El. The common noun El was also used to refer to the ancient Near Eastern gods such as El the creator-god in the Ugaritic *Baal Cycle* (Ex 3:3-14; cf Gn 1:1; Jdg 1:7; 11:21, 23-24; see Hope and Chidavaenzi 1984:211-215; also, Patai 1973:1182). For this reason, some scholars equate YHWH with the Ugaritic El (see Day 1992c:483). However, as the reader will find out later in this segment, YHWH is not from the north like the Ugaritic El. As stated before Exodus 6:2-3 reads: ‘God *’ēlōhîm* also said to Moses, “I am the LORD. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as *bā’ēl* (El) *šaddāy* (Shaddai) [God Almighty], but by my name *Yahweh* – the LORD) I did not make myself fully known to them’ (See Cross (1997a:3-12) for an in depth discussion of the term ‘God of the fathers’ interpretations and origin).

This conflict is one proof that the Old Testament (the Pentateuch, Joshua and Judges) was written by several authors (according to the Documentary Hypothesis) (Berlin and Brettler 2004:115). However, some scholars hold that the name YHWH dates from great antiquity as evidenced by the derivation of the name from the archaic *havah*, a form that had already been replaced by *hayah* at the time of Moses.¹⁹⁴ It was also stated (see 3.4.1-3.4.3) that although the divine Name was ancient, and known to the patriarchs, they did not understand its entire meaning, therefore God did not reveal Himself to them by that Name until it became necessary.

Smith (2002:142), on the other hand, maintains that the verse (Ex 6:2-3) shows YHWH was not known to the patriarchal fathers who called upon the name of (the Ugaritic) El (cf 3.5.1.1). However, clearly the Israelite covenant distinguishes YHWH as a unique and unparalleled God by the (covenantal) features of redemption, grace and hope, attributes that are not part of the personalities of the Canaanite deities such as El (cf 3.6.1.1). Consequently, although they share the same title, the El worshipped by the Israelites cannot be the same as the Ugaritic one (for all the reasons mentioned in 3.5.1.2). In the Old Testament YHWH is the covenantal and personal name of the true El. The author/s of the Book of Judges always present YHWH as the true God and distinctly separate from the Canaanite deities. Why else would they advocate sole adherence to YHWH and condemn the Israelites for their idolatry?

In Judges 1:4, the author/s uses the divine name YHWH in reference to the conquering Judahite tribe; the narrative offers a description of the defeat of the Canaanites by ‘יְהוָה – Yahweh.’¹⁹⁵ However, in Judges 1:7 the common divine name ‘אֱלֹהִים – Elohim is uttered by the Canaanite King, Adoni-Bezek: ‘Seventy kings with their thumbs and big toes cut off have picked up scraps under my table. Now God – אֱלֹהִים (‘*’ēlōhîm*) has paid me back for what I did to them.’

It is very possible that Adoni-Bezek is aware that YHWH is known by His (common) name Elohim among the Canaanites; that is, as a deity distinct from the Ugaritic El and, thus, Adoni-Bezek is referring to YHWH in the narrative of Judges 1:7. According to the Old Testament the ancient Near Eastern nations were aware that YHWH was the personal name of the God of the Israelites (cf Ex 23:20, 27-28; Nm 22:1-39; cf Jos 2:8-11; 4:24; 5:1; cf 2.2.1.1). As indicated before (see 3.5.3.1a-c), the divine Name is found in the Book of Judges as a distinguishing name of the God of the Israelites, a name which set YHWH apart from the other gods, such as the gods of the Philistines and the Ammonites (cf 3.6.1.1). Judges 10:13-16 reads: ‘But you have forsaken me and served other gods אֱלֹהִים (‘*’ēlōhîm* – gods). But the Israelites said to YHWH, “We have sinned. Do whatever you think best but please rescue us from now.” Then they got rid of the foreign gods

¹⁹⁴ See Bible Hub 2022. Exodus 6:3.

¹⁹⁵ See also Judges 16:28 in which a desperate Samson used three different titles for God namely: YHWH, Adonai and Elohim.

among them and served the LORD.’ Judges 5:1-31 also demonstrates that YHWH is a God separate from the Canaanite deities, the Ugaritic El/ El-berith (cf Jdg 9:46).

3.5.1 Various theories: toponyms and personal names

The date and origins of the divine Name have been a source of intense debate among scholars (Thompson 1992:1011-1012). In the ancient Near East, names and origins of deities on the whole were geographically located (cf 3.4.2; see also Rainey 1978:1-17). Based on inscriptions discovered along the eastern and western Mediterranean coast it is believed that Baal (and El), for example, was a general name given to the local Canaanite deities. Accordingly, Baal is venerated by the name of Baal-Peor (Nm 25:1-9), Baal-Hermon (Jdg 3:3), Baal-berith (Jdg 9:4) (Gill 1988:22; DeVries 1997a:79; Stern 2001a:75) as well as Baal-Tamar (Jdg 20:33; 4.2.2.1a).

The aforementioned serve as a comparison for the purported origins of the name of YHWH. Accordingly, it has been proposed that YHWH is a local Canaanite deity. However, Van der Toorn (1999a:910) maintains that the ‘cult of Yahweh is not originally at home in Palestine.’ Van der Toorn further asserts that ‘outside Israel, Yahweh was not worshipped in the West-Semitic world – despite affirmations to the contrary.’ Van der Toorn goes on to say that prior to 1200 BC ‘the name Yahweh is not found in any Semitic text.’ He adds that the claim of an abbreviated form of the name Yahweh; that is, *Yāh* found ‘as a divine element in theophoric names from Ebla’ (ca 2400-2250 BC) is uncorroborated (Van der Toorn 1999a:910). The Ebla epigrapher Pettinato (1980:38-41) first brought his findings of the Eblaite ‘*Ya* or *Yaw*’ as ‘divine elements in a name’ to academic attention but they have also been refuted by other scholars such as Rainey (1977:38-44, 48-51; cf Rainey 2007a:41-64). According to Rainey, ‘*Ya*’ endings in the Eblaite names ‘are hypocoristic;’ that is, essentially abbreviations or diminutive form such as ‘Mickey is to Michael’ (cf Pettinato 1980:38-41).¹⁹⁶ If the evidence for YHWH’s names at Ebla is valid, it could provide proof for the authenticity of the Old Testament. Pettinato, however, claims that he has never linked Eblaite ‘*Ya* or *Yaw*’ with –*Yahweh*, Hebrew God of the Old Testament’ but merely stated that ‘*Ya* or *Yaw* appear as divine elements in a name.’ *Ya* or *Yahweh* never appears by itself as the name of a god in the Ebla tablets, according to Archi (1980:55-56). However, Archi does not mention the appearance of the name *Ya-Ra-Mu* that is preceded by the divine determinative which denotes that *Ya* is a divine element (Mikaya 1978:2-6). According to Mikaya, the name is ‘semantically equivalent to the Hebrew name *Yoram*’ which means ‘*Ya* is exalted.’ Thus, sometime in the 3rd millennium BC, *Ya* or *Yahweh* was known at Ebla (Mikaya 1978:2-6). However, according to

¹⁹⁶ See Pettinato (1980:38-41) for more details regarding his analysis of the Ebla tablets and associations with the Old Testament. See also Archi (1980:55-56) and his refutation of the findings of Pettinato regarding the Ebla tablets. See also Thompson (1999:195) regarding Ebla that he refers to as the earliest group of texts that may contain references to the name Yahweh, God of the Old Testament.

Mikaya the Eblaite *Ya* or Yahweh ‘was not the same all powerful, transcendent, and monotheistic God later worshipped by the Israelites.’¹⁹⁷

The Ebla tablets do indicate evidence for the existence of the name YHWH prior to the Israelite settlement in Canaan (see Mikaya 1978:2-6). The existence of the *shedim* (false gods) was described in Chapter Two (2.2.5.8). As the people started to worship these gods after the ‘fall’ it is possible that they did so alongside YHWH. Judges 6 and 17 and other narratives in the book may provide parallels for this type of syncretic worship. It may also be true that the God of the early Israelites is not the same as the ‘Ya or Yahweh’ mentioned on the Ebla tablets as Mikaya (1978:2-6) asserts. However, it is also possible that people (at Ebla) have kept some remembrance of the name of the God, YHWH, and have absorbed aspects of the divine Name into their own names or have inherited it without being aware of the meaning. A parallel for this is found in certain common Islamic names such as Yakub/Yaqub (Hebrew: Ya’aqov) and Yahya (Hebrew: Yehôhânân [John]). In the biblical worldview YHWH as His name implies is eternal and unchanging (cf Ex 3:14; Dt 32:40; 33:37; Job 36:26; Ps 48:14; 90:2; Is 44:6, etcetera; cf 3.4). Therefore, it is also plausible that at Ebla some people worshipped YHWH in the aforesaid divine attributes and this is what the name ‘Ya or Yahweh’ reflects in the Ebla texts.

Cross (1997a:61) states that the divine name ‘Yahweh’ appears in extra-biblical sources dated prior to the exile: as ‘yhw’ in the 7th to 6th century BC letters from Lachish and Arad and the 9th century BC Moabite *Mesa Stela* (cf Thompson 1992:1011-1012). Extra-biblical sources are 14th and 13th century BC in which periods ‘South Palestinian [Edomite] places names written, yhw’ (see 3.5.1.4). This indicates the antiquity of the knowledge and use of the name ‘yhw.’ According to Cross (1997a:61), Yahweh (yhw) is an ancient name and abbreviations such as *Yāhû*, *Yāh*, *Yô* and *Yēhō* are held to be secondary (see above) (Freedman, O’Conner and Ringgren 1986:501; see also Van der Toorn 1999a:910).¹⁹⁸

3.5.1.1 The Kenite Hypothesis

It has been speculated that the God of the early Israelites, YHWH, was the God of the Kenites, a Midianite clan (see Fishbane 2002:70, 73, 247).¹⁹⁹ Abba believes that the name of YHWH originates from the Kenites (Abba 1961:320). The Kenites, at the very least, were a nomadic people very closely related to the Midianites and the Amalekites. The Kenites were one of the ten tribes mentioned in Genesis 15:19 already inhabiting Canaan at the time of Abraham. Dever (2003a:34)

¹⁹⁷ Mikaya, however, does not substantiate his statements regarding the purported weak Eblaite YHWH and one must imagine this assertion to be only an opinion of his. See Thompson (1992:1011-1012) for more details regarding the possible theophoric Eblaite name endings. According to Thompson the cuneiform symbol NI, which some academics had interpreted as /ya/ (in the Eblaite tablets) is currently read as *IL_x* ‘god’ when used in personal names.

¹⁹⁸ Cross (1997a:62-75) discusses the meaning and forms of the divine Name of YHWH.

¹⁹⁹ According to Genesis 25:1-2, the Midianites were the descendants of Midian, a son born to Abraham by his wife Keturah whom he married after the death of Sarah. In Genesis 25:6, Abraham sent them to the east of Canaan.

locates Midian on the eastern shore of the Gulf of Aqaba on the Red Sea, in the northwest Arabian Peninsula. Motyer (1962:688) remarks that the name Kenite means ‘smith’ and the occurrence of copper southeast of the gulf of Aqaba, the Kenite-Midianite area, corroborates this conception. Parke-Taylor (1975:21) explains that Moses was introduced to the worship of YHWH by Jethro, a Midianite priest (of YHWH) whose daughter, Zipporah, Moses married. Moses was blessed by Jethro who offered sacrifices to YHWH (Ex 18:8-12) and later advised him concerning the sharing of his duties (Ex 18:17-27; Dorsey 1996a:564). Evidence of ‘believing’ Kenites who are allied with the Israelites are found in Heber, the Kenite and his wife Jael (Jdg 4:11, 18-22) also Caleb and Othniel (Jdg 1:12-14; 3:9-11).

Mondriaan (2011:414-430) theorizes that the Kenites were descendants of Cain. Mondriaan remarks that several Old Testament passages (Dt 33:2; Jdg 5:4; Ps 68:8; cf Ex 19:18, 20) allude to YHWH’s ‘origins’ in the southern parts of ancient Israel (see 3.5.4.1 and 3.5.4.1c) where the Kenites, descendants of Cain dwelled. The Kenites were acquainted with a form of the worship of YHWH that was passed down the ancestral lineage of Cain (cf Gn 4:21-24). Motyer (1962:689) asserts that ‘the sole support of the Kenite hypothesis is that their ancestor Cain bore the mark of Yahweh’ (Gn 4:15; see also Abba 1961:320; cf Mellinkoff 1981:103-104). The Kenites would spread their religion to the northern regions of ‘Palestine’ while working as, inter alia, nomadic metalworkers; that is, coppersmiths (see above), also makers of music instruments, trades possibly inherited from their ancestor Tubal-Cain, a son of Cain (Gn 4:21-22; Mondriaan 2011:414-415, 419-420).²⁰⁰ Parke-Taylor (1975:21) elaborates that Jethro ‘rejoiced at the discovery that YHWH had delivered Moses and the Israelites in the Exodus from Egypt and the passages of the Sea of Reeds.’ He goes on to say that according to Genesis 4:26 and the J tradition, YHWH was worshipped ‘from antiquity’ (cf Gn 4:26).

The passage in Numbers 24:21-22 associates the name of Cain to that of the Kenites and which scholars use to support the Kenite hypothesis (Mondriaan 2011:418; Hurn 2005:348-350). Mondriaan (2011:414-430) states that her research supports the idea that Moses acquired his Yahwistic beliefs, which he subsequently delivered to the early Israelites, from the Kenites. However, Abba (1961:321) and Dorsey (1996a:564) argue that there is too little evidence to support the Kenite hypothesis. It is possible that the Kenites are descendants of Cain and that they might have retained a Yahwistic faith from their eponymous ancestor (Gn 4:1) at the time Moses first came into contact with them (Ex 2:15-22).

On the other hand, Genesis 4:16 states that Cain left the presence of YHWH, which is interpreted to mean that he was no longer under God’s direct protection. Thus, YHWH gave Cain the aforementioned mark as protection from the murderous inclinations of other people (Gn 4:14-15). The

²⁰⁰ For a complete description of the Kenite Hypothesis and a list of the scholars who have discarded the theory, see Parke-Taylor (1975:21-22).

Genesis accounts describe the birth of a third son, Seth (Gn 4:25-26) and indicate that it was Seth's lineage that survived the deluge rather than Cain's (Gn 6-9). Furthermore, although the Hebrew word for Kenite and Cain is the same – קַיִן – *qayin* – it is also the name of a descendant of Seth, Kenan (Gn 5:9) and presents strong evidence for the idea that the Kenites come from the lineage of Seth through his descendant Kenan (cf Mondriaan 2011:417).²⁰¹

Judges 1:16 narrates that 'The descendants of Moses' father-in-law, the Kenite, went up from the City of Palms with the people of Judah to live among the inhabitants of the Desert of Judah in the Negev near Arad.' Heber, the Kenite, broke away from this larger Kenite community and 'pitched his tent by the great tree in Zaanannim near Kedesh' (Jdg 4:11). In Judges 5:24-26, Deborah describes them as tent dwellers and alludes to their raising of cattle (see Gn 4:20), clear indications of their pastoralism that further collaborates the idea espoused by the Kenite hypothesis that Yahwism was spread in Canaan by these itinerant semi-nomads (cf Ex 3:1; Mondriaan 2011:422). Judges 1:16 records that the descendants of Moses' father-in-law migrated to the Negev, near Arad where they lived among the people in the Desert of Judah in the Negev (where the copper-mining activities took place (cf Jdg 4:11). These desert people already living in the Negev possibly were the descendants of Hobab, Moses' brother-in-law (cf Nm 10:29-30).

This lends credibility to the presence of the Kenites in Canaan as supported by the evidence in the archaeological record of Israel. In a village at Arad, a potential altar construction in the form of a raised platform was discovered and regarded to be the most plausible location for the Kenites (Mondriaan 2011:424). The Israelites constructed an altar at Arad in the 10th century BC using the stones that remained from an earlier altar. These stones retained an earlier cultic tradition of a platform that may have been a Kenite shrine from the 12th century BC on a platform (Mondriaan 2011:424).²⁰²

²⁰¹ Bible Hub 2022. Qayin. Mondriaan makes only a brief reference to the Kenan, a descendant of Seth, who shares the same name as Cain in the Hebrew language. I propose that Kenan (*Qayin*) is a likely progenitor of the Kenites as they would have inherited their faith in YHWH from this ancestor rather than Cain who apparently abolished his faith in YHWH (Gn 4:16).

²⁰² As previously indicated it is possible that the Kenites were the descendants of Seth through Kenan (Qayin) (Gn 5:9). Another theory proposes that they were the descendants of Abraham through Keturah which would account for their presence in Canaan and their retention of their forefather Abraham's faith in YHWH (Hurn 2005:348). Evidence for this idea is found in another tribe the Kenezites. The Kenezites are also mentioned alongside the nine other tribes, including the Kenites (Gn 15:19) who are believed to have inhabited Canaan at the time of Abraham (Jael and her husband for example in Judges 4 and 5).

Like the Kenites (Heber and his wife Jael [Jdg 4:11, 17]), the Kenezites to whom belonged Othniel, Caleb and Achsah (Jdg 1:12; 3:9) had allied themselves with the Israelites. The Kenezites were descendants of Abraham through the line of his great-grandson, Eliphaz, the son of Esau (Gn 34:11, 15, 42) who were known as the Edomites and who, according to Genesis 34:8, settled in the hill country of Seir (Lilley 1962:689). Apparently, this situation indicates that there exists a contradiction between Genesis 15:19 and Genesis 35:11. However, Moses' father-in-law is a Midianite (Ex 18:1) but is called a Kenite also (Jdg 4:17). Similarly, Moses's brother-in-law is called a Midianite (Nm 10:29; cf Ex 18:1) and his descendants Kenites (Jdg 4:11).

The texts (Gn 15:19; Gn 35:11; Ex 18:1; Jdg 1:16; 4:11) might be referring to two groups of people (both

3.5.1.2 Canaanite origins of YHWH

Another theory ascribes Canaanite origins to YHWH who emerges in the Late Bronze Age and early Iron Age in Canaan (Miller 2000:1). According to this theory, YHWH is indigenous to Canaan and during the aforementioned period He was one of the many Canaanite deities, such as Baal (and El) worshipped in Canaan (Smith 2002:7; cf 3.5.1).

Smith (2002:142) enumerates the similarities in the characters of the Ugaritic El and YHWH and determines that ‘in Israel El’s characteristics and epithets became part of the repertoire of the descriptions of Yahweh’ (cf 3.5.1). In other words, the character of the Ugaritic El merged into that of YHWH and the worship converted into the religion of YHWH (Smith 2002:144; see also Cross 1997a:69-75). It has been suggested that the name YHWH is part of the cultic title of El – *’il dū yahwī šaba’ôt* – (El who creates [heavenly] armies or hosts) which is interpreted as El having a convoy of the heavenly army at the time he leads the earthly armies of Israel (into battle) (Cross 1997a:69-75; Murdock 2014:417).

It has also been claimed that YHWH was a Canaanite god of metallurgy to explain His origins (Amzallag 2009:387-404). Amzallag reports that in the antiquity of south-eastern Canaan there existed a major copper smelting centre which was associated with the Kenites. The identity of the Canaanite patron god of metallurgy that likely was worshipped there remains unknown. Amzallag (2009:387-404) in his research examines the possibility that YHWH was this Canaanite god of metallurgy. Amzallag cites the following as supporting data for his theory: The Kenites, a minor Edomite tribe considered as the Canaanite smelters, worshipped YHWH. A symbol of metallurgy was the bronze serpent (*nehustan*) with which the Israelites were associated. The melting of copper is regarded as a definite symbol of YHWH in Exodus 4. YHWH and the god of metallurgy in Egypt (Ptah), Mesopotamia (Ea/Enki) and Elam (Napir) are comparable. They are all lone enigmatic deities. Both ancient metallurgical traditions and Yahwism share the practice of combating the (other) gods. According to Amzallag (2009:387-404) this information shows that before Yahweh was widely worshipped in Israel, He was the deity of the Canaanite guild of metallurgists. These arguments of Amzallag are very thin. It lies outside the scope of this study for a close examination of Amzallag’s theory. Suffice it to say Exodus 4 is a mysterious text and its context is the deliverance of the early Israelites by means of YHWH’s miraculous intervention. Hence the staff turned into a serpent. Unlike the other gods mentioned by Amzallag, monotheistic YHWH contends for sole worship. According to the Old Testament, YHWH is the patron God of the

groups were also called Midianites): the Kenites referred to in Genesis 15:19 formed one group hostile to the early Israelites (cf Jdg 6:1) while the Kenites, the descendants of Abraham through Esau were part of another group allied to the early Israelites in Judges. Both Kenite groups occupied the same area and were therefore known as Midianites prior to the descendants of Moses’ father-in-law joining them to settle in Canaan. It is also possible that the group who remained in the Negev (Nm 10:30; Jdg 4:11) became allies with the Midianites who were the enemies of the Israelites (Jdg 6:1; see also Alexander 1828:640).

Covenant, the creator and sovereign of the cosmos. He is not a regional Deity neither is He a mere god of metallurgy (see 3.3.2-3.3.5.1).

Day (2002:14-15) refutes the idea that YHWH was a Canaanite deity. Day (2002:13-14) has pointed out the differences in the characters of YHWH and El that controvert this theory (see also 2.3.4). Day has also criticized the use of the term *'il dū yahwī ṣaba'ôt* (El who creates [heavenly]) armies ([by] Grabbe 2017:194) to support a Canaanite origin for YHWH since it cannot be attested either in the Old Testament or in extra-biblical sources. Above (see 3.5.1), I have explained that it is the dissimilarities in the character of YHWH that point towards a singular God who could not have been a derivative or merger of another deity. Textual sources do not mention the name of YHWH as a minor or principal deity worshipped in Canaan. There are no major temples or altars built to YHWH (apart from the sanctuary/altar of the LORD at Shechem; see 2.3.1; 2.3.5.3a) and this would have been case had He been a Canaanite god. As mentioned below (see 3.5.4.1d;), it is possible that, given the travels of Abraham from Ur and throughout Canaan, Abraham's faith in YHWH (or perhaps El as YHWH was also known by the patriarch; see Figure 3.6) was adopted by the peoples who came into contact with him (cf Gn 20:17; see 3.5.4.1) and throughout the eras these people retained a memory of Abraham's God. Thus, the Canaanite El may be a corrupted version of Abraham's God also called El (cf Jdg 9). This would account for the purported similarities between El and YHWH (see L'Heureux 1981:47-48 presenting an explanation for these similarities; cf Block 2012b). However, the most important argument against YHWH having Canaanite origins is that YHWH is (always) referred to as coming from the 'south' (cf Jdg 5:4-5; see below 3.5.1.3-3.5.1.4).

3.5.1.3 YHWH comes from Seir in Edom

In Judges 5:4-5, Deborah states that YHWH comes from Seir in Edom, from Sinai (which is also the vicinity of the Kenites [see above]). This statement is an allusion to the covenant and the place, Mount Sinai, where Moses received the covenant (Ex 19-24), more than it indicates a geographical region that points to the purported origins of YHWH (cf Dt 33:2; Ps 68:8). YHWH comes from Seir to fulfill His covenantal promise to protect the tribes (cf Ex 23:20; Dt 32:11-12; 33:29; Is 46:4; Ps 121:4-5, 7).

Freedman, O'Conner and Ringgren (1986:520) describe YHWH's origins as lying in the south, in the mountains of Sinai. Smith (2017a:42) observes that scholars agree YHWH was a divine warrior from Seir in Edom, Paran and Teman. Walton, Matthews and Chavalas (2000:446) elaborate that Seir was the Biblical name for an area in Edom and frequently used as an alternative word for Edom (cf Gn 36:7-9). Seir also appears in the 14th century BC *Amarna Letters* from Egypt 'as a geographic toponym' (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:170, 612). Paran is located west of Edom. The region is a desert in the northeastern Sinai and plays an important role in the wilderness dwelling period of Israel (cf Nm 13:3, 26; Dt 1:1; Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:53, 148,

793). Teman ‘is a geographical name synonymous with Edom or with the northern section of that southern Transjordan kingdom...’ (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:681-682, 793; see also below).

3.5.1.4 ‘The land of Shasu-yhw’

An ancient Egyptian inscription – a list of toponyms reads ‘the land of Shasu-yhw.’ The name *yhw* in the aforesaid term may refer to the Tetragrammaton (Freedman, O’Conner and Ringgren 1986:510; Thompson 1992:1011-1012; Schneider 2007:113). The place name would be in accordance with the ancient Near Eastern tradition of describing a geographical region and a god (Berlejung 2017:267-92; Adrom and Muller 2017:93-114; Pfeiffer 2017:115-144; Jeremias 2017:145-156; Leuenberger 2017:157-180).²⁰³

The list of toponyms was discovered on a column of a temple built by the Egyptian Pharaoh Amenhotep III (ca 1402-1363 BC). The Shasu is assumed to refer to a Bedouin tribe beyond the eastern borders of Egypt in the region of southern Transjordan – the areas where the Israelites dwelled according to the Old Testament at that time (Grabbe 2007:54; 2022; Anderson 2015:100; cf Levy, Adams and Muniz 2004:66) as well as certain areas in Lebanon, Syria, Sinai and Canaan (Billington 2010) referenced in the Egyptian inscriptions. Billington (2010) remarks that ‘the term Shasu is found in a variety of New Kingdom hieroglyphic texts including the military, administrative, and diplomatic documents of Thutmosis III, Amenhotep II, Thutmosis IV, Amenhotep III, Akhenaton, Seti I, Ramses II, Merneptah, and Rameses III.’ Billington adds that it is likely that the Egyptians from the New Kingdom Period considered the Edomites, Ammonites, Amalekites, Midianites, Kenites, Apiru and Israelites as Shasu.

The two *New Kingdom inscriptions* which mention the Land of the Shasu-yhw (the Land of the Shasu of Yahweh [see above]) are found on topographical lists (Billington 2010; cf Thompson 1992:1011-1012). One list was discovered at Soleb and a second at ‘Amarah West (Thompson 1992:1011-1012; Billington 2010). These *Egyptian name lists* include a Syrian site, *Ya-h-wa* ([name] no 97), which is equal to ‘Yahweh’ as indicated before (Thompson 1992:1011-1012). Thompson describes the discovery of the 13th century BC Rameses II list in a Nubian temple in ‘Amarah West with six names (nos 93-98) following the term ‘Bedouin area’ (the Shasu of *S’rr*, the Shasu of *Rbn*, the Shasu of *Sm’t*, the Shasu of *Wrbr*, the Shasu of *Yhw*, the Shasu of *Pysps* (Sivertsen [2009:118]) along with other the names (nos 96-98) that have been discovered in Soleb

²⁰³ Berlejung (2017:267-92); Adrom and Miller (2017:93-114); Pfeiffer (2017:115-144); Jeremias (2017:145-156) and Leuenberger (2017:157-180) discuss, inter alia, the location of the land of the Shasu in the Egyptian text. See also Thompson (1992:1011-1012).

in Nubia on an Amon temple of Amenhotep III (1417-1379 BC).²⁰⁴ According to Billington the Amarah West topographical list was ‘almost certainly copied from the earlier list at Soleb.’

The name *S'rr'* (*Sa-ra-r*) in the line ‘the Shasu of *S'rr'*’ has been connected to Seir (Edom) and the biblical passage in Deuteronomy 33:2 that links YHWH with Seir and Paran (Thompson 1992:1011-1012; cf Sivertsen 2009:118; Fleming 2021:62; cf Jdg 5:4; Nm 10:12). The aforesaid could be construed to mean that the name was known in the Edom or Midianite region circa 1400 BC (Thompson 1992:1011-1012). In contrast to the spelling in other Egyptian inscriptions, Thompson notes that some scholars believe the inscription ‘*S-r-r*’ to be wrong (in its association with YHWH coming from Seir). Evidence comes from Rameses III’s temple in *Medinet Habu* which contains the words *Yah-wa*, *Yi-ha* which are Syrian words that scholars associate with ‘Yahweh’ (De Lafayette 2014:129). Consequently, the name is not associated with Edom or the Midianites but does seem to appear as early as 1400 BC in Syria (Thompson 1992:1011-1012; cf De Lafayette 2014:129-130).²⁰⁵ According to Genesis 22:14, the name YHWH was already known to Abraham although the patriarch was unaware that this was God’s covenant Name (cf Gn 15:7; see also 3.4.2; cf 3.5.1). In the Hebrew text it is YHWH who appears to Abram. As previously mentioned, it is possible that the name of YHWH may have been spread in Canaan and neighbouring regions through Abram’s journeys to these territories (see Figure 3.6; see 3.5.1b; cf De Lafayette 2014:129-130).²⁰⁶ The name of YHWH may have been preserved down the generations and people in the regions of Syria might have retained some memory of the divine Name.

²⁰⁴ Schneider (2007:113-120) discusses the personal name of the owner of a newly disclosed and displayed *Book of the Dead* papyrus from the late 18th or 19th dynasty (Princeton University Library, Pharaonic Roll 5). It is suggested that the name in question is a Northwest Semitic theophoric sentence name in Egyptian transcription, *'adōnī-rō 'ē-yāh* ‘My lord is the shepherd of Yah.’ While the name Yahweh has been recorded in Egyptian toponym lists from the New Kingdom (Thompson 1992:1011-1012), the current name ‘would be the first documented occurrence of the god Yahweh in his function as a shepherd of Yah, the short form of the tetragrammaton’. Schneider’s article ‘The First Documented Occurrence of the God Yahweh? (Book of the Dead Princeton ‘Roll 5’)’ also discusses ‘a new etymology of the divine name’ and the cultural importance of the evidence.

²⁰⁵ The determinative *-ywh* in personal names from Ugarit (about 14th century BC) is not a divine element, and it has nothing to do with the name YHWH, claims Thompson (1992:1011-1022).

²⁰⁶ Evidence for communication between different regions in ancient Syria is found in the exchange of letters between a king of Tyre and a king of Ugarit (Vita 2017:69-71).



Figure 3.6 Abraham's travels (Young 2022)

According to Thompson (1992:1011-1012) the earliest appearances of the name of YHWH (in the Old Testament) is in the Song of Deborah (Jdg 5) dated to the 11th century BC, which aligns with the references to Seir in the Egyptian inscriptions previously mentioned.²⁰⁷

3.6 THE NAMES OF THE ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN DEITIES

3.6.1 What's in a name?

In this segment the names of the ancient Near Eastern gods that occur in the Book of Judges – Chemosh (Jdg 11:24), Dagon (Jdg 16:23), Baal, Asherah, Ashtoreth (Jdg 2:11-12; 3:7; 6:25-26; 10:6) and Anath (Jdg 3:31) will be discussed. This is done to showcase the uniqueness of the divine Name, YHWH, and His nature. The names of the ancient Near Eastern gods do not reveal the unique references to eternity and holiness such as that intrinsic to the name of YHWH. The names of the foreign gods had to do with those facets of the Canaanite lifestyle which were of primary concern to them, that is, military conquest, fertility and agriculture (Noll 2013:333; see Lambert 2013:55, 142-143 for descriptions of the gods' concepts of virtue and holiness; see Ross 1980:223-240 for details regarding the morality of the gods).

3.6.1.1 The names of the gods

a. Chemosh

The name of the national god of Moab was Chemosh 𐤇𐤌𐤌𐤔 (*kəməwōš*) (Thompson 1962:8:34-836; Mattingly 1992:895-897; Muller 1999a:187-188). The *Mesha Stele*, circa 840 BC, is considered to be a source of information regarding the character and function of the god Chemosh (Mattingly 1992:895-897) which is also reflected in the name of the god (Muller 1999a:187). The name of

²⁰⁷ The rest of the biblical text is dated to the post-exilic period in accordance with the dating of the writing of the Old Testament prescribed by the Documentary Hypothesis.

this Moabite god, Chemosh, inscribed on the abovementioned *Mesha Stele*, might mean ‘conqueror, subduer’ (cf Jdg 11:24; 2 Ki 3:26-27; Muller 1999a:187).²⁰⁸ Mattingly (1992:895-897) remarks that it may seem logical to think of Chemosh as a god of war given his description on the *Mesha Stele*. The *Mesha Stele* records the victory of the Moabite king Mesha over Israel (Thompson 1962:834-836; Muller 1999a:188); that is, the victory of Chemosh over YHWH (Muller 1999a:188) since the conquest of a nation also meant the defeat of their god/s (Conn 1999:99; Kang 2011:71; Tucker and Grant 2018:221). In the worldview in Judges the aforesaid subjugation of the Israelites would have been ascribed to their idolatry (cf Jdg 2:10-15).

Judges 3:12-30 narrates the defeat of the Moabites which translates into YHWH’s defeat of Chemosh when the Israelites cry out to YHWH for help. In Judges 11:12-24 Chemosh is also described as the god of the Ammonites (Muller 1999a:187-189). Jephthah references Chemosh as giving land to the Ammonites (see also 3.4.5; also 3.4.5.1; 3.7.1.1a; Jdg 11:24; Mattingly 1992:895-897). Was Jephthah possibly under the influence of Chemosh by sacrificing his daughter? However, the national god of the Ammonites was Milcom (possibly also known as Molech; Mattingly 1992:895-897). Mattingly observes that this ‘puzzling and enigmatic reference’ to Chemosh in Judges 11:24 has been ascribed inter alia to a ‘Kemosh-Milcom equation, ... a scribal blunder, or an example of diplomatic protocol.’ The designation of the Ammonite god Molech מֹלֶךְ (*mo'lek*) is an epithet that originally meant ‘prince’ or ‘king’ (cf Lv 20:5; Muller 1999b:538).²⁰⁹

b. Dagon

Dagon is the Hebrew variant of the name Dagan who was a Philistine deity and specifically the god of Ashdod (Jdg 16:23; 1 Sm 5:1-7; Healey 1999:216-219; Spronk 2019:447). Dagon (see Figure 3.7) is mentioned in Judges 16:23 when the Philistines held a great sacrificial ceremony to honour their god for helping them to capture Samson saying: ‘god has delivered, Samson, our enemy, into our hands’ (cf Healey 1999:218). Wiersbe (2007:465) observes that ‘instead of bringing glory to the God of Israel, Samson gave the enemy opportunity to honor their false gods.’ However, the Philistines’ joy at the apparent defeat of YHWH is short lived when Samson brings down the walls of the temple on them. The repeatedly falling of (the statue of) Dagon before the stolen Ark of the Covenant that was housed in the temple of Dagon at Ashdod (1 Sm 5) was a glaring example of YHWH’s superiority over the Canaanite god/s and His subordination to no one (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:287).

²⁰⁸ See Muller (1999a:186-187) for a discussion of the phonological form of Chemosh and the meaning of the name based on Akkadian and Old South Arabic terms that mean to defeat or conquer.

²⁰⁹ Muller (1999b:538-542) provides more information on Molech also Malik or Milcom and etymologies related to the name of the god.



Figure 3.7 The fish god (Dagon) (Gutenberg.org)

The meaning of the name of the Philistine god Dagon דָּגוֹן (*dāgōwn*) is uncertain but could include etymologies based on ‘fish’ or ‘grain’ (cf Jdg16:23; Healey 1999:216; cf Noll 2013:337) which ascribe a fertility function to this deity. The name of Dagon which is also associated with agriculture (Healey 1999:216) denotes Canaanite preoccupation with the vital aspect of land fertility and successful harvests. Leick (2003:30) translates the name of Dagon as ‘the rainy one.’ Dagon is mentioned in the *Mari texts* (Day 2002:89) probably originated from the Amorites (Jdg 1:34-36; see Singer 1992:437; see also Van der Toorn 2008:22; cf Wallenfels and Sasson 2000:2; Mead 2014:274). Amorites frequently combined the veneration of their ancestral family gods with the gods of the city where they resided (cf Jdg 6:10; Van der Toorn 2008:22; cf Gottwald 2007:96).²¹⁰ The Amorite ancestral family deities included the moon god Erah (also revered as Sin-Amurru ‘the Amorite moon god’). The crescent-shaped ornaments Gideon took from the necks of the camels of the slain Midianite kings, Zebah and Zalmunna, are symbols of the moon god Sîn (Jdg 8:21; Oman 2005:43 cf Nakhai 2001:130). The storm god Amurru was an ancestral deity venerated by the Amorites and is described as ‘the personification of the Amorites’ (Van der Toorn 1999b:32-34).²¹¹ In the Ugaritic text Dagon, is the father of Baal. It is possible, however, that El and Dagan

²¹⁰ The Amorites or Amurru are recognized as Canaanites by scholars (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:158; Galambush 2001:545; Singer 2006:755; Collins 2007:203-204; see also 3.6.1.1). They were a pastoral-nomadic people who moved into eastern Syria and northern Iraq in the late 3rd to early 2nd millennia. They later migrated from Syria into Canaan. In the Old Testament the Amorites and Canaanites are genealogically related (Gn 10:16) and Canaan is sometimes referred to as the land of the Amorites (Gn 10:16; Jdg 6:20; Nakhai 2001:7-8; cf Dever 2003b:44, 48). The Amorites are identified in Middle Bronze Age texts when *MAR.TU* [Sumerian] or *amurrû* [Akkadian] are attached to tribal or personal names (Nakhai 2001:7; Gottwald 2007:95-96; cf Buccellati 1997:108. See also Van der Toorn 1999b:32). Van der Toorn (1996:88) notes that the Amorite king of Aleppo, Yarîm-Lîm referenced the god Adad as ‘the god of my city’ and Sîn as ‘my personal god.’ This is an indication of the dualistic nature of Amorite worship (cf 3.6.1.1).

²¹¹ As the personification of the Amorites, the god Amurru is described in terms of the semi-nomadic lifestyle of the Amorites before they became urbanized. Van der Toorn notes that ‘according to a passage in the *Marriage of Martu*, the god

dresses in sheepskins [...], lives in a tent, at the mercy
of wind and rain, [...] does not offer
sacrifice [...]. He digs up truffles in the
steppe, but does not know how to bow his
knee [i.e. he is not accustomed to sit down

are merged deities at Ugarit (Smith and Pitard 2009:47 cf 3.4.4.2a). If so, Asherah /Athirat (see below) who later became Baal's consort, probably was Baal's mother.

c. Baal

The most popular gods were the local Baal deities of the numerous fortified cities in the region of Canaan (cf Jdg 2:10-12; 8:33; Wallis 1915:220; cf Van der Toorn 1996:88; 2008:22; Schmidt 2007a:39)²¹² that potently featured among the deities worshipped by the Israelites in the Book of Judges (cf 2.2.5.3; 2.2.5.6e). The popular Canaanite god Baal is often mentioned in the Book of Judges as one of the gods frequently worshipped by the Israelites (Jdg 2:13; 3:3,7; 6:25-26; 8:33; 10:6). Baal was an agricultural god; as a storm god he brought the rains that fertilized the land (Day 1992a:545; Noll 2013:333; see also 3.3.2; 8.2.2.2a) which may explain why the Israelites came to worship him. Baal 𐎁𐎗𐎗𐎎 (*bah'al*) commonly known by his title which means 'lord' was originally known as Baal-Hadad (cf 2.2.5.3; 2.2.5.6e) The title Baal would in the long run come to substitute the original name of the god Hadad 𐎗𐎎𐎗𐎎 (*hādād*). Spronk (1999:532) notes that in the ancient Near East it was common practice to allude to a god merely by his title such as Baal. The original name of the god would in time be supplanted by this designation. Examples are 'the Mesopotamian Bel for Marduk and Canaanite Baal for Hadad.' The popular Canaanite storm god, Baal, whose epithet means thunder or rider on the clouds (Coogan [ed] 1978:77) is one of the most notable deities in the texts from Ugarit.

d. Marduk

The common title of the Babylonian god Marduk 𐎠𐎵𐎠𐎫𐎧𐎺𐎠 (*mārōdāk*) was Bel 𐎁𐎗 [*bēl*] (cf Jr 50:2) by which designation he would finally come to be known. The preferred interpretation of Marduk's name is calf of the storm (or of the sun) or son of the storm (or of the sun) (Abusch 1999:543; Coogan [ed] 1978:77). Marduk's name is generally interpreted as calf/son of the sun, as shown above; however Abusch (1999:543) mentions that the interpretation calf of the storm is preferred 'since Marduk is not a solar deity.' Coogan [ed] (1978:77) points out the similarities between Baal

for a meal (?). He eats raw meat. In life he has no house, in death he lies not buried in a grave.

Van der Toorn (1999b:33) goes on to say that the epithet of Amurru is *bēl šadē*, 'Lord of the Mountain' for which the Canaanite cognate is El Shaddai, 'The Mountain One,' one of the names of YHWH. For this reason, some identify El Shaddai with Amurru. In the Old Testament, however, YHWH is the one true God and all other are false deities. It is clear that the prophet of Judges 6 refers to Canaan as the land of the Amorites which apparently is an allusion to the sin of the Amorites in Genesis 15:16 and thus they are subject to YHWH's judgment. The sin was so severe that it merited the annihilation of the Amorites. I believe that this has everything to do with the worship of the god Amurru: it was so abominable that neither the name of the god nor the nature of the sin could be mentioned. The *Marriage of Martu* (see above) grants insight into the character of the god.

²¹² Albright (1941:175) notes that 'Ashirat' (Biblical Asherah) the consort of the Ugaritic El, was worshipped by the Amorites. He mentions that an 18th century BC votive inscription in the Sumerian language is dedicated to the goddess by an Amorite who addresses her as the 'the bride of heaven.' Asherah was also the consort of the storm god Amurru (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:177; Van der Toorn 1999b:33).

and Marduk. Both share a similar name ‘son of the storm’ (Marduk) and rider on the clouds (Baal). In addition, both defeat a sea goddess, and both are promoted to the headship of the gods (Coogan [ed] (1978:77). Alike the Canaanite Baal, the Babylonian Marduk emerged initially as a fertility and storm god who later assumed position as the supreme god in the Babylonian pantheon (Abusch 1999:544; see also Dalglisch 1992:652-653 and Handy 1992:522-523).

e. Asherah

In the Book of Judges, Asherah אֲשֶׁרָה (ăšērâ)²¹³ is always referenced in connection with Baal (Jdg 3:7; 6:25-26; Day 1992c:483-487; Noll 2013:325; see Figure 3.10). In the Ugaritic texts, Asherah is also known as Athirat (Day 1992c:483-487; Noll 2013:325). As the consort of El, Asherah has an elevated status of sanctity and is thus referenced as Qudshu (*Qdš* with the meaning of holy or sanctuary)²¹⁴ in the aforesaid texts (Day 1992c:483-487; Noll 2013:247, 325; see also Cross 1997a:33; Day 1992d:831-837; Dukstra 1999:603; cf Houtman 1999:678).²¹⁵ Noll (2013:331) describes Asherah as the female consort of El that demonstrated the deity’s supreme qualities such as the wisdom of El. Other epithets dedicated to Asherah in her role as the consort of El are: Asherah ‘the grace of El, the support of El and the peace of El’ (Noll 2013:331), Asherah is the mother of the gods (cf 3.6.1.1b) which prompts her status as a fertility goddess.²¹⁶ Day (1992c:483-

²¹³ Cf Jdg 3:7, in which verse the Asherahs/Asheroth may refer to a cult object – a pole or tree that is positioned next to an altar on a high place for example (Campbell 2001:221; Day 1992c:483; cf 2.3.4.3b; 3.3.2.1; 4.3.1.2b). The pole or probably tree represented the fertility aspect of Asherah (Nielsen 1999a:637). In the Old Testament Asherah appears ‘as the name of a Canaanite fertility goddess and a wooden cult-symbol’ (Day 1992c:483). See also Judges 3:7; 6:25-26. See also Binger (1997:109) describing the reference to Asherah by some as ‘a thing, a cult-pole, a Yahweh-symbol, a sanctuary, a tree or a hypostasis (the turning of a Yahweh-symbol into a god[dess] in its own right).’ The Hebrew word for the Asherah pole אֲשֶׁרָה – *hā’ăšērāh* denotes this symbol of the goddess Asherah in the form of a wooden image or a sacred tree or pole set up near an altar (see Bible Hub 2022. Asherah). Asherah has been associated with the religion of YHWH based on certain inscriptions found at a 9-8th century BC Israelite temple at Kuntillet ‘Ajrud] (see Emerton 1982:2-20; Dever 1984:21-34; Stern 2001b:20-29) as well as tomb inscription discovered at Khirbet el-Kom (Zevit 1984:39-49; Shea 1990b:56-63). I have not discussed the purported association of YHWH with Asherah at length in this study (see 8.2.2.2a-b) since this would not have been a feature of the unadulterated supernatural Yahwistic worldview of the early Israelites but rather a facet of the syncretic religious cult that existed in the pre-monarchy (see also Finkelstein and Silberman 2002:242; Sha 2018:193).

²¹⁴ In the Ugaritic text, El is also portrayed as *qdš* and also as ‘benevolent, good-natured El’ (Hermann 1999a:275). See also Smith (2002:142; cf Smith 2000:384-386).

²¹⁵ Although some scholars equate Asherah with Qudshu (see above), Houtman (1999:678) argues that the identity of Qudshu in the Ugaritic Texts is disputed by others. See Parker (1999a:718-720) for an informative discussion of the meaning of the word *qdš*. In Egyptian representations, *Qdš* is also the name of a goddess (Day 1992c:483-487).

²¹⁶ Representations of nude male and female human figures and gods accentuate the eroticism and anti-covenantal values inherent to the fertility rites (see Bahrani 1993:12-19; see also 7.4.4.1). Van der Toorn (1999b:33) mentions a nude Amurru found on a cylinder seal from Alalakh that demonstrates the fertility aspects related to the worship of this god. The divergences in covenantal lifestyle, morality and rituals, the result of worshipping a diversity of gods, placed the Israelite community under severe pressures of destabilization (see Wallis 1915:220; see also above). An ancient and exceptional collection of gold and silver articles dated to be 3600 years old were uncovered at Tel Gezer (Hasson 2016). The cache includes Canaanite sacred statuettes equivalents of the ancient Near Eastern fertility goddess Ishtar and the moon god Sin. The items were found in clay jar placed within the foundations of a building. The sacred objects were probably offered to gods in the tradition of the time to consecrate the edifice (Hasson, 2016) and demonstrate the ancientness of the polytheistic nature of Canaanite society adopted by the Israelites.

487) notes that depictions of Athirat/*Qdš* make her role as a fertility goddess abundantly clear' (cf 8.2.2.2a-b).

Depictions of the goddess as *Qdš* are found in the figurines and plaques in the archaeological records from Syria and Israel.²¹⁷ Asherah later becomes the consort of her son Baal (cf 3.4.3.1; 3.5.3.2a; 3.6.1.1b). In one Hittite myth, the Hittite god Elkunirsa who is a deity corresponding to El, orders Baal to sleep with his wife, a goddess corresponding to Asherah (Day 1992c:483-487). It is understandable that the same behaviour was expected from the followers of the Canaanite gods and goddesses and why YHWH would forbid their worship (cf 2.2.5.8). It was after all the gods who were created 'in the image of man and not vice versa' as suggested in Genesis 1:26-28 (Noll 2013:331). As already mentioned (see 3.3.5), in Judges 6, the household of Joash worshipped Baal and Asherah at the high place at Ophrah (cf also 4.3.1.1b). The people at Ophrah venerated the cult image of Asherah in the form of a pole which was probably carved in the image of the goddess. It was the symbol of the mother goddess wherein dwelled the presence of the deity (Jdg 6:25-26; Johnston 2004:418; cf Jdg 3:7; see also 2.3.4.3b; 3.3.2.1; 4.3.1.2b; cf Footnote 213).

f. Ashtoreth

Ashtoreth אֲשֶׁת־אֲשֶׁרָה – *āštōret*²¹⁸ (Jdg 2:13; 10:6) also known as Astarte was a 'less dominant' consort of Baal in the Ugaritic texts and a secondary wife in the relationship in which Anath was the principal partner of Baal (Day 1992b:491-494). In Egyptian texts, Astarte is referenced by the designation 'the mistress of heaven.' In the Ugaritic texts Astarte has an epithet that might be interpreted as 'Astarte of the field.' In these inscriptions, she is seen in a domestic setting, preparing a meal at El's ceremonial feast. In the material culture, nude Astarte figurines known as 'Astarte plaques' (see Figures 3.8-3.9), have been discovered that indicate the worship of the goddess in particularly the Late Bronze Era (Day 1992b:491-494; Sparks 2006:16-21). The variant Ashtaroth (Jdg 2:13; 10:16) is the plural form of Ashtoreth (Day 1992b:491). Day (1992b:491-494) remarks that the Baal and the Ashtoreth referred to in Judges 2:13 may reference Canaanite gods and goddesses in general and not specific deities. Day (1992c:483) states that some erroneously associate Asherah with Astarte or Ashtoreth. Day further remarks that in the Old Testament Ash-toreth/Astarte is the more dominant consort of Baal. Judges partners Baal with Ashtoreth (Jdg 2:13; 10:6) and Asherah (Jdg 3:7) which may reflect the pervasive idea of the divine couple that was needed to secure the fertility and abundance of the land. According to the covenant, however,

²¹⁷ This Egyptian plaque puts together the three goddesses Qudshu (Asherah), Astarte and Anat while representing a single figure (Hadley 2000:182). See Edwards (1955:49-51) for a full description and analyses of the plaque. See also Cross (1997a:33-34). The three goddesses, particularly, Asherah and Astarte (Ashtoreth), were the female half of the divine couple that people in the ancient Near East worshipped for the prosperity of families and households. Asherah and Astarte were also worshipped by the early Israelites, as mentioned above (Jdg 2:13; 3:7; 10:6), in violation of their sacred covenant that required mono-Yahwistic worship for their success and longevity.

²¹⁸ Cf Jdg 2:13.

mono-YHWH had to be worshipped in order for YHWH to bring about the fertility of the land (cf Dt 28:1-14).

g. Anath

Anath אַנַּת – *ānāt* (cf Jdg 3:31) as Baal’s partner in the Ugaritic text is perceived as a fertility goddess. She has the epithets ‘Lady’ and ‘Maiden’ (see Figure 3.10). Despite the exalted descriptions of ‘Mistress of Royalty,’ ‘Mistress of Dominion’ and ‘Mistress of the Highest Heaven,’ Anath is fiercely hotheaded, a warlike homicidal goddess, in the Ugaritic texts. Causing death and destruction, Anath affixes the heads and hands of those she slaughters to her body as she strides immersed in their blood (Maier 1992:225-227).



Figure 3.8 Astarte plaque figurine (Amin 2016)



Figure 3.9 Relief of Qudshu-Astarte-Anat. Dated to 1198-1166 BC (Edwards 1955:50)



Figure 3.10 Asherah. Carving on an ivory box from Mina al- Beiḏā near Ras Shamra (Ugarit), 1300 BC (Encyclopedia Britannica 2022)

In the Book of Judges Ben-anath (Jdg 1:33), (also Jos 19:38; Jos 15:58 [Ben-anoth]) is a place that may have the meaning House of Anath which apparently indicates that Anath was worshipped here at some stage (Maier 1992:225-227). Maier points out that the warrior Shamgar (Jdg 3:31; 5:6) has the title *ben anat* ‘the son of Anat’ which could be interpreted as a personal name or signify to the community that he hails from that vicinity or that he used to be a worshipper of Anath. Maier also opines that the *ben anat* signifies a military title since title references the war goddess Anat (cf 3.2.2.1b). It has also been suggested that ‘anat’ was the father of Shamgar (Maier 1992:227). It

is also interesting to note that Maier mentions that Shamgar has a non-Israelite name that was probably Hurrian (Maier 1992:225-227; Schneider 2000:55-56) and which may mean that he was a convert to YHWH (see also Lowry 1992:227); see also Craigie (1972:239-240) and Cross 1980:1-20). Schneider (2000:56) notes that either Shamgar and his actions are approved by their insertion in the text, showing that it was acceptable for Israelites to receive help from non-Israelites, or it illustrates the failure of the leaders that early Israel relied on for support. Judges 3:6 also leaves the possibility that Shamgar is the offspring of a mixed marriage that allows him to hold the position of military hero and judge of early Israel.

3.7 CONCLUSION

Monotheism, that is, mono-YHWH worship, prompted a redefinition of the relationship between individuals and the divine, people's identity and their place and role in the cosmos. Most significantly, biblical monotheism facilitated a comprehensive and radical revision of the nature of divinity in light of the widespread presence of polytheism in the ancient Near East. Given the aforesaid, it is the Yahwistic nature of the worldview espoused by the author/s of Judges that makes it a groundbreaking perspective in the context of ancient Near Eastern polytheism.

The Israelites were YHWH's chosen people, a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Ex 19:5-6). They were to worship YHWH above all other gods, be loyal and devoted to Him and obey His laws and stipulations (see Chapter Two). Monotheism defined the Israelites' identity and distinguished them from their Canaanite neighbours and their everyday lives and religious practices were to serve as the ideal means of expressing that faith and the worldview it represented (MacDonald (2012:46).

The author/s of Judges present YHWH as a deity with extraordinary qualities, supreme and unrivalled in the ancient Near East. YHWH is not a member of a pantheon; therefore, He alone may be omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent. These are characteristics that are embedded in the narratives of Judges as YHWH delivers judgment, saves His people from oppression and restores the covenant. The author/s, via these narratives, thus emphasize the Israelites' promise to adhere to their commitment to YHWH, advocating a return to their covenant as the only sanctioned mode of their existence (Jdg 2:1-5; 3:11, 30; 5:31; 10:10-16, etcetera).

It is clear that the author/s of Judges effectively communicate their worldview by means of the monotheistic tone of their narratives in Judges. They convey the message that monotheism is the superior religious system in comparison to polytheism. The author/s demonstrates this by describing YHWH's self-revelation of YHWH as the one true God, in the world of the Israelites. In these narratives the author/s demonstrates that YHWH, who as stated before, alone is supreme and sovereign and always desiring to restore the covenant and the Israelites to Himself.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE (RE)CREATION OF SACRED SPACE IN CANAAN

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Upon their arrival in Canaan (see 4.2.1.1), the Israelites introduced their unique monotheistic religious beliefs, which stood in contrast to the predominant polytheistic practices of the land. Consequently, they effectively recreated sacred or ritual space in Canaan, transforming polytheistic places of worship into Yahwistic ritual sites. As they crafted Yahwistic ritual space in Canaan, the Israelites were reclaiming the sacred sites of their ancestors. Accordingly, by reinstating Yahwistic worship rites at locations such as Shechem, Bethel, and Mizpah, the tribes were following in the footsteps of the patriarchs and in their custom of establishing Yahwistic ritual places throughout Canaan. However, Judges shows that this situation was only ever continued during times of covenantal restoration as the Israelites were frequently prone to perennial cycles of idolatry.

In light of the aforesaid, this chapter aims to examine the ways in which this recreation of ritual space in times of covenant restoration emphasize the religious worldview of the author/s of Judges. This examination will be conducted by analyzing the following topics: Firstly, an examination of the concept/s pertaining to sacred space in the tribal community and the ancient Near East which may grant significant insight into the shaping of the religious worldview of the author/s of Judges as well as the Israelite community as a whole (see 4.2.2-4.2.2.3a-c). The Israelites' ideas of sacred space will be compared to that of the people of the ancient Near East. Secondly, an analysis of the influences of sacred space on individuals' lives and cognitive processes which may also grant insight into the mindset informing the author/s of Judges (see 4.3-4.3.1.3a-b) will be done. Thirdly, it is important to acknowledge the substantial influence exerted by Shiloh and the Tabernacle upon the monotheistic mindset of the author/s of Judges. The examination of Shiloh and the Tabernacle in this chapter, although they only briefly appear in the narratives of Judges (Jdg 18:31; 19:18; 21:19), may illuminate their depiction and function in the book (4.4-4.5.6.6a-b).

Given the limited available information regarding Shiloh and the Tabernacle in Judges, this chapter aims to utilize information in the Book of Deuteronomy and other biblical texts, archaeological evidence as well as Zevit's (2002:74-75) categorization of sacred space in the ancient Near East, in order to identify and describe the metaphorical and physical concepts associated with these sacred sites.

4.2 SACRED SPACE IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

4.2.1 Canaan

4.2.1.1 Background

a. Transformation

Following the author/s of Judges' worldview, the early Israelites were connected to the land of Canaan through their patriarchal ancestry (cf Jdg 1:1-36; 2:1-3; 6:8-10, and so on; see 4.1; cf 2.2.1.1; 2.2.2.1; 2.2.4-2.2.5). The patriarchs, particularly Abraham, travelled through Canaan building altars at certain destinations (cf 2.3.1; 2.3.2.1a, c; 4.3.1.1; 4.4.3.1). Although the 'conquest and settlement' of Canaan was incomplete, the early Israelites simply reclaimed the patriarchal sites as sacred space/s when they settled in Canaan (see 4.1).

The archaeological shows that the transformation of sacred space in Canaan began during the Iron Age I (ca 1200 BC), when population numbers in the central highlands soared²¹⁹ and the establishment of numerous settlements in that region (Bloch-Smith and Nakhai 1999:62-93; McNutt 1999:47-49; Grabbe 2007:95; cf Footnote 6; see Figure 4.1).



Figure 4.1 Early Israelite highland settlement (Faust 2009:63-69, 92, 94; see also Faust 2015a:250)

²¹⁹ The central hill or central highland region of Israel consists of a mountain range with a height of 1026 meters extending from Samaria in the north to the southern Hebron highlands. The mountains are located between the coastal areas and the Jordan River valley (Golden 2002:295). The fertile agricultural lands along the Mediterranean coast were occupied first by the Canaanites and then the Philistines which excluded Israelite occupation (Faust 2013:45). Between 1550 BC and 1200 BC, archaeology records low population numbers for the highlands and only a few major urban centres such as Shiloh, Jerusalem, Shechem and Bethel to have existed (Beitzel 2007:179).

Archaeological surveys piloted in the past decades reflect an increase in settlements and population numbers in the central highlands of Canaan at the beginning of the Iron Age I (Stager 1985:3; Bloch-Smith and Nakhai 1999:77; Miller, RD 2005:97-124; cf Finkelstein 1989:167; Mazar 2007a:63). Although the origins of the settlers of the central highlands at the start of the Iron Age I are disputed among scholars (see also Footnote 6), they do concur that the region experienced a population explosion and consequently the growth of settlement numbers (see Hess 1999:498-500; Beitzel 2007:179; Grabbe 2007:98; Scheepers 2010:284; cf Finkelstein 2007:73-84; see also Miller, RD 2005:29-124). Thus, after 1200 BC, the highlands were occupied by the Israelites, mostly in unfortified settlements around Shechem (Hess 1999:498; Beitzel 2007:179). The 115 small Israelite settlements in Iron Age I which sprang up increased the number of permanent residents in the hill country (Finkelstein 1989:167; Hess 1999:500; Scheepers 2010:284; Grabbe 2007:98-110; Stager 1985:3; see Sha 2018:32).

The elevated population numbers can be attributed to the influx of Israelites in that region of Canaan when the tribes show definitive signs of their presence as a distinct community in Canaan as indicated in the archaeological record (Bloch-Smith and Nakhai 1999:62-93; McNutt 1999:47-49; Grabbe 2007:95; cf; Miller, C 2005:90; see Figure 4.2).²²⁰ Figure 4.2 shows the Israelite ethnic markers as collared rim storage jars and the cross section of pillared or four-room house.²²¹

²²⁰ Although early Israelite ethnicity on the central highlands may be difficult to establish (in the archaeological record) there exist determinative symbols indicating these people were the Israelites. Bloch-Smith and Nakhai (1999:64) mention extra-biblical sources that refer to groups of trouble mongers in Canaan and which may indicate an Israelite presence on the highlands:

- The *Amarna Letters* (14th century BC) a body of texts containing messages between the Egyptian Pharaoh and the vassal Syrian and Canaanite kings alludes to a group of dissenters on the highlands called the *Apiru* who sought freedom from the dominion of the aristocrats in the lowlands (Aharoni 1979:192; Scheepers 2010:286; Grabbe 2007:48-50). Scheepers (2010:286) remarks that the *Apiru* share many similarities with David and his group of refugee soldiers.
- The Egyptian, *Papyrus Anastasi I* (13th century BC) that refers to a group of people, the *Shasu* ‘in the mountains of Shechem’ (see Rainey 2001:57-75) suggesting that the early Israelites may have been part of this group; see also Levy, Adams and Muniz 2004:63-89 and Grabbe 2007:49-50).
- The *Merneptah Stele* (ca 1207), created by Pharaoh Merneptah, is the oldest extra-biblical reference that mentions Israel in Canaan as a group of people conquered by Merneptah (see also Aharoni 1979:195).

The mention of Israel is found in the coda section of the Stele and describes Pharaoh Merneptah’s campaign in Canaan circa 1207 against the Libyans and their allies (Ahstrom and Edelman 1985:59-61). The last two lines on the stele mention a previous campaign in Canaan in which Merneptah proclaims his victory over Ashkelon, Gezer, Yen-oam and Israel (Ahlström and Edelman 1985:59-60; Goedicke 2004:54-55). The 27th line of the inscription reads: ‘*Yasir-’l fkt, bn prt. f*’, which means, ‘Israel is laid waste, His seed is not’ (see Rainey 2001:57-75; cf Hasel 1994:45-61). For a translation of the *Merneptah Stele* see Breasted (1987:62-68), contending that the writer of the Merneptah stele when referring to the line ... (Israel is not), his grain is not..., is referring to a ‘collective people’ (Breasted 1987:67). The word seed in the phrase ‘his seed is not’ has also been translated as grain (McNutt 1999:44-49). However, Rainey (2001:57-75) has contested the translation of *prt* (seed) as grain by some scholars (see Hasel 1994:45-61). Ahlström and Edelman (1985:59-61) translates *prt*, as seed while Goedicke (2004:55, 61) translates it as ‘income’ (‘the supplies people receive as income’) or ‘seed-grain’ referencing *prt* as an agricultural word that ‘denotes the grain for the planting season.’

Goedicke (2004:68) refers to the inscription concerning ‘Israel’ on the Merneptah Stele as an ‘isolated extra-Biblical reference.’ However, this might not be the case at all; a prior mention of ‘Israel’ may be found on an *Egyptian granite slab*. The creation of the inscription on the Egyptian granite slab is dated to around 1400 BC which places it at about 200 years before the formation of the *Merneptah Stele* (Shanks 2012b:59-62, 67). The *Egyptian granite slab* (that pre-dates the Merneptah Stele) which contains the possible earlier reference to Israel is a fragment from a broken statue pedestal. Egyptian pharaohs would often inscribe the names of places that they conquered in rows which scholars call name-rings. A name-ring contains the small engraving of a prisoner showing a subjugated place. Underneath the neck of the prisoner there is an oval ring which resembles a cartouche containing the hieroglyphic name of the conquered place. The slab contains three name-rings in hieroglyphs. The name-ring on the right, although damaged, is presumed to contain the name ‘Israel’ (Shanks 2012b:59-62, 67). For more information on this discovery see Shanks (2012b:59-62, 67).

²²¹ Included among these (hypothesized) Israelite markers are the traditional collared rim jars or *pithoi* (Biran 1989:71-96; cf McNutt 1999:52; see also Footnote 220) and the four room house (Faust and Bunimovitz 2003:22-31, see Figure 4.1). Chang-Ho (1997:405-412) discusses the early Israelite four-room houses and the collared rim jars. Schmidt (2007b:70) details the argument against the collared rim jars as indicators of the distinct Israelite identity (cf Esse 1992b:81-103; Mazar 2007b:85-98). See Dever (2012) who debates Finkelstein (2012) a proponent for the collared rim jar as a marker of the ethnicity of the Israelites on the highlands of Canaan (See Finkelstein’s 2012 refutation of Dever’s (2012) claims).

Dever (2012) also theorizes that the continuity of the pottery assemblages is evidence for the emergence of the Israelites from the indigenous Canaanite population. Dever concludes that the collared rim jar is originally



Figure 4.2 Israelite ethnic markers (Slideplayer.com)

The reference to Israel on the *Merneptah Stele* (see Footnote 223) indicates that they were recognized as a political threat that had to be eliminated by subjugation (see Wood 2003:256-282; cf Sha 2018:131). This could only have been the case if Israel was a well-established cohesive socio-ethnic entity in Canaan (as attested to in the Book of Judges) and not the loosely co-allied variant groups of people proposed by some scholars (see Hasel 1994:45-61; see also Ahlstrom and Edelman 1985:59-61; cf Wood 2005:475-489; cf Sha 2018:33; cf Footnotes 2 and 6). Accordingly, early Israel would have had a well-defined monotheistic religion and a distinct worldview associated with their worship of YHWH (as indicated in Deuteronomy and Judges; see also Chapters Two and Three). The religion of the early Israelites transformed the cultic landscape of the hill country of Canaan ‘into a new society as distinct from the Late Bronze Age Canaan (Moore and Kelle 2011:127; see 4.1). These novel religious traditions of the early Israelites confronted the Canaanites with the reality of a powerful and transformative religion.’²²²

b. Reversal

However, as the reader is well aware (see also 4.1 and Chapters Two and Three), monotheism often gave way to polytheistic worship among the Israelites. Archaeology provides evidence of both monotheism’s introduction into Canaan (see above) and the Israelites’ periodic adoption of

Canaanite but that it was appropriated by the emergent Israelites to become a distinguishable part of their own identity as a people’s group in Canaan. According to the Book of Judges, the continuity of the Bronze Age culture into the Iron Age I which shows the similarities between the Israelites and the Canaanites, would have been the result of the Israelites’ adoption of the Canaanite religious cult and culture (cf Esse 1992b:99-100).

Bloch-Smith (2008:30) remarks that ‘none of these features [collared rim jars, four-room house and a diet lacking the inclusion of pork] is exclusively Israelite... [and] are attested outside of Israelite territory’ (insertion mine; cf Edelman 2002:42-43). However, in 1999, Bloch-Smith and Nakhai (1999:77) mention that ‘refraining from pig consumption is a possible Israelite ethnic marker and cultic taboo (Lv 11:7; Dt 14:8; Is 65:4; 66:3, 17; see also Mazar 2007b:85-98).

²²² The Book of Judges, and other ancient Near Eastern sources such as the sacred sagas, the Ugaritic *Tale of Aqhat* (ca 1350 BC, Bienkowski 2010:24; Gibson 2004:103-122; Ginsberg 2011:134-149). The Mesopotamian legend, the *Epic of Gilgamesh* (Heidel 1951:1-60; Dalley 2000:39-136) and the creation of humankind in the *Enūma Eliš* (Dalley 2000:228-277) for instance, describe the often desired communion between people and the gods and the transformative power of such communion.

polytheism (cf Jdg 2:10-19; 3:5-6, etcetera) which was likely transmitted to their sacred sites. This could be consistent with the author/s of Judges accounts of tribal idolatry in the Book of Judges:

While evidence for the Israelites as a separate people's group in Canaan exists, the archaeology indicates that the early Iron Age Israelite community displayed certain shared customs with the Canaanites. These similarities have been determined by the continuation of the material culture of Late Bronze Age Canaan societies and the early Iron Age communities (the Israelites, for example) who inhabited the region. Dever (2012) mentions the nearly undistinguishable pottery repertoires of 'Late Bronze Age IIB Canaanite urban sites' (see Figure 4.3) and 'early Iron Age I Israelite locations (see Figure 4.4). This continuity is also referenced in the matching pottery of 13th to 12th century BC (Canaanite) Gezer and (Israelite) 'Izbet Sartah, Stratum III, of the late 13th -12th century BC.²²³



Figure 4.3 Canaanite 'En Haggit collared rim jars (dated to the early Iron Age I) (Wolff 2008:24-36)



Figure 4.4 Israelite collared rim jar from Khirbet el-Maqatir. The jar is dated to 1200 BC (SeEVERS, Bauman and Ziemer 2019:54)²²⁴

A Canaanite-Israelite corresponding pottery assemblage indicates a shared socio-economic environment (see Dever 2012; cf Finkelstein 2012). This shared cultural environment leads some scholars such as Hess (1999:497-498) and Dever (2003a:5-52, 72-73, 188-189) to propose an

²²³ Shea (1990a:60) identifies 'Izbet Sartah as an Israelite site based on its location and the material culture as well as the five lines of text inscribed on the ostrakon discovered in an early Iron Age grain silo. According to Shea the initial line of the ostrakon text speaks of a people who came from Shiloh, identified as an Israelite site in the Old Testament. Shanks (2012a) describes Israelite Iron I sites including the ethnic markers that define these areas as Israelite locales (see also Mazar 2007b:85-98). This provides archeological support for the presence of a distinct people – the Israelites in the hill country of Canaan as recorded in Judges (cf Footnotes 6).

²²⁴ Zertal (1991:8, 30-38, 43-47); Finkelstein (1998a:349-367); Esse (1992b:81-103) provide more details on, inter alia, the distribution of the collared rim pottery (see also Figure 4.3).

indigenous to Canaan ancestry for the Israelites (cf Sha 2018:32-34). According to the Book of Judges, however, the Israelites origins are external to Canaan (cf Jdg 1:1; 6:8-9; 11:15-22). Judges also shows that although the Israelites shared in the Canaanites' cultic and socio-economic heritage (cf Jdg 2:1-3; 3:5-6), they managed to maintain their identity as a separate people (after a war of liberation). It is probably that the early Israelites revived their own distinct and unadulterated Yahwistic religion and, subsequently, their identity as YHWH's covenant people during cycles of peace as also indicated in Chapter Two (cf Jdg 2:4; 5:31; 6:11-40; 10:16; 13:3-20; 12:8-10; cf 3.2.2.1b; see also Table 2.2).

The early Israelites' idolatrous relationship, treaties and marriages with the Canaanites had such far-reaching implications that there was always a risk of the Israelites assimilating into the Canaanite culture and the dissolution of their identity as a distinct ethnic group (cf Jdg 2:1-2; 2:10; 3:5-6; 6:8-10; 10:11-14). This situation probably accounts for the lack of an Israelite presence in the archaeological record of Israel prior to the early Iron Age I (see above). Idolatry, according to the biblical narrative, idolatry also affected the priesthood at Shiloh (directly or ancillary) (cf Sm 2:12-14). Judges 2:1-3 narrates that all the people, without exception, were chastised by the Angel of YHWH for making treaties with the Canaanites. The treaties between the Canaanites and the early Israelites had to have involved the priesthoods of both peoples since in the ancient Near East, making treaties was not only a political but also a religious occasion (see Karavites 1992:98n,32).²²⁵ Extra-biblical writings explain that animal ceremonies were used in ancient Near Eastern treaty-making (Day 2003:95). Ceremonial animal oblations were official tasks undertaken by the religious officials – priests – in both the ancient Near East and in the early Israelite community (cf Jr 34:18-20).

Judges also narrates that a new generation of Israelites 'grew up who neither knew the LORD or what He had done for Israel' which may allude to the dereliction of priestly duties (Jdg 2:10; see also 2.2.2.1). The destruction of the Israelites' primary centre of worship, later in history, was most probably the result of the corruption of the priesthood at Shiloh (cf Jr 7:12-14; 26:6, 9). Some scholars confirm that archaeological investigations at ancient Shiloh corroborate the mid-11th century BC (ca 1050 BC) destruction of Shiloh by the Philistines (1 Sm 4:22; cf Jr 7:12-14; O'Connell 1996:335; Day 1979:87-94; see Figure 4.5).²²⁶ In Figure 4.5 the collared rim pottery excavated at Shiloh can be seen leaning against a wall. Evidence of the city's 11th century BC destruction by

²²⁵ The covenants made with Noah, Abraham and Moses did not involve a priest/s. However, at the time of their settlement in Canaan, it can be assumed that the Israelites had a well-established priesthood who oversaw official events such as the oath involved in treaty making (cf Jdg 1:1-2; 20:28).

²²⁶ This does not imply that the entire Tabernacle and its furnishings were completely destroyed since they were movable. Kaiser (1998:246); Kaiser and Wegner (2017) note that after its return from Philistine captivity the Ark of the Covenant was located at Kiriath Jearim and that 'at least for some of this time,' the Tabernacle was located at Nob (1 Sm 22:11). A Danish archaeological team undertook several excavations at Shiloh under the leadership of Hans Kjaer (see Kjaer (1930:87-194); for a full list of the publications of the provisional reports by Kjaer, see Haran (1985:28, *ibid* footnote 25). Kjaer determined that Shiloh was destroyed in the mid-11th century BC.

the Philistines is visible in the burned and blackened soil behind the flagstone paving of the floor in the photo (Finkelstein 1986:22-41).



Figure 4.5 Excavating at Shiloh (Finkelstein 1986:22-41)

In contrast to the unfaithful Israelites, the Book of Judges also shows the momentous efforts of the faithful men and women to preserve their religion and the covenant (Jdg 3:7-31; 4:1-23; 13, etcetera; cf 3.2.2.1b).

According to the religious worldview of the author/s of Judges, the polytheism of the Israelites, which likely had an impact on their sacred space/s, constituted a catastrophic violation of their covenant (cf Jdg 2:1-3). As explained before (see 4.1; 4.2.1.1), the early Israelites had a connection to Canaan through their patriarchs which was probably remembered (cf Jdg 6:13), but probably ‘forgotten’ during periods of covenantal infidelity (see also 4.3.1.1a). It is likely that the treaties made between the early Israelites and the inhabitants of the land resulted in the Israelites surrendering their claim to certain regions of the land, giving the inhabitants of the land some sort of legal right to remain (cf Jdg 1:19-36; 3:5-6; cf 2.2.1.1; 2.2.2.1).

As pointed out previously, the worldview of the author/s of Judges was unalterably covenantal and monotheistic (see Chapters Two and Three). The author/s of Judges thus regarded any type of relationship with the idol-worshipping Canaanites (cf 4.2.1.1), including sharing the land, as a serious breach of the covenant. As stated above, the Israelites had lost their claim to the entirety of the land (cf Jdg 2:1-3) which YHWH had promised their patriarchs and which He had confirmed with Moses. Given that YHWH’s promises are unchanging (Jdg 2:1), and that the incomplete occupation of the land was a prophetic judgement delivered by YHWH Himself in Judges (2:3), the author/s of Judges may be presented with a dilemma (Jdg 2:1). However, the Israelites had broken their sacred covenant and as a result certain blessings – the complete occupation of the land – were withheld while other conditions become applicable – oppression and expulsion from the land (cf Dt 28; see also 2.2.5). YHWH has the legal right to declare that the land claim will (not yet) be accomplished (Jdg 2:3).

4.2.2 Sacred space in Judges and the ancient Near East

4.2.2.1 Definitions

a. Ritual space

Sacred space²²⁷ in the Book of Judges and in the ancient Near East was, most concisely, ritualistic areas; that is, designated sites, sacred buildings and architecture and/or objects set aside for the specific use and performance of religious rites (see also Lefebvre 1991:58-352). Sacred places in the Book of Judges are either idolatrous (cf Jdg 6:25-26; 9:4; 16:23-30), syncretic (Jdg 17; 18:30-31) or unadulteratedly Yahwistic (cf Jdg 19:18; 18:31; 20:1, 26; 21:19; see also below). But the author/s of Judges show that sacred space is wherever YHWH (physically) reveals Himself (Jdg 2:1-3; 6:11-19; 13:3-20).

Sacred sites are the dwelling places of God or gods and where the presence of the divine could be experienced (people could commune with their god/s) (Ellwood and Alles 2007:29). Heynickx et al (2012:7) describe sacred space ‘as expressing the intersection of the human and the Divine.’ As liminal places, sacred space/s are thus, a meeting place of heaven and earth (Kennard 2013:245; cf Gn 28:10-22; Jdg 2:1-5; 6:11-20; 13:3-20). Heynickx et al (2012:7-8) comment that the signs of sacred places – hallowed ‘objects, images, walls, written words, sounds or sculptures’ together with the actions related to a sacred location, are all essential parts of the religious reality of a community. The vital divergence of Yahwism from the Canaanite cults is the exclusion of the ‘images’ and ‘sculptures’ (see Heynickx et al 2012:7-8) in the religious experiences of early Israel (see also 4.2.2.2). The ancient Near Eastern temple or shrine, which housed the cult image, designated a sacred public building or architecture (Kamlah 2012:507). Kamlah (2012:507) remarks that ‘sanctuary, cult place or ritual place are terms for sacred areas in general, regardless of whether they contain a temple edifice or not.’²²⁸

Early Israelite sacred space/s were demarcated by sites such as Bethel, Mizpah, Shechem, and so on (see 4.3.1.1) which tied the Israelites to the patriarchal traditions (see 4.1; 4.2.1.1). The main religious centre of the early Israelites was designated as the Tabernacle (see 4.4), the house of God or the house of the LORD in Shiloh referred to in Judges (18:31; 19:18; cf Jdg 21:19, 21; see also Walton 2005:42; Timmer 2009:158). Judges also mentions Gilgal (cf Jdg 2:1) and, as stated before, Mizpah (Jdg 20:1; 21:1), Bethel (Jdg 20:18; see also 2.3.5.3c) as sacred places of the Israelites as well as Shechem, where also stood a Canaanite temple of El (Jdg 9:46; see also 2.3.5.3a) and a Yahwistic sanctuary that emerged from previous religious activities of the patriarchs (cf 2.3.1; 2.3.4.2a; 3.5.1). Idolatrous sites such as Ophrah (Jdg 6:25-26; 8:27), the syncretic household shrine of Micah (Jdg 17:5) and that of the Danites are also referenced in the Book of Judges (18:30-31;

²²⁷ I shall use the terms ritual space and sacred places, as well as other terms, interchangeably with the term sacred space.

²²⁸ In light of the statement above, the gods could also be worshiped at the cultic pits of the chthonic deities, streams and ‘stone images’ or idols (cf Jdg 3:19, 26; cf 2.3.5.1; 2.3.5.2b) which were inhabited by revered gods and spirits. Collins (2002:224-24) describes the cultic pits as a Hittite practice.

Rooker 2010:49-50). Sacred space also included sites at divination trees (Jdg 9:6, 37; cf Jdg 4:4; 6:11, 19, etcetera), altars/rocks (Jdg 6:20; 13:19) and high places (one was possibly at Ophrah where stood the alter of Baal and the Asherah pole [Jdg. 6:25-26]). In the Book of Judges, the author/s contrast mono-Yahwistic sacred space with the polytheism of the Canaanites who could worship various local deities (Gill 1988:22; DeVries 1997a:79; see also Sha 2018:189). Accordingly, Baal-Hermon mentioned in Judges 3:3 was worshipped as the resident god of Mount Hermon and environs (DeVries 1997a:79), *Baal-berith* in Judges 9:4 in Shechem and surrounding area, Baal-Tamar in Judges 20:33, and Baal-Hazor in 2 Samuel 13:23 (cf 3.5.1).

b. Hallowed ground

In light of the above (see 4.2.2.1a), sacred space in the ancient Near East is hallowed ground, a deified place (Heynickx et al 2012:7-8) since it is consecrated by the presence of the temple and the resident deity or deities who rested inside the temple (see Walton 2018). Ancient Near Eastern people thought that the statue of the god consecrated a place since it was filled with the god's spirit and thus exuded the qualities of both a divine presence and an earthy actuality (Walton 2018; see also 8.2.3.1b-c). Walton, Matthews and Chavalas (2000:191) remark that on a macro-cosmic level, Canaanite cities were the sacred spaces of the resident gods who rested in the temple and to whom allegiance was given in return for the gods' protection (cf Jdg 9:27, 46).

Zevit (2002:78) observes that it was the building, the *Miskhan* (Jos 18:1, 9-10; 21:2) that 'rendered the ground holy.' The Tabernacle was a symbol of God's presence with His people (Cho 2021:65). It was built as a means by which YHWH dwells among the early Israelites (Cho 2021:65; cf Beuken 2020:129). Figuratively, it may be said that, among the Israelites sacred space is the early Israelite individual him/herself who worships mono-YHWH and who as YHWH's image bearer forms part of a kingdom of priests (cf Ex 19: see 5.2.1 cf 2.2.5.8). Doak (2019:20) mentions the priestly body and its power to represent YHWH. Judges references that certain Israelites (judges) may be filled with the Spirit, the *rūah* of YHWH (cf Jdg 3:10; 11:29; 13:25). According to Exodus (Ex 19:6) the early Israelites are priests, a holy nation.²²⁹ Since YHWH is holy the same quality applies to those Israelites who represent Him and worship Him faithfully in Judges.

4.2.2.2 Analogues and differences

a. Analogues

As was previously noted, sacred spaces were locations where God or gods were worshipped and where religious rites were carried out. In the worldview of the author/s of Judges, the Tabernacle at Shiloh was regarded as the centre of the world cosmic stability (although Shiloh and the Tabernacle are not mentioned frequently by the author/s) (Zevit 2002:78; Pitre 2008:57). Similar beliefs

²²⁹ See also Bible Hub 2023. Exodus 19:6.

about sacred space were shared by the ancient Near Easterners, including the Canaanites, who saw the temple (see Figure 4.6) as maintaining cosmic order and reflecting universal order from its position at the centre of the cosmos (Walton 2015:49; Walton and Walton 2017:161). Without this order, continuity of life is impossible (Walton 2017:145; cf Lundquist 1993:5; Zevit 2002:74).²³⁰



Figure 4.6 The North-East Temple at Tell Lachish. A Canaanite Temple dated to the Iron Age I (Weissbein et al 2020:4)

Similarities between the Israelite concepts and utilisation of sacred space and ancient Near Eastern ideas will also be referenced below (see also 4.5.1).

i. The interior of the sanctuary

Canaanite and Israelite sacred spaces shared the practice of reserving a sanctuary's interior for priests alone while excluding the general public. Like the Tabernacle, the ancient Near Eastern temple such as the Canaanite temple of *El-berith* and *Baal-berith* in Judges 9 was the residence of the god (see Dalley 2000:262; see Figure 4.6); it was not 'intended as a place of corporate worship' and while worshippers were permitted to enter the temple courts, they could not access the temple itself (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:648). They would present a prayer to the gods in the crowded courtyard of the temple where the sacrificial rites were performed (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:648). Only when they celebrated their festivals as described in Judges 9:27 would the temple doors be opened to both the elites and common people (Arnold and Beyer 2002:125; cf Smith, JA 2020:45).

ii. Rites

Another parallel is the use of altars for ritual sacrifices officiated over by the priesthood (Haran 1985:64; cf 4.5.6.6a) as well as the keeping of calendar days and years for religious celebrations

²³⁰ The continued functioning and maintenance of the temple was integral to the continuance of cosmic order. Sachs (1969:339-342) describes an elaborate Akkadian ritual service to be performed by the priests and king for the rebuilding of a temple. In the ancient Near East, kings undertook great building projects to present the potency of his kingdom to the rest of the world (Leick 2003:4). Temples were expanded to illustrate the might of a god over another. The resources to pay for such grand building projects were often amassed through warfare. An Akkadian ritual (Sachs 1969:339-342) involves the rebuilding of a wall of the temple of the god Anu probably to expand or remodel and enhance the grandeur of the temple. Failing to rebuild the temple would have resulted in setbacks such as attacks by the enemy and injustices in a country gone mad (Sachs 1969:339). Royal palaces and the cities were considered to be cosmic centres in addition to the temples (Beaulieu 2005:56).

(Davis 2020:195-206; cf Chapter Eight). Sacrifices were done in the courtyard of the sanctuary where there was an altar for burnt offerings (Dewberry 2013:28; Coogan et al [eds] 2007:143). Every Israelite was able to offer a sacrifice at solitary altars without the aid of intermediaries (cf Jdg 6:20, 24; 13:19), but only established families of priests were permitted to perform religious ceremonies at the Tabernacle and at the altars that were connected to them (Haran 1985:64). It is likely that the same can be said about the Canaanite temples. External to the major religious centres, religious activities such as animal oblations, offerings, prayers, divination and oath making also likely occurred at ‘minor’ Canaanite and Israelite sacred sites which were probably closer to those people who lived in remote regions (cf Jdg 4:5; 6:19-20; 6:25-26; 8:27; 13:19-20; 17:5).

b. Differences

According to the worldview of the author/s of Judges, the cessation of life is regarded as a renunciation of the covenantal way of life, resulting in an impact on the religious practices at Shiloh, as individuals would have redirected their religious rituals towards the Canaanite sacred sites and temples (cf Jdg 9). Hence, despite the similarities they possess, there exist significant differences between the sacred areas of the Israelites and the Canaanites, which effectively emphasize the perspective held by the author/s of Judges as described in the following section:

- Beliefs – the main distinction between the two communities’ sacred spaces is, naturally, their respective monotheistic (see Strawn 2015) and polytheistic beliefs (Arnold and Beyer 2002:179; Tasker 2004:19; Orlin 2007:176; Münnich 2013:115; Walton 2018).
- The purpose of worshipping the Deity – monotheism upholds the covenantal relationship between YHWH and the ancient Israelites. Worship rites are performed in YHWH’s honour as an expression of gratitude for His bounty (see Chapter Eight). 1 Samuel 1:15:22 describes the desire of YHWH for wholehearted love and obedience of Him instead of merely seeking Him for self-serving gain (cf Hs 6:6; Is 1:11; Pr 21:3; Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:573; Olson 2005:81; Thompson, DA 2014:136; cf Keener and Walton 2016:314; Longman and Enns [eds] 2008:599; Walton 2018)). Canaanite holy space was distinguished by a reciprocal relationship between the gods and their followers in which the needs of both the gods and human were addressed and met (3.3.5.1).²³¹ The gods demanded offerings, worship and the provision of their needs in exchange for their favour and blessings (Miglio, et al [eds] 2020; cf Walton and Hill 2003:112). Accordingly, in the ancient Near East, sacred space primarily functions to serve the needs of the gods and goddesses for food, housing and clothing (Keener and Walton 2016:11; Walton 2018; Breier 2022:93; cf 2.2.3.1d; 2.2.5.8; 3.3.2.1a; 3.3.5.1; 3.3.6; 3.3.6.2; cf Footnote 36 and Footnote 146). Rites consisting of black magic, sorcery, divination, and sacrifices

²³¹ Babylonian and Hittite texts refer to sacred spaces ‘where all are to be protected’ both spiritually and physically upon loyalty given to the resident gods (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:191) (cf 1Ki 1:50-53; 2:28-34). In Judges, the Israelites continuously fall prey to oppression for abandoning their monotheistic faith.

characterize the worship of a plethora of deities (cf 3.3.5.1; Footnote 36).²³² These practices were prohibited to the early Israelites who by not practising these Canaanite rites retained their monotheistic identity and loyalty to YHWH's covenant (cf Dt 18:9-12; Cohn 2004:142; Rae 2009:33; cf Kasher 1990:33; Bauckham 2005:94; Blidstein 2017:40-42; Walton 2018).

- Atonement – the unique idea of annual atonement for the Israelites' sins, which according to the covenantal stipulations could only be made at the Tabernacle at Shiloh (Berlin and Brettler 2004:244; see 8.4.4.1a-b). The best ancient Near Eastern people could do to remove their sin was to offer the god/s they thought they have offended, rites of appeasement (cf 2.2.5.8).²³³
- The favour of the gods – the gods could be induced by ritual bribes and prayer praise to bestow their favour. Bribery was forbidden by YHWH who 'takes no bribes or gifts' (Olson 2005:81; cf Keener and Walton 2016:314). In the ancient Near East, worshippers praise the gods in hymns 'for who they are, what they provide for the world, and what they have done for the community and the individual' (Longman and Enns 2008:599). Walton (2018) observes that the deity is praised not because he is inherently good but because the deity is good to the community and the worshipper. In the ancient Near Eastern literature, 'the gods are praised for their majesty, glory, beauty, and splendor on the one hand, and for their power, authority, and deeds on the other' (Walton 2018; cf 3.2.3.3.b). Walton notes, however, that these are attributes revealed in external ways 'rather than interior attributes' (cf 3.3.6-3.3.6.3).

²³² Parallel textual evidence of polytheism from the ancient Near East includes prayers to a multitude of gods such as Sumero-Akkadian supplications to the nocturnal gods (or astral deities) as well as a prayer to all gods (cf 3.2.3.3a) that could be performed at the temple of a principal god where all other (chief) deities were also invoked (Stephens 1969: 387-392; cf Goetze 1969c:205-206; Roberts 2002:48). The Sumero-Akkadian prayer to the gods of the night, the star, or astral deities, is described by Stephens (1969:390) as an entreaty performed at night during a divination ritual and is dated to the Old Babylonian period. The rituals mentioned above was thought to make the presence of the god more accessible to their human followers (see Lundquist 1993:5). However, it required the endurance of extensive rituals to appease the gods to procure their blessings. Goetze (1969b:396-399) describes the prayer undertaken by Hittite kings in an emergency which involved various offerings, invocations to multiple deities to commune with them and incite their deliverance. Sachs (1969:339) describes the lengthy ritualistic appeasement of the Hittite gods which involved offerings including 35 sacrificial barley loaves, and 30 pitchers of wine (no mention is made of animal sacrifices). These offerings are meagre compared to the extravagant offerings described in a different prayer (see Goetze 1969b:399).

²³³ The ancient Near Eastern people also believed that (their) sin could incur the disfavor of the gods (cf 2.2.5.8d) cause ruin (to a temple) and destroy a city. People felt helpless to change their fate for once the gods have decided on a course of events, there is not much they could do to prevent the outcome (see Walton and Walton 2017:67-68 describe the destruction of Sumer and Ur as decided upon by the gods and the powerlessness of people to change the gods' minds; see also Kramer 1969b:611-619). As part of the ritual for the repair of an Akkadian temple, the king had to plead forgiveness from the gods by confession of sins and the performance of appeasement rituals (see Sachs 1969:339-342) to restore the gods' favour and protection (cf 5.5.1).

The common folk in the ancient Near Easterners had circuitous contact with their gods as their ritual bribes had to be delivered via the priests who thus supplied the deities with these ‘gifts’ or bribes in exchange for blessings and favors (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:514; cf Bergant 2006:11). Ancient Near Eastern priests could also engage in activities involving bribery (Noonan 1984:11; Jasnow 2003:346; Botta 2022:37; cf 1 Sm 2:12-17). Bribery was an everyday problem in the ancient Near East and in some societies in the ancient Near East accepting or giving bribes was such a serious problem that it was punishable by death (Lioy 2012:327). Noonan (1984:11) mentions a law in which Egyptian official staff are ordered to pay the pharaoh a portion of their income as compensation for accepting bribes. At times the gods could be pleased with a judge who did not accept a bribe (Yamauchi and Wilson 2014). In an Akkadian text a judge is said to have won the favour of Shamash, the god of justice, for standing up for the weak without accepting a bribe. But the gods themselves, who served as the protectors of widows, orphans and the destitute (Yamauchi and Wilson 2014), themselves were to blame for the widespread corruption that existed in the ancient Near East. As described above, the gods could be bribed with food, shelter and clothing – essential elements that the gods needed for their care in order to gain their favour (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2001:181; Keener and Walton 2019:314). It follows that if the gods could be bribed then so too the human judges who were required to treat the vulnerable and the disenfranchised with impartiality (Noonan 1984:11; Yamauchi and Wilson 2014). As a result, these cultic practices at ancient Near Eastern ritual places had a significant impact on the larger society.

YHWH, on the other hand, was ‘not to be thought of in the same way as the gods of Israel’s neighbors’ (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2001:181; cf 3.3.3-3.3.6.3). According to Walton, Matthews and Chavalas (2001:181) ‘this also reflects the picture of Yahweh as a just judge who refuses to distort justice for personal gain (cf Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:241; cf Ex 18:21, 23, 8; Dt 16:19; cf 3.4.6.3-3.4.6.4).

- Fertility rites – Bird (2020:37) remarks that the many shrines that dotted the landscape as well as the major sanctuaries were used for fertility rites. These fertility rites were outlawed by YHWH. The Canaanite fertility cults, however, were assimilated by the Israelites resulting in repeated tribal oppression in Judges and later in their history contributed to their exile from their homeland. The king as a representative of the gods also symbolized its fertility, safety, and success (Whitelam 1992:40-48). These rites were condemned by the author of Judges as demonstrated in the narration of Judges 6:25-26).

4.2.2.3 *Sacred space and society*

As the reader will find below, ritual sites had economic advantages which were appropriated by the king, royals and other elite groups such as the priests. In accordance with the covenant, by

distributing excess back into the community, the priesthood at the Tabernacle prevented the tribes, from obtaining more than they required for their daily lives. In the worldview of the author/s of Judges, it would have been abhorrent to use YHWH's sacred space purely for economic gain that would satisfy people's self-serving desires. The author/s most likely promoted the covenant in the periods of idolatry to address the aforesaid concepts regarding sacred space. The next section will address the less spiritual features of economy and trade involving (Canaanite) sacred space (see also Soya 1989:10-76) and how it likely contributed to the early Israelites' physical and spiritual penury. The cyclical conflict and change of sacred space in Judges, for example, will also be discussed. The purpose of this is to provide an additional illustration of the early Israelites' breach of the covenant, which explains the author/s' strong objections in the Book of Judges.

a. The king and temple economy

In the ancient Near East, temples were hubs of religious worship and political dealings but they were also busy places for economic activities unlike the modern temple. Walton (2018) remarks that the temple serves as both the focal point of society and the ultimate site of human activity. Cho (2019:59) describes a Canaanite temple feast (Jdg 9:27; 16:23; 21:19) as 'a socially, politically and religiously charged event.' Cho adds that it can be used to publicize power structures, build and sustain political ties, and highlight military success (cf 2:2; Jdg 16:23). In the Book of Judges, the Canaanite temple in Judges 9:27, local to Shechem (Lang 2016), would have stood as a symbol of the presence of the god and his divine protection over the city.

Van de Mieroop (2016:155) remarks that sacred space in the ancient Near East is primarily the domain of the rulers, royal courts, and elites – priestly and other privileged groups to whom belong the governmental and religious authority – these are their inalienable rights that go with the lavishness of their lives (cf Garcia 2016; cf 7.4.1.2d). Sacred space in the ancient Near East, thus, legitimizes the rule of the king and his power (Madsen 1984:59; Dutcher-Walls 1996:140; 91; cf O'Neill et al (eds) 1987:91; Meyers 2001:197) and consolidated the power of the resident god/s and the king over other gods and kings (Shiner 1972:432; cf Hundley 2013:41).²³⁴ By contrast, YHWH prefers to legitimize His rule over the early Israelites through the Sinaitic Covenant. This, among others, is what YHWH's sacred space in Judges signifies.

The king was the proprietor 'of the god's properties on earth' (Najovits 2003:152; cf 5.2.3.2c) who was the 'living image' of the god and thus the representative of the god on earth which may account why palaces were constructed close to temples (Hodge 2011:45-46; cf Walton, Matthews and

²³⁴ The king could also authorize the building of areas of worship (over earlier ones) or the restoration of temples and their furnishings and the reinstalment of the cult (Liverani 2014b:542; Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:445; cf Garrison 2012:43; Davis 2019:133). The subsequent (sacrificial) rituals and festivities officiated by the king to commemorate the restoration of the land and sacred places granted him the necessary validation to undertake his role as ruler of a land (Watts 2009:41). In Judges 6:25-26, YHWH overthrows this dominant cultural perspective by instructing Gideon to destroy the cult site at Ophrah and building an altar to YHWH there.

Chavalas 2000:648; Jones 2020:243-263).²³⁵ Whitelam (1992:40-48) asserts that the king held absolute power over a state or region and as a representative of the gods symbolized its fecundity, protection, and prosperity. As a result, the king was entitled to receive the wealth of the nation. In both sacred and mundane space, the king also stood for harmony and peace. The king's role in preserving the peace in the country was crucial for both domains (see Jones 2020:244-245). As the representative of the god, the king was the builder of sacred space but apparently this divine impetus had economic inclinations (see below). Walton (2018) mentions an *Arik-din-ili inscription* (ca 1300 BC) that captures the spirit of the worldview when it specifies that the king constructed the temple of Shamash 'in order that the harvest of my land might prosper.' The early Israelites were impacted by this anti-covenantal (religious) worldview of the ancient Near East, especially that of the Canaanites. Consequently, one of the reasons for the early Israelites' worship of the Canaanite gods was that they believed that in order to reap the benefits of a bountiful harvest and ensure the fertility of their land, animals, and households, they had to appease the local gods.

Festivals were important features of temple life since they involved the temple economy (cf Jdg 9:27; 16:23; 21:19). Glatz (2016:191) observes that official celebrations in the ancient Near East fell under the heading of 'tributary feasts.' Such feasts aimed to gather as much surplus as possible and to sequester as much of it for elite usage as feasible. Tribute feasts were closely related to ceremonies honouring political deities and were frequently connected to the massive buildings and spaces (temples) where these deities were worshipped (Gatz 2016:191; cf Altmann 2011:231).²³⁶ Conceivably markets and depots for receiving goods and their storage would have been set up in the courtyard or its proximity. Liverani (2013:174) observes that there was no requirement for a permanent and specific marketplace in the redistributive economy of the ancient Near East. The administration of the palace or temple handled long-distance trade, and 'periodic fairs' were held in front of temples, in the streets, or at the city gates (Liverani 2013:174). The 'periodic fairs' or markets were generally associated with religious festivals and ceremonies and provided an opportunity for the circulation of information and products between vendors and merchants (Aubert 2013:30n,10). It is probable that the Israelites portrayed in the Book of Judges contributed to the temple economy of their oppressors (see explanation below).

b. Tribute

²³⁵ Jones (2020:243-263) relates that not all ancient Near Eastern kings were considered as divine agents of the gods. Kings were considered the cause of creating disorder through imposing royal violence on their subjects for example and often became (ritually) impure as a result of it (Jones 2020:245).

²³⁶ The temple is a place where the gods assemble a place of feasting, joy, the swearing of oaths of allegiance and the making of a *taqribtu* offering (Dalley 2000:263). The *taqribtu* offering refers to an offering in a cultic sense (McAllister 2021:118; cf Oshima 2011:174). The Akkadian word *qerēbu* from which *taqribtu* derives means to ['bring, present' [an]] offering (Black, George and Postgate [eds] 2000:287) and its Syriac cognate *qerēb* means 'to offer a sacrifice, utter a request or give advice.' The Hebrew cognate is קָרַב – *qarab* (Lv 21:16-24) and in its religious context means to offer sacrifices to YHWH (McAllister 2021:118). Oshima (2011:174); Linssen (2004:28-29); Thury and Devinney (2009:565) provide further details regarding the *taqribtu* offering.

Jabin ‘king of the Canaanites who reigned in Hazor’ (Jdg 4:2) in all probability would have fulfilled all the roles of a king described above (cf 3.5.3.2). Judges 4:2 narrates that YHWH had ‘sold’ the early Israelites into the hands of Jabin.²³⁷ It is likely that the Israelites were required to pay tribute to Jabin and probably other enemy kings that oppressed the Israelites in Judges. Tribute payments would have included agricultural produce – a sizeable amount of their harvests, and even people as a workforce (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:248). Judges 3:15 states that the Israelites paid tribute to Eglon, king of Moab. The tribute, apparently, was quite substantial since it required a number of people to carry (Jdg 3:18). Walton, Matthews and Chavalas (2000:248) remark ‘that when one state or other political entity conquered another or extended hegemony over its affairs, the result was the exaction of periodic tribute payments from the subject people’ (see Sm 8:2, 1 Ki 4:21; 2 Ki 17:3-4; cf Altmann 2011:231).

Deuteronomy states that the early Israelites were to deliver their yearly tithes – one tenth of all their crops ‘to the designated place of worship’ which would have been made to the Tabernacle at Shiloh in the period of the judges (Dt 14:22-29).²³⁸ Judges (Jdg 3:15) may show that instead of delivering their tithe to their rightful King, YHWH, a large portion or perhaps all of it went to king Eglon as tribute payment (see Altmann 2011:231). Ajah (2018) reports that tithe giving was a part of covenant keeping (Dt 26:13-15). It demonstrated the Israelites’ obedience to YHWH’s rule. In the ancient Near East, a vassal, a subordinate king, who paid tribute to a superior king would remain wealthy and dignified, similarly as the vassals of YHWH the early Israelites would be prosperous (cf Ex 19:5-6; Coleson, Stone and Driesbach 2016:95; cf Hayes 2012; Walton and Walton 2017:223; Kennard 2020:22). It was a breach of the covenant not to give the tithe to YHWH at the Tabernacle (see Altmann 2011:231). When the Israelites fall under the oppressive enemy regimes mentioned in Judges, they consequently suffer a reversal of fortune and fate. In the worldview of the author/s of Judges, the Israelites’ act of paying tribute to another nation was a sign of their defeat and humiliation (see Altmann 2011:231). One of the punishments for breaking the covenant was to be defeated by their enemies (cf Dt 28:25). The temple and palace of the nations that oppressed the Israelites benefited from their tribute payments, as stated above (see Altmann 2011:231). However, it was detrimental to the ‘tribal economy’ which would contributed to their impoverishment during a period of oppression (cf Jdg 6:1-6). The idolatrous and rebellious Israelites had no other choice but to cry out to YHWH for help (Jdg 3:15; 4:3, etcetera).

²³⁷ It remains unclear if the Jabin described in Joshua 11:1-13 and this Jabin are the same king and if that is the case, Judges directly conflicts with the Book of Joshua (Schneider 2000:59). One theory to explain this contradiction holds that Jabin is the dynastic title for the kings of Hazor (Schneider 2000:59). Schneider states that support for this theory is found in the *Mari texts*, the *Amarna Letters* and other Egyptian documents since all refer to the city of Hazor as well as modern archaeology excavation which has uncovered an impressive Late Bronze Age city (and a destruction layer) (Schneider 2000:60).

²³⁸ As Deuteronomy indicates the Israelites’ tithe was in keeping with covenantal requirements. Tribute has the meaning of a payment ‘made by one ruler to another in acknowledgement of submission or as the price of protection or security’ (The Free Dictionary 2023. Tribute).

Judges indicates that Ehud delivered the Israelites' tribute to the palace of the Moabite king Eglon (Jdg 3:18; cf 3.2.2.1b). Ehud succeeded in killing Eglon and delivering the Israelites from the oppression of the Moabites (Jdg 3:18-30). The idea that an ordinary person, someone removed from the nobility and the royal court could be empowered by the god/s to lead and change society would have been inconceivable in the ancient Near East. King-to-king treaties, for instance, that changed societies were made without the participation of the general populace (Hillers 1990:361; Orlin 2007:89-90). In Judges however, YHWH overthrows this dominant cultural ideology by granting ordinary Israelites the type of divine authority and power which challenged and overthrew the rule of their enemies (cf Jdg 3:10, 13, 30, 31, etcetera).

c. Conflict, social and environmental changes

Heynickx et al (2012:7-8) observe that sacred space (in the ancient Near East) exudes immutability and remains unaffected by the passage of time. Zevit (2002:77) remarks that although sacred space is constructed by men (in the ancient Near East) by divine command, it displays unchanging features that assist in the prevention of cosmic chaos and of decay. Nonetheless, the Book of Judges demonstrates that the sanctity and immutability of a Yahwistic sacred place might periodically be shattered by calamity, social upheaval or some other destruction, for example, in warfare.

Judges exhibits several instances of the desecration and destruction of sacred places. The destruction of the Canaanite sacred sites was in keeping with the covenant stipulation that required the demolition of the Canaanite high places and cult installations:

- Gideon's destruction of the altar of Baal and the Asherah pole at Ophrah (Jdg 6:25-26),
- Gideon's razing of the tower of Penuel –the face of El (Jdg 8:17; Gottwald 1999:575),
- Gideon's making and installation of an ephod that launched another cycle of idolatry (Jdg 8:27),
- Abimelech destroys the temple of El-berith (Jdg 9:48-49; Smit and Fowl 2018),
- The destruction of the temple of Dagon by Samson (Jdg 16:30; see Zirpolo 2022),
- The making of an idolatrous idol and installation of a Levite in a syncretic shrine (Jdg 17:3-4, 10-12),
- The creation of a syncretic Danite sanctuary (Jdg 18:30).

Smit and Fowl (2019) remark that the level of death and destruction increases with each instance of the obliteration of sacred space in Judges: As directed by the YHWH Angel, Gideon destroys the Asherah pole and the Baal altar (Jdg 6:25-27). Afterwards, he demolishes the tower of Penuel and kills the town's men (Jdg 8:17). A thousand or so Shechemites are trapped inside the burning tower of Shechem by Abimelech (Jdg 9:49). Samson kills many more people in his final moments than he did during his lifetime when he sends the temple of Dagon crashing down on the Philistine rulers and everyone inside (Jdg 16:30). In contrast to the peace and rest that the early Israelites

experienced under effective leadership, Earl (2020:293) notes that the Book of Judges demonstrates the manner in which idolatry, unfaithfulness, and ineffective leadership led to widespread violence. This had a damaging effect on certain sacred sites in Judges (cf Jos 14:15; 21:44-45; cf Free and Vos 1992:117-118; Rooker 2010:49; see below).

Sacred space could also be transformed by means of social changes. The archaeology demonstrates evidence of the destruction of sacred space that denotes either rebuilding by a society after destruction or a transformation from one culture to a different one (Zevit 2002:77). At Megiddo, for instance the cult places of various shapes replaced older ones, in the Early Bronze III strata XVII-XVI-XV. At Lachish one sacred place succeeded another, deviating significantly or barely from the three Late Bronze fosse temples that came before it (Zevit 2002:77). The third fosse temple was destroyed during the destruction of Lachish VII in the last Canaanite phase, level VI, 'which continued the material culture of level VII.' At Tell Qasile and Ekron, Philistine samples can be found. The Arad temple is an Israelite example of the same occurrence when the Israelites rearranged sacred space around until eventually burying it (Zevit 2002:77).

Warfare in the Book of Judges also had other disastrous consequences for the community and the ecosystem as well as the 'economy' of the Tabernacle. The effect of army incursion on agriculture was severe (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:761). The economy may be severely hampered for years by the ecological catastrophe. It most likely had an effect on the Tabernacle, disrupting tithe making. As the reader is well aware, the writer/s of Judges saw the destruction of the environment as a direct result of the Israelites breaking their covenant. The 'economy' at the Tabernacle suffered as a result of each of the destructive incidents described below. Priests and the general public were left destitute due to a lack of agricultural resources supplied to the Tabernacle. Perhaps this causes a seemingly impoverished Levite in Judges 17 to accept Micah's offer of a yearly salary of ten shekels, food and accommodation.

Sometimes, fields would be so destroyed that their fertility would be significantly decreased (cf Jdg 6:3-5; Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:761). Judges 6:3-5 describes the devastation of Israelite land, crops and livestock when the Midianites, Amalekites and eastern nations invaded the land. Paradoxically, did the early Israelites not worship the gods of the Canaanites precisely to guarantee the fertility of the land and their cattle and abundant harvests?

When Abimelech destroyed Shechem, he also scattered salt over the surrounding agricultural land rendering it infertile (Jdg 9:45). Walton, Matthews and Chavalas (2000:761) state that the destruction of trees would have even more devastating effects on the ecological balance. Not only would shade and wood supply be lost, but topsoil erosion would increase; deforestation would accelerate the development of wasteland conditions (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:761). Some fruit trees (like the date palm) which require twenty years of growth would be affected by soil erosion (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:761). Deforestation and agricultural destruction were

common strategies used by invading armies to punish those they had conquered and accelerate their surrender. Records and reliefs from Assyria describe the cutting down of trees, the damage of meadowlands, and the obliteration of irrigation canal systems as punishments against enemy nations (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:761).

The turmoil and destruction would not have left the cult sites, the sacred hills as well as divination trees and, as stated before, the Tabernacle untouched in some form or the other (see Hagelia 2017:126). Judges 5:6 describes ‘the abandoned highways’ and ‘travelers who took to winding paths’ because of the upheavals in the land (cf 2 Chr 15:5). The people would not have been able to work in their fields or harvest their crops (cf Jdg 6:11; 9:42-43; see also 6.2.2.3b) and travel along roads (to deliver their products to the temples and shrines) for fear of attacks by the enemies (cf Jr 6:25; Jdg 5:6; 9:43). Judges 9:25 narrates that men on hilltops robbed people who happened to pass by. Shrines were usually located on hill tops. It is possible that these passersby were pilgrims going or coming from the hilltop shrines. In light of the above, the sanctuaries and other sacred places of all the inhabitants of the land would have been affected by the ongoing militancy of the people as described in Judges.

Warfare generated the settings in which wealth was obtained from plunder and trade for the victors (Watts 2009:41). Leick (2003:4) comments that a king could engage in warfare to collect tribute from another (minor or vassal) king. The temple and palace would be the major beneficiaries of this accumulated wealth. Wars created the motive; that is, giving thanks to the gods for ‘celebrating and elaborating temple cults’ (Watts 2009:41). Watts (2009:41) also notes that sacred space (or ‘ritual’) in return presented the ancient Near Eastern king with a cause for warfare – to retrieve a stolen god and return it to its sanctuary or to castigate a régime for the abandonment of its god.²³⁹ Judges 18:22-26 narrates an occasion when a lethal fight almost broke out between Micah and the Danites when the former wanted to retrieve his pilfered idols (see also above). The Danites set the idol of Micah in their sanctuary at Dan, ‘all the time the house of God was in Shiloh.’

4.3 SACRED SPACE IN JUDGES

4.3.1 Introduction

The descriptions of the sites in the sections below (see 4.3.1.1a) will highlight both their geographical significance as well as their close association with the Israelites’ patriarchs and the sacred and other advantages. The sacred sites of the early Israelites, Bethel, Mizpah, Shechem, have also been discussed in Chapter Two. The idea guiding the author/s of Judges’ worldview is that the early Israelites would have been drawn to these locations specifically because of their connotations to the patriarchal traditions and religious importance. Above all, however, the author/s would have

²³⁹ But this was not always the case. Leick (2003:4) records the efforts of the Assyrian king, Adad-nirari (911 BC -891 BC) to return the seized statues of gods and deportees in a peaceful way.

considered the locations to serve as tangible evidence of YHWH's covenantal promise to Abraham and his offspring to inhabit the country. The subsequent sections (4.3.1.1b) will elucidate the locations in Judges that hold a distinct importance, as perceived by the author/s, in relation to the Israelites' covenant. The segments that follow (4.3.1.2 and 4.3.1.3) will demonstrate the transformation of both the natural surroundings and constructed sites into sacred spaces. The author/s of Judges do not oppose the attainment of sacredness by these sites, but rather emphasize that such attainment must always be related to YHWH and aligned with His covenant.

4.3.1.1 Sacred sites

Judges 1 records that the Benjamites conquered Jerusalem (Jdg 1:9), the Judahites, Hebron (Jdg 1:10, 20), Gaza, Ashkelon and Ekron (Jdg 1:17-18), the Simeonites, Hormah (Jdg 1:17), and the tribes of Joseph (Manasseh and Ephraim took over Bethel (Jdg 1:22-26). Hebron was given to Caleb (Jdg 1:20) and the Kenezites also conquered Debir (Jdg 1:11-13). The cities of Hebron and Bethel together which lie along the north-south mountain highway (see 4.2.1.1; 4.4.3.1) hold a rich ancestral history for the Israelites since the patriarchs built altars to YHWH at these sites.²⁴⁰ Hebron and Bethel were sites where the patriarch Abraham had erected altars, Hebron (Jdg 1:10; Gn 13:19) and Bethel (Jdg 1:22-26; Gn 12:8; see also Chapter Two) later became important Israelite religious centres (Finkelstein and Silberman 2002:44). Debir which was earlier known as Kiriath Sepher (Jdg 1:11; Jos 10:39) was a royal city (Silver 2008:239; cf Finegan 2015:139) and for this reason may have been an affluent urban centre that was taken over by the early Israelites. The name of the city, Kiriath Sepher, which translates to 'city of the letter/document,' according to Block (1999), however, raises the possibility that the location once held a 'library or archive.' The precise location of Debir or Kiriath Sepher remains uncertain (Block 1999). Some have linked the site with Tel Beit Mirsim (Bodenheimer 1960:181; Kyle 2007:33; Finegan 2015:139) while others have associated Tel el-Rabud with ancient Kiriath Sepher (Block 1999; Silver 2008:239). Block (1999) suggests that another possible depiction of Kiriath Sepher describes it as a significant

²⁴⁰ However, the Benjamites could not drive out the Jebusites from Jerusalem (Jdg 1:21) and the rest of the Israelite tribes could not manage to drive out the Canaanites completely from the cities mentioned in Judges 1:27-36 which leaves the Israelites vulnerable to the cultic and cultural influences of the Canaanites among they lived (Jdg 3:5-6). It may be for this reason that there is more archaeological evidence for an idolatrous and hybrid domestic cult and associated ritual space (cf Jdg 17:5; 18:30-31) among the Israelite tribes than there is for a Yahwistic household cult and associated ritual space (cf Jdg 4:5) (Vriezen 2001:45-80; Becking 2001:151-163; Dijkstra 2001:164-188; see also Sha 2018:43, 74, 139, etcetera; see also 2.3.5.2b). Dijkstra (2001:165) mentions that in addition to Asherah (cf Jdg 6:25), the Israelite tribes also worshipped the goddess Ashtoreth (cf Jdg 2:13; 10:6) and the tribal community venerated the Egyptian god Bes in the domestic cult (see also Sha 2018:219).

Evidence for 'syncretistic worship' comes from several cult sites such as the Bull Site that may qualify as *bamot* (King and Stager 2001:322; see Chapter Two). Nevertheless, Judges does indicate some domestic worship of YHWH exclusively (cf Jdg 6:24 – an altar built by Gideon) at least until the next cycle of idolatry). Judges 4:5 leads to the conclusion that YHWH was worshipped in the household of Deborah. A household that worshipped YHWH is indicated by the wife of Manoah's recognition of the LORD, her obedience, and the sacrifice made by her and her husband in Judges 13:19.

government or army post. Gibeon was described as an important and large city ‘like one of the royal cities’ (Jos 10:2) that was captured by the Israelites. Brooks (2017) reports that Gibeon may have been a flourishing city given that the flat land that surrounded it was suited for agriculture and the slopes beyond it were suited for vineyards.

a. The patriarchal connection to the land

The patriarch Abraham regularly travelled through Canaan via the north-south mountain highway (Blenkinsopp 2015:37). The north-south mountain highway that runs from Shechem in the north to Hebron in the south passes through Shiloh, Bethel and Jerusalem. YHWH instructed Abraham to leave his own land and go to Canaan (Gn 12:1). Subsequently, Abraham arrives in Shechem (Tell Balata, in the area of Nablus in the West Bank) ((Gn 12:6), Bethel (Beitin, some 19 kilometers north of Jerusalem) (Blenkinsopp 2015:37) (Gn 12:8). The north-south mountain highway in Canaan is part of a much longer trade route known as the ‘King’s Highway’ (Nm 20:17) that runs from Upper Mesopotamia to North Arabia and Egypt ‘and, in between, the central route to Egypt via Shechem, Bethel and Beersheba’ (Blenkinsopp 2015:37).

Blenkinsopp mentions Jacob will travel the same trade route as Abraham, spending enough time in Shechem to buy a piece of land (Gn 33:18-20; see 2.3.4.2a). He will travel to the Bethel sanctuary (cf Gn 12:8; 28:18-19; 35:1-7; see 2.2.5.3; 2.3.5.3c; 2.3.4.2c) on his way to Beersheba (Gn 46:2), ultimately reaching Egypt (Blenkinsopp 2015:37). Jacob makes sacrifices to the LORD at Beersheba and is instructed to go to Egypt (Gn 46).

Jacob’s father Isaac dwelled in Beer Lahai Roi (*well of the Living One who sees me*) (Gn 16). He lived in the Valley of Gerar when a famine came to the land (Gn 26:17). Here he opened a well that was dug by Abraham, and from the Valley of Gerar, Isaac went to Beersheba where he built an altar (Gn 26:23, 25). Apparently, the patriarchs (Abraham) was true to YHWH’s instruction to ‘walk through the length and breadth of the land’ for YHWH was giving it to them (Gn 13:7).

i. Shechem

As stated before, Abraham built an altar in Shechem to remember the covenant that YHWH had made with him in which Canaan was promised to Abraham and his offspring (Gn 12:6-7; see 2.3.4.2a; see also 4.1; 4.2.1.1; 4.3.1; 4.3.3.1). Jacob had also lived in Shechem where he had constructed an altar at Shechem (Gn 33:20; see also 2.3.2.1c; 2.3.4.2a).

Referred to as the ‘navel of the land,’ Shechem was in a strategic position (Wright 1957:2); located along the north-south mountain highway (see 4.3.1.1a) and situated in a narrow pass between Mount Gerizim to the South and Mount Ebal to the south, the city controlled all the roads and traffic to the north, south, east and west (Boling 1982:247; Dorsey 1987:68; see also Figure 4.13). Shechem was one of the most important commercial hubs of Canaan where all the major trade

routes in Canaan converged, and which the city also controlled (Wright 1957:2). The city not only traded in olives (see 4.4.2.1a) but also grapes, wheat, cattle, and ceramics.²⁴¹ This diversification of trade through Shechem added to the city's wealth and political influence in the region. According to the epigraphic and archaeological record, Shechem was the most formidable political city state in the central highlands with much of the region under the city's authority (Wood 1997:246)²⁴² which made the city a daunting place to conquer. Shechem would have brought benefits to every city that fell under its sphere of influence, including Shiloh (see 4.4).

Shechem was also a centre of covenant-making, with religious customs dating back to the second millennium BC. It has been hypothesised that the god worshipped in Shechem was a divinity who upheld treaties (Sperling 2022; see 2.3.4.2a). Na'aman (1999c:141) is of the opinion that the religious activities of the patriarchs (see above) suggest that Shechem functioned as a religious centre. This idea is viable considering the above description of Shechem's geographic, political and commercial significance. Historically, cities with religious significance have frequently developed into prosperous hubs for trade and commerce. Therefore, religion and the prosperity of the cities that would benefit from the trading opportunities along the north-south mountain highway may have had a lot to do with the patriarchs' visits to the cities in Canaan and the early Israelites settlement of the sites.

It is possible that it was a strategy of the early Israelites to spread the Yahwistic religion via the north-south trade route which, as stated before, was part of an extensive international trade route when they occupied these sites specifically. However, since they lived in a polytheistic world it would have been a daunting task. Still, the religious activities of the patriarchs might have led to the construction of a sanctuary dedicated to YHWH at the 'holy place of the LORD' referenced in Joshua (24:26; see 2.3.4.2a). Judges 9 makes reference to Shechem, where the Israelites probably worshipped Baal-*berith*, the 'Lord of the Covenant,' the deity likely responsible for upholding the earlier-mentioned treaties (see 2.2.5.3; 2.2.5.6e). It is likely that in the opinion of the author/s of Judges the Israelites were endangering YHWH's plan of universal redemption. This could be accomplished by spreading Yahwism throughout the land and eventually the ancient Near East – possibly, *inter alia*, via the north-south trade route. The author/s of Judges, thus, would have been gravely concerned about the syncretic worship of the Israelites at Shechem. Deborah mentions that during a time of idolatry, there were abandoned highways (Jdg 5:6), which probably indicated the end of trade and, at the very least, a lost opportunity to propagate the worship of mono-YHWH.

ii. Bethel

²⁴¹ New World Encyclopedia 2021. Shechem.

²⁴² The *Amarna Letters* document that the king of Shechem, Lab'ayu, held authority over the central highlands from north of Jerusalem to Megiddo and was in the process of expanding his territory. The archaeology indicates that the Late Bronze Age culture peaked in Shechem in the 14th century BC (Wood 1997:246).

Similar to Shechem, Bethel, also known as the ‘House of God,’ was a fortified city and a prosperous place with a rich cultural and religious heritage when Abraham (Gn 12:8; see also 2.3.2.1c) and Jacob built their altars (Gn 28:18-19; 35:1-7; see 2.2.5.3; 2.3.5.3c; see also 2.3.4.2c) and the Ephraimites occupation of the city (Jdg 1:22; cf Jdg 4:5). Genesis states that Abraham moved from Shechem to the hill country and pitched his tent with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east where he built an altar to the LORD (Gn 12:6-8). The area was once fertile, as evidenced by the remnants of aqueducts and other irrigation systems (Bible Hub 2024. Genesis 12:8). The ruins of Ai are still visible today under the name of Medinet Gai (Bible Hub 2024. Genesis 12:8). Apparently, Bethel is a place of divine revelation. Jacob receives a revelation from YHWH in Bethel where he constructs a stone (pillar) to commemorate the event (Gn 28:18; cf Gn 48:3). Judges references Bethel as a place where the Ark of the Covenant was utilized to predict the war outcome against the Benjamites (Jdg 21:28). Abraham (and Jacob) publicly professed their trust in YHWH by erecting altars to the LORD, solemn acts of devotion that demonstrated their commitment to Him. They established the religion of the worship of the one true God (see Bible Hub 2024. Genesis 12:8). The idolatrous Israelites took the exact opposite action in many of Judges’ narratives.

iii. Hebron and Jerusalem

Hebron and Jerusalem are significant (fortified) cities in Canaan, according to the Old Testament (see Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:45). These cities, like Shechem and Bethel, benefited economically and culturally from their advantageous location along the north-south mountain highway. A mixed agricultural-pastoral economy like the one outlined in Genesis 23 would have been sustained by the abundant water supply found in Hebron’s springs and wells used for the production of olives and grapes (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:45). Hebron and Jerusalem’s association with the patriarchal traditions made them places of great historical and religious significance to the early Israelites. Genesis records Abraham’s journey to Hebron after parting ways with Lot (Gn 13:8). Abraham built an altar to YHWH at Hebron. Two important events take place at Hebron when the LORD announces the conception of Isaac and the destruction of Sodom. Abraham begs YHWH to spare Sodom (Gn 18). According to Berlin and Brettler (2004:39), Abraham resurfaces in the story as a hero who reveres God intensely but respectfully asks justice from Him (see also Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:50).

In Genesis 14:18, Abraham met with Melchizedek, king of Salem who is also called the priest of God Most High (‘El Elyon’). Salem is generally considered to be Jerusalem (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:47). There is only brief mention of Jerusalem prior to and during the pre-monarchic period. Abraham is requested by YHWH to sacrifice Isaac on a mountain in the region of Moriah which some associate with Jerusalem (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:53; Berlin and Brettler 2004:45). At the time of the ‘conquest’ of Canaan, the Benjamites had failed to occupy Jerusalem completely as stated before and shared the area with the Jebusites (Jdg 1:21). According to Berlin and Brettler (2004:550), the narrative of Judges 19 ‘depicts a unified society sensitive to

problems of ethics and serving the LORD' (see also Jdg 20; 21). However, can the Israelites truly have been serving the LORD (with all of their hearts), given the revelations in Judges 19; 20, and 21 that disclose their lack of true justice, honesty, and value for life, especially that of women? In light of Judges 21:25, it is also possible that the author/s of Judges questioned the Israelites' devotion to YHWH. In the narratives of Judges 19 to 21 nobody stands out as a heroic figure.

iv. Mizpah

Mizpah is derived from the Hebrew root word *sph*, which means 'guard' or 'watch.' This implies that it is the name of a military outpost, observatory, or watchtower (Arnold 1992:879-881) As mentioned before (see 2.3.4.2c), Jacob erects a pillar at Mizpah in Genesis to serve as a witness to the covenant made with Laban. He also had his family gather stones and placed them in a heap (Gn 31:45-46). Genesis 31:48-49 reads: 'Laban, said, "This heap is a witness between you and me today." That is why it is called Galeed. It was also called Mizpah, because he said, "May the LORD keep watch between you and me when we are away from each other."'

The Israelites engage in a number of religious activities at Mizpah of Benjamin (Jdg 20:1; 21:1, 5; see 2.3.4.2c). Mizpah of Benjamin was a city of political, military and cultic significance (Arnold 879-881). Biblical Mizpah of Benjamin (Jos 18:26) may be identified with modern day Tell en-Nasbeh (Arnold 1992:879-881; see also 2.3.4.2c). Tell en-Nasbeh is located on the north-south mountain highway connecting Hebron and Jerusalem on the south with Shechem in the north. The site is a significant border fortress as it is situated on the northern border of the tribe of Benjamin (Cornell University Library 2024. The Digitizing Tell en-Naşbeh [Biblical Mizpah of Benjamin]). Arnold (1992:879-881) remarks that the Mizpah of Benjamin and the Mizpah in Gilead (Jdg 10:17; 11:11) may be the same. If this is the case, the writer/s of the Book of Judges might be contrasting the Mizpah during Jacob's time, which represents the patriarch's faith in YHWH, with the Mizpah during Jephthah's time, when he makes a harmful vow (Jdg 11:30-31). Jephthah's oath indicates that the 'mighty warrior' is being impacted by another cultic force.

b. Bochim, Ophrah and Zorah

The sacred sites of Bochim, Ophrah and Zorah will be discussed in this segment. Judges reveals that Bochim, as well as Ophrah (Jdg 6:11) and Zorah (cf Jdg 13:3, 4-11) are transfigured into sacred space on the occasions of the appearances of the Angel of YHWH at these localities (see Chapter Six). Bochim, Ophrah and Zorah symbolize YHWH's rejection of the dominant traditions of the early Israelites that held that YHWH's presence and power associated with the Tabernacle and especially the Ark of the Covenant that rested in the sacred sanctuary (Gallaty 2017:414). The narratives of Judges 6:11-40 and 13:1-23 support the notion that sacred space is only not a physical place in itself but that the God, YHWH, Himself is sacred space since worship of YHWH at the

sites in Judges 6 and 13 occurs external to the approved religious sites and the prescribed times for worship and sacrifices.²⁴³

i. Bochim

The second chapter of Judges begins with the appearance of the Angel of YHWH (who is YHWH Himself) at Bochim and His admonition to the Israelites there for their disobedience in failing to drive out the Canaanites, following the abortive conquest described in Judges 1 (Stroup 2014:343; see also 2.2.1.1b; 2.2.2.1). MacArthur (2016) observes that the Israelites failed to adhere to YHWH's command of refraining from making treaties with the people of the land and demolishing their altars (Ex 23:31-32; see also Evans 2017). They were unsuccessful in their attempts to expel the inhabitants of the land (MacArthur 2016; Evans 2017; cf 4.3.1.1). A significant number of Canaanites were subjected to tribute, essentially becoming slaves to the Israelites (MacArthur 2016; Jdg 1:19-36). MacArthur continues by saying that it is possible that the Israelites believed that enslaving the Canaanites was a satisfactory fulfillment of the LORD's command. They have even viewed it as a compassionate and practical approach to utilize their labour instead of exterminating or displacing them (MacArthur 2016).

However, the LORD had explicitly and repeatedly instructed the people to refrain from entering into any kind of treaty with the Canaanites, including slavery, and they had disregarded His command (MacArthur 2016). Evans (2017) comments that no alliances were to be formed with the existing inhabitants of the land, and their religions were not to be tolerated under any circumstances. However, this did not happen as planned (Evans 2017). Right from the start, they had been giving at least superficial respect to the local gods, believing it to be necessary for their survival, and had even collaborated with the local population in this regard (Evans 2017). Furthermore, there had been clear instances of intermarriage (Jdg 3:6), which not only violated the covenant but also worsened the problem of increasing idolatry (Evans 2017). While the 'Torah' emphasizes YHWH's promises and His unwavering commitment to Israel, it also highlights their responsibility and warns of severe consequences if they fail to fulfil that responsibility (Evans 2017).

In light of their disobedience YHWH will not drive them out before them and they will be a snare unto the Israelites. The Israelites wept and offered sacrifices to YHWH. Thus, Bochim they call 'weepers' because it is there that they expressed their sorrow at the words of the Angel of YHWH. In Exodus 23:29, YHWH had declared His intention to gradually expel the nations residing in Canaan. However, due to the disobedience of the Israelites, YHWH decided to allow the nations to continue dwelling in Canaan (Jdg 2:3; cf Jdg 3:4).

Bochim might have been an elevated area since the Hebrew word *הָלַח* (*'ālāh* – to go up/to ascend) indicates a movement (of the Angel of YHWH) to a higher region (cf 4.5.5.2). The Old Testament

²⁴³ See the podcast: Judah's Redemption and The Stairway to Heaven.

portrays high places as religious sites associated with oracles (cf Jdg 20:28; 21:2; see also 1 Sm 9:19; 10:5; cf 2.3.4.3b), where sacrifices also took place as attested by the animal bones found at these cult places including the Israelite Bull Site found at Dhahrat et-Tawileh in the West Bank (see 2.3.4.3b) and the Canaanite *bamah* at Megiddo (see Figure 4.7).



Figure 4.7 The bamah at Megiddo (Forsythe 2016)

Walton, Matthews and Chavalas (2000:245-246) state that the location of Bochim is unknown but that the narrative in Judges 2 indicates a location west of the Jordan River near Gilgal (see also (MacArthur 2016; Evans 2017). Bochim is called ‘weepers’ by the Israelites because it is there that they expressed their sorrow at the words of the Angel of YHWH (cf Jdg 2:1-5). Some scholars perceive Bochim and Bethel to be the same place (Amit 2000:119; Wong 2006:42, 147; cf Klein 1989:30, Baker 2016:101, 128). Wong (2006:41-42) remarks on the parallels between the weeping of the Israelites at Bochim and their weeping at Bethel (Jdg 20:26; 21:2). Amit (2000:129; 2004:513) identifies the city of Bochim (cf Pike 1996:734; Gomes 2006:118) with Bethel based upon the Septuagint and the association of Bethel with weeping (Jdg 2:5; 20:26; 21:2).

In Judges 2:5 the Israelites at Bochim make a sacrifice to YHWH (cf 5.5.1), as an act of penitence for their idolatry and perhaps to revoke the prediction of trouble made by the Angel of YHWH in verse 3. This type of sacrifice included a communal meal to renew the covenant or to celebrate the covenant relationship with YHWH and each other. Likewise, in Judges 20:26, the Israelites in Bethel presented burnt offerings to YHWH as a way (to acknowledge their disobedience and) to confess their sin. It is possible that this sin played a role in their second defeat by the Benjamites in Judges 20:18-25. Meyers (1996c:26) remarks that any large rock ‘could be used in its original position and condition as in the story of Gideon’s offering of bread and meat upon a rock’ (cf Jdg 13:19-20). YHWH shows a preference for earthen altars when God says He will come near to those who make offerings on an earthen altar (Ex 20:24-26; Miglio et al [eds] 2020). Miglio et al [eds] (2020) remark that the text in Exodus 20 shows ‘the close connection between altars and God’s presence.’ Earthen altars could be erected anywhere (Ex 20:24) ‘for the sacrifice of various kinds of offerings’ (Meyers 1996c:26) and consequently, YHWH could be worshipped anywhere. ‘Simplicity and availability to all people characterize both earth and stone altars’ (Meyer 1996c:26) and demonstrate the equalitarian nature of Yahwistic worship.

ii. Ophrah

In Judges 6:1-2, it is evident that the Israelites have once again fallen into a period of idolatry. The powerful Midianites have oppressed them to such an extent that they are forced to seek refuge in mountain clefts, caves, and strongholds. During the harvest season, the Midianites, along with the Amalekites and other eastern nations, invade Canaan and completely devastate the crops, as well as the cattle, sheep and donkey (Jdg 6:3-4). The author/s specific mention of these animals is reminiscent of Deuteronomy 28:31 that states ‘your ox will be slaughtered...your donkey will be forcibly taken...your sheep will be given to your enemies.’ In a further allusion to Deuteronomy 28, specifically verse 42: ‘swarms of locusts will take over all your trees and the crops of your land,’ the author/s describe the Midianites as ‘swarms of locusts.’ These references to Deuteronomy sets the stage for the message of the prophet sent by YHWH when the Israelites turn to the LORD for assistance. Following this, the prophet invokes YHWH’s covenant and the Israelites’ disobedience thereby rationalizing their oppression by the Midianites. Apparently, the prophet is implying that there is no legitimate cause for their grievances or their appeal for YHWH’s intervention.

The Angel of YHWH appears to Gideon beneath an oak tree in Ophrah (Jdg 6:11; see Figure 4.8; cf 2.3.4.3b; 3.2.2.1b; 3.4.4.1b; 5.3.2.2d). The name Gideon means ‘hewer, slasher, hacker’ (Boling 1992b:1013-1015; cf Auld 1989:257-267; Berlin and Brettler 2004:523). He was the son of Joash, ‘a Yahwist name,’ and Abiezer was his clan or local village association within the territory of Manasseh (Boling 1992b:1013-1015; Hamilton 1992:27-28; Dorsey 1996b:786).

Joash and his household lived at Ophrah, presumably close to Affuleh, a fairly exposed location in the middle of the Jezreel valley (Boling 1992b:1013-1015; Hamilton 1992:27-28; Berlin and Brettler 2004:523; see Figure 4.8). Joash was an apostate, the owner of a cult place at Ophrah where there stood a sacred tree (Jdg 6:11, 19; cf 3.3.5; 3.6.1.1e) and where Baal was revered (Jdg 6:25-26; Boling 1992b:1013-1015). Ophrah was also known for its Asherah pole (Boling 1992b:1013-1015; see 2.3.4.3b; 3.6.1.1e). ‘Thus, was posed the inner threat to Israelite integrity and unity, the gods of the Amorites’ as specified in Judges 6:10 (Boling 1992b:1013-1015).

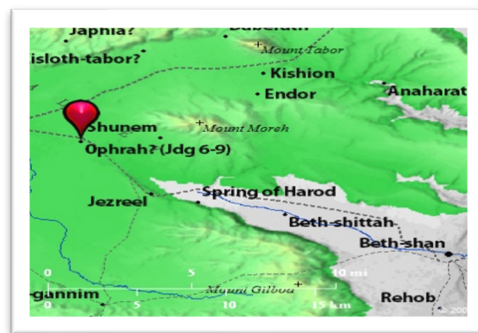


Figure 4.8 Possible location of Ophrah (Ewing 2021)

Hamilton (1992:27-28) observes that the designation of the site as the ‘Oak of Ophrah’ indicates a place of ‘prophetic activity’ (cf Deborah’s Palm tree [see 4.3.1.2b; 7.6.1.1; cf 2.2.3.1a; 3.2.2.1b] although this one functioned in the cult of Baal (cf Jdg 6:25). Gideon also makes an ephod in Ophrah which becomes an object of idolatry for Gideon and the early Israelites (Jdg 8:27; Hamilton 1992:27-28; Longman and Dillard 2006:141; see also 4.3.1.1b).

Nevertheless, under the oak of Ophrah, the Angel of YHWH’s commissions Gideon to engage in a war of liberation against the Midianites (Jdg 6:14, 16). To confirm the divine instruction and the identity of the Angel, Gideon presents the Angel with a sacrifice. The rock (altars) in Judges 6:19 and 13:20 symbolize the promise of deliverance from the Israelites’ enemies and restoration of the covenantal relationship. YHWH confirms His identity and commission to Gideon to deliver the Israelites from the Midianites at the rock (altar) (Jdg 6:21)

The narrative in Judges 6:17-19 defines the altar on which Gideon makes the sacrifice to YHWH as a rock with a flat surface (2 Sm 21:10; Pr 30:19) or a block of stone that functioned as an altar.²⁴⁴ The rock in Judges 6 could have been an improvised altar used by Gideon but it was probably an established altar that was associated with a shrine in existence at the place where Gideon made the offerings to YHWH (see Hundley 2020:166; cf Jdg 6:25-26). Gideon’s rock was possibly also a freestanding altar (Hundley 2020:166) that was situated under the oak tree (Jdg 6:19) where the Angel of YHWH ‘came and sat down under the oak in Ophrah’ – a very symbolic gesture – discussed in 4.3.1.2b (Jdg 6:11). The rock (altar) in Judges 6:19, consequently, symbolize the promise of deliverance from the Israelites’ enemies and restoration of the covenantal relationship. YHWH confirms His identity and commission to Gideon to deliver the Israelites from the Midianites at the rock (altar) (Jdg 6:21).

In Judges 6:24, Gideon apparently builds a memorial altar to YHWH near a site where an altar to Baal already exists or had existed (see Judges 6:25-27). Binger (1997:126-127) states that the altars built for burnt offerings by Gideon in Judges 6:24 and Judges 6:25-26 are one and the same but written from the perspective of two disparate traditions with Judges 6:25-26 being the younger tradition and of the ‘Deuteronomistic type.’ However, altars were not always built for sacrificial purposes but also to commemorate great events.²⁴⁵ Accordingly, Gideon, in all probability, built two altars. Gideon recognized the presence of YHWH and built the altar in Judges 6:24. If YHWH accepted his sacrifice it would serve as a type of covenant renewal (Harris, Brown and Moore 2000:187). Gideon calls this alter ‘*The LORD Is Peace.*’ Shalom in the context of an offering/sacrifice means reconciliation (Nm 6:22-26; Harris, Brown and Moore 2000:187). The other altar was

²⁴⁴ See Bible Hub 2020. tsur.

²⁴⁵ See Bible Hub 2021. Judges 6:24. See also Genesis 25:26; 31:48 and Exodus 17:15.

built in the place of the altar of Baal destroyed by Gideon and his servants (Jdg 6:25-28). In doing so Gideon reestablishes YHWH worship (Harris, Brown and Moore 2000:187).

iii. Zorah

The Israelites are caught in yet another cycle of idolatry that led to their subjugation by the Philistines (Jdg 13:1). Manoah's wife is in a field in the area of Zorah when the Angel of the LORD appears to her. The author/s of Judges shed light on the fact that Yahwistic sacred space operates independently from the prevailing cultural ideology embraced by the idolatrous Israelites and Canaanites. Firstly, the arrival of the Angel instantly confers holiness upon the location (cf 4.3.1.1b) where the woman may be praying for a child since she is barren (see Le Roux 2017:501-526). The dominant belief was that the temple (Jdg 9:27), household shrine (Jdg 17:5), or the idol/s (Jdg 6:25-26) imbued sanctity upon a particular place. Secondly, the Hebrew word for sacred or holy *קֹדֶשׁ* – *qəḏōšîm* also means to be consecrated or to be set apart (for God) (Bible Hub 2024. qadosh). Consequently, the woman is set apart unto YHWH as a Nazirite (Jdg 13:4) for a special task at the place where she encounters the Angel of YHWH. The woman is to become a Nazirite in order to bear the promised child. The woman herself may play an important role in emphasizing YHWH's disapproval of the popular cults (Sha 2018:149; see the discussion in 8.5.4.1). Walton and Matthews (2000:146; 182) remark that by adhering to the restrictions of the Nazirite vow (see Nm 6:1-21; Jdg 13:4, 7, 14; cf 8.5.4.2-8.5.4.3), the woman could serve as YHWH's messenger and visibly demonstrate His disapproval of the prevalent cults (see 8.5.4.1).

In a society that is primarily patriarchal, it is noteworthy that YHWH does not exhibit any form of gender discrimination. Both men and women are equally capable of serving Him in any role that He assigns to them (see also 2.2.3.1e). Therefore, the Angel of YHWH appears to the barren woman, who because of her barrenness is probably rejected as a sinner in her community. The woman then subsequently takes the role of leading in comprehending the Angel's identity. Additionally, Klein (1989:123) notes that Manoah, while being the masculine figure, must follow his unnamed wife to come to the Angel (Jdg 13:11). Manoah accepts the revelation only after being assured of that fact that the Angel is the same 'man' who spoke to his wife (Klein 1989:123; cf Unterman 1996c:649).

Upon the Angel of the LORD's request, Manoah took a young goat and the grain offering and sacrificed it on a rock to the LORD as a burnt offering (Jdg 13:19). In a similar manner to Judges 6:19, the rock altar mentioned in Judges 13:20 serves as a symbol of the promise of salvation from the enemies of the Israelites and the restoration of their covenantal relationship (see 4.3.1.1bii). At a rock, YHWH reveals His true identity to Manoah and his wife, thereby confirming His promise of deliverance and the miraculous birth of a child (Jdg 13:19-20). Alike Judges 6:17-19, the altar on which Manoah offers a sacrifice to YHWH is a solid rock or a stone block that serves as an altar (see 4.3.1.1bii). The rock on which the offering was made could also have been a rock hewn

altar. A rock hewn altar was discovered that is situated below the ancient site of Zorah and is now known as the altar of Manoah (Amit 2004:539; Elitzur and Nir-Zevi 2003:30; see Figure 4.9). However, if this is actually Manoah's altar has not been confirmed. Hundley (2020:166) observes that people made contact with the divine, by means of altars, on their own initiative rather than waiting for the divine to arrive. The altar was intended to act as a conduit to heaven, sending the aroma of sacrifice there to attract the deity's attention 'and to make him favorably disposed to human petition' (Hundley 2020:166).



Figure 4.9 'Rock altar of Manoah' (Israel Agency 2022)

Manoah and his wife are from Zorah (Jdg 13:11; Klein 1989:123; King 1996:1248) where Samson is also raised (Jdg 13:2, 25; King 1996:1248). Zorah is located in the valley of Sorek, about 4 kilometers northeast of Beth-shemesh and about 24 kilometers west of Jerusalem (King 1996:1248). The Zorah area was settled by the Danites (Jos 15:33; 19:31); however, the tribe was driven from the territory when the Philistines invaded it (King 1996:1248). King states that when the Danites left Zorah, the town became 'Judahite' (cf Lindsey 1983:404). Klein (1989:123) notes that both Manoah and Samson are buried in the area between Zorah and Eshtaol (Jdg 16:31; cf King 1996:1248; Unterman 1996c:649). Zorah means 'smiting, defeat' while Eshtaol translates as 'petition, request' (Klein 1989:123). Klein (1989:123) observes that 'literally Samson first felt the Spirit of Yahweh *between* 'defeat' and 'petition,' and he was buried in the same place. Klein adds that the phrase 'judging Israel' has been understood to signify seeking the 'will of God...by a charismatic person' – which appears to be the 'proper goal of Samson.' However, that ambition is not achieved in the narrative since Samson does not request or ask of YHWH (cf Kuruvilla 2017:209).

4.3.1.2 Geographical features with cultic association

Ordinary topographical features such as hills, water and trees are transformed into sacred elements required for the establishment of a religious place (see Zevit 2002:74-75). Geographical features that were associated with the sacred will be discussed in this segment: hills, trees (oaks) and water. The tribes worshipped at places, unsophisticated but with a great degree of religious importance such as sacred trees (Jos 24:26; Jdg 9:6, 37). The oak tree at Shechem where Joshua set up the 'book of the law' (Jos 24:26) which later possibly functioned as a sacred site for syncretic

vation of YHWH (cf Jdg 9:37) alongside other gods by the tribes (cf Jdg 17:5) or the worship of these gods apart from YHWH. The Israelites offered sacrifices at rocks/altars (cf Jdg 6:20-22; 13:19-20). Gideon made a burnt offerings to YHWH (Jdg 6:19) as well as Manoah and his wife (Jdg 13:6; see Le Roux 2016:501-526). Other places of idolatrous worship included the stone images of Gilgal (Jdg 3:19, 26) as well as high places. Gilgal was discussed in Chapter Two and will not be addressed in this section (see 2.3.4.2d; 2.3.4.3a-b). The topic of high places was examined in Chapter Two and will only briefly be mentioned in this section.

a. Hills

i. Shiloh

The steep western, eastern and northern sides of the Tell Shiloh made the mound extremely defensible and would have appealed to the settlement of the early Israelites at this location (see Finkelstein 1986:22-41). Another appealing aspect of Shiloh was the presence of hills in the area. Finkelstein (1986:22-41) describes Tell Shiloh as located ‘at the northern end of a fertile valley surrounded by hills.’ People in the ancient Near East regarded mountains and hills as ‘prime spots for worship and ritual’ (Carpenter 2016). Shiloh probably had a longstanding cultic past and was perhaps a ‘nomadic sanctuary’ to people travelling through the area (Van der Steen 2004:70; see 4.4.2.1) which is collaborated by the altar found near Shiloh. In the religious perspective of the author/s of Judges, YHWH is omnipresent and may also dwell on the hilltop of Shiloh where the Tabernacle and the Ark of Covenant are set up since any elevated area even if it was only a raised platform symbolized the sacred mountain and was believed to be the dwelling place of the divine (see below; see also Van Vuuren 2023:206).

ii. Mount Saphon and Mount Hermon

In the ancient Near East and early ‘Israel,’ mountains, were frequently imbued with a sacred aura, (cf Gn 2:9; 3:22, 14; Jdg 3:3 Prov 3:18; Hundley 2015:203; cf Smith 1994:293-294; Wyatt 2001:148; Leal 2004:170; Carpenter 2016).²⁴⁶ Both Mount Saphon and Mount Hermon are referenced in the Old Testament.

Moses declares in Exodus 15:17: ‘You will bring them in and plant them on the mountain of your inheritance – the place, LORD, you made for your dwelling, the sanctuary, Lord, your hand established.’ Previously in Exodus 14:2, YHWH gave the early Israelites the command to set up camp near Pi Hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea. The Israelites were to set up camp by the sea,

²⁴⁶ In the ancient Near East, and early Israel, the sacred mountain was the locale of the divine presence (see above), for example, the gods’ abode on the sacred Mount Saphon in the Ugaritic *Baal Cycle* (Hundley 2015:203; cf Smith 1994:293-294; Wyatt 2001:148; Leal 2004:170). Clements (2016:5) points out that the significance of Baal’s residence on Mount Saphon must be understood in the context of the ancient Near East’s most intense reverence for sacred mountains. Typically, an open air cultic site with a stone altar for sacrifices and a surrounding area where worshippers may congregate was situated on a sacred hill or mountain (Smith, MS 2020; cf Jdg 6:25-26).

directly opposite *צִפְוֹן בְּעַל* (*ṣāpōn bā'al* – Baal Saphon). Baal Saphon refers to the role of the storm god Baal as lord of Mount Saphon that is mentioned as the abode of the Canaanite gods in the Ugaritic texts (Niehr 1999:152). By position the Israelites on the geographical landscape where He did, YHWH announced to the other gods that He is about to establish His people and kingdom in Canaan. Baal Saphon has been identified in a number of locations. For instance, Albright (1943a:9, 16) places biblical Saphon in the centre of the Jordan Valley north of the Jabbok River. Accordingly, *Ṣabuma* in the Amarna Letter 274 should be read as *Ṣapuna* which corresponds with the Hebrew *Ṣapōn* (Saphon). Zephon was one of the towns allocated to the tribe of Gad and where the Ephraimites assembled to cross the river Jordan to take up arms against Jephthah (Jdg 12:1-4; Albright 1943a:9,16; see also Hoffmeier 2005:105-108; Gmirkin 2006:232, 234; Sinclair 2000:137).

Mount Hermon was considered sacred by many nations and their gods (Jdg 3:3; Carpenter 2016). Talmon (2005:117) comments, however, that ‘the Biblical thinkers rejected the mythological notion of space as unalterably holy.’ No place, not even a mountain, can be considered sacred in and of itself. A place is only regarded as holy if it has a connection to the ‘God of Israel’ (Talmon 2005:117; cf Jdg 2:1-3; 6:11; 13:3-20). Although the central sanctuary and YHWH’s chosen dwelling place (Talmon 2005:117) is in Shiloh, any other area or place wherever YHWH chooses to be becomes holy in Judges (see also 4.3.1.1b).

iii. Mount Seir

The sacred mountain served as the pillars of the cosmos – the connection that united heaven and earth – and was revered as such (Talmon 2005:117). Talmon (2005:117) remarks that the Israelites’ preference for placing sacred places on mountains or associating them with mountains stems from the topographical and geophysical realities they encountered in Canaan, which were then bolstered by economic and military concerns. Talmon (2005:117) identifies what he calls ‘a fusion of mythological motifs’ within the realities experienced by the Israelites in Canaan as described above. Judges (Jdg 5:4) refers to YHWH as coming from Mount Seir to Mount Tabor (Talmon 2005:117; cf Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:250; Slavicek 2009:22; Youngblood [ed] 2011:224). Leal (2004:170) affirms that ancient Near Eastern nations as well as the early Israelites construed of the mountain as the geographical feature ‘most conducive to contact with the divine and most revelatory of the divine presence.’

b. Trees

Certain trees – terebinth and oak – are designated as sacred space for cultic activities; sacrifices (Gn 12:6-7; Jdg 4:4; 6:11, 19; 9:6, 37; Leal 2004:170) and divination (cf Jdg 9:37; see below).²⁴⁷

²⁴⁷ James (1966:viii) remarks that the basic element symbolised by the sacred tree or tree of life is ‘ever-renewing vitality’ and related to this ‘the expulsion of barrenness, aridity and sterility (cf Ross 2006:100). According to Ross

The association between trees and divinity is shown in Genesis as well as Judges 9:37. The patriarch Abraham is said to arrive in Shechem specifically at the ‘great tree of Moreh’ where the LORD appears to him (Gn 12:6-7). Abraham also went to live ‘near the great trees of Mamre at Hebron (Gn 13:18). In Genesis 21:33, Abraham planted a tamarisk at Beersheba where ‘he calls upon the LORD.’

The Hebrew word for terebinth *elah* (Gn 12:6, 13:8; Dt 11:30; Jdg 4:11; 9:6, 37; 12:12; 1 Sm 10:3), also translated as oak, is derived from the Hebrew root *el* (god) which means strong and durable²⁴⁸ (see Figure 4.10). The oak and the terebinth, however, belong to distinct genera.



Figure 4.10 A great terebinth tree (Vamosh 2014)

Nielsen (1999b:851) observes that the close bond between goddesses like Asherah and trees – frequently palm trees – demonstrates that trees (in the Canaanite and ancient Near Eastern cults) are associated with fertility (see also Jdg 6:25-26) and a tree or a group of trees could represent a fertility god or goddess (De Vaux 1997:278). Early Israelites also adored the Canaanite goddess, Asherah, who was linked to a sacred tree or pole that served as a place of worship and a symbol of fertility (Keener and Walton 2016:316; Carpenter 2016; cf Winter 2010:240). Ross (2006:101) indicates that the fertility cult of Asherah included a sacred tree, and that sacred poles were built in her honour on lofty hills or beneath sprawling trees. It was unlawful for the Israelites to plant or erect an Asherah pole (Dt 16:21), yet they worshiped the god Baal as well as the goddess Asherah and her cult items. Judges mentions the Asherah pole and the altar of Baal in Ophrah as one place where these deities were worshipped (Jdg 6:25-26, 28). The Israelites, however, were not to offer sacrifices at the ‘hills and green trees’ where the Canaanite peoples had done in the past (cf Jdg 6:25-26; see Keener and Walton 2016:316; cf Ross 2006:101).

(2006:100) the tree of life was supposed to be a source of permanent life, which is evident from the fact that God forbade Adam and Eve from eating from it and living forever (Gn 3:22). In the ancient Near Eastern temple reliefs there were stylized sacred trees and Mesopotamian texts refer to eating plants that will bring immortality or ‘at least youth’ (Ross 2006:100).

²⁴⁸ Encyclopedia.com 2022. Terebinth.

i. Palm tree of Deborah

Judges 4:5 mentions that the prophetess and leader of the Israelites, Deborah ‘held court under the Palm of Deborah which was situated between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim. According to Na’aman (1999b:152), this tree must be located close to Bethel. Na’aman further states that the tree ‘a prominent date palm’ and comparable to other remarkable trees ‘in ancient Palestine’ was regarded as sacred and would have attracted a cult (see above, 4.3.1.2b).²⁴⁹ In the usually polemical style of the Old Testament, the author/s of Judges shows that trees by themselves have no magic divination power or fertility functions (see Jdg 9:37) but may symbolize a place for the giving of divine instructions (cf Jdg 4:5) and covenant renewal (Jos 8:32; 24:26). Therefore, similar to the (improper) diviner’s tree (cf Jdg 9:37), Deborah’s palm tree was a sacred place where in addition to ‘oracular consultation’, she met with the early Israelites to settle their (legal) disputes and administer justice (Boling 1992a:113-114; see also Niditch 2001:189; cf Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:250). Judges does not indicate whether she ruled from a building constructed under the palm tree or an open courtyard attached to her household near the palm tree. It can be imagined that she had assistants to help her adjudicate since there would have been large numbers of Israelites consulting with the prophetess (cf Ex 18:18-23).

ii. Oak tree of Ophrah

Le Roux (2015:np) remarks that the ‘special tree in the Gideon-Abimelech story’ is the oak tree of Ophrah which is undoubtedly a ‘holy tree’ where the Angel of YHWH appeared to Gideon (see also 3.3.5) and is evocative of the ‘special tree’ – the palm tree of Deborah where she administered justice.²⁵⁰ Le Roux goes on to say that this could be a religious phenomenon that associates trees

²⁴⁹ In the land of Hatti, the gods were believed to meet under a hawthorn tree (Keener and Walton 2016:316; Carpenter 2016). The ‘tree of life for the sunfolk’ is referenced in the *Great Cairo Hymn of Praise* to Amun-Re (Keener and Walton 2016:316; Carpenter 2016).

²⁵⁰ According to Gideon, his family is a weaker clan than the rest of the tribes (Jdg 6:15) Later, Gideon is faced with the Ephraimites’ resentment at not being able to share in the war booty at the end of the war against the Midianites. Gideon appeases the Ephraimites by saying that they did not suffer any losses for the war booty did not enrich his clan and was meagre compared to the wealth already in possession of the Ephraimites (Jdg 8:1-2). However, indications are that the Abiezrite clan was perhaps not as affluent as the rest of the Israelite tribes but still quite wealthy. Apparently, the wheat fields of Ophrah or a portion of it had survived the destruction of the Midianites and the harvest was now hidden in Gideon’s winepress (Jdg 6:11). It is possible that the wheat harvest or a part of it had been salvaged because the fields surrounding Ophrah were extensive. ‘Izbet Sartah, an Iron Age I Village with a probable population of 100 people (possibly the same size, more or less, of the inhabitants of Ophrah), was possibly sustained by approximately eight hundred acres of surrounding land, ‘four hundred and fifty of which were cultivated, and the rest used for pasture’ (Finkelstein and Silberman 2002:110). Finkelstein and Silberman remark that the fields could have yielded about fifty-three tons of wheat and twenty-one tons of barley ‘with the help of about forty oxen for ploughing.’ The villagers apparently raised a herd of about three hundred sheep and goats (Finkelstein and Silberman 2002:110). If Ophrah was a parallel village to ‘Izbet Sartah and like the latter located in a fertile part of the foothills, it would have been a rich village and unlike most villages in the highlands that were less affluent. A further indication that Gideon’s clan is a high-status, honorable family with associated affluence is the terebinth (or oak) tree owned by his clan (Lee 2021:64). While the clan in which Gideon belongs may have a minor place in the tribal society Lee (2021:65) remarks that in light of the extraordinary correlation of a terebinth with sacred places (cf Nielsen 1999b:851), it is implied that Gideon’s clan – his father and family – have a prominent social role in Ophrah.

with sacred or cultic space. Judges 6:19 indicates that offerings and sacrifices were made under the oak tree of Ophrah which may provide a parallel for the possible cultic rituals performed at the ‘diviner’s tree’ in Judges 9:6, 37.

iii. The oak tree at Shechem

The oak tree at Shechem (Jdg 9:6; cf Jdg 9:37), also known as the ‘great tree at the pillar in Shechem’ in the narrative of Abimelech, assumes a unique significance when an unauthorized ‘coronation’ occurs beneath it (Le Roux 2015b:np). Le Roux (2015:np) further observes that the soothsayer’s/diviner’s tree in Judges 9:6, 36 denotes Abimelech’s attack on his fellow Israelites. The site may also be the same location where Jacob buried the unlawful idols of his household (Gn 35:3) and where Joshua renewed the covenant and set up a stone as a witness of the people’s vow to serve YHWH. The stone would also act as a witness against the people if they should violate their covenant (Jos 24:26-27). It is possible that the site was originally a Yahwistic site. However, the oak tree at Shechem probably later became an idolatrous sacred place known as the ‘diviner’s tree’ (Jdg 9:37).

In the three stories (Deborah, Gideon and Abimelech), and their depictions of a tree as sacred space, the disparity progressively grows wider between the divine and the human perspectives of the occupation of the land (Le Roux 2015b:np); that is, the divine desire for a continued covenantal relationship and the people’s idolatry and violation of their sacred covenant.

c. Water

In the ancient Near East, and still today, a clump of tree was a sign of blessing because it meant there was water (Ross 2006:101). A large spring lies northeast of the Tell Shiloh which is an additional water resource to the surfeit rainwater collected in the cisterns on the tell (Finkelstein 1986:22-41; cf 6.3.2.2b). Many of the Iron Age I villages in the highlands arose on the most eastern part of the fertile land that looked out on the desert (cf Jdg 21:19). In these self-sufficient communities, water was available all year; water was collected from nearby springs or from rock-hewn cisterns that were built to store water from winter rains (Finkelstein 1986:22-41). Nissinen (2019:441) remarks that water is a requirement for the existence of all life on earth but at the same time water also can cause death by means of flooding. Water was therefore ascribed divine qualities because it was the source of both death and life and was also thought to be the location and medium of supernatural agency (Jdg 5:4-5; Nissinen 2019:441).

Water is frequently associated with magic, healing, and divinatory rituals, according to Nissinen. In Judges 5:4-5, YHWH creates the thunderstorm that flooded the Kishon River causing it to flood, sweeping away the Canaanite army (Jdg 5:21; Lapp 1996c:574; Cundall and Morris 2011:189,

191; Douglas and Tenney 2011; Sha 2018:175-176).²⁵¹ In Judges YHWH utilizes water in the fleece oracle to confirm Gideon's call to leadership (Jdg 6:34-40; see also 6.5.2). YHWH also reduces Gideon's army of twenty-two thousand men down to three hundred in order to prevent the people from attributing victory over the Midianites 'to itself by virtue of its large army' (Jdg; 7:2-8; Assis 2005:58). The water where the army of Gideon was reduced was probably a stream that flowed from the spring of Harod mentioned in Judges 7:1 (Webb 2012). The spring of Harod is at the foot of the Gilboa mountains from where the water flows to the east (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:255 – a direction that cannot be ignored for its meaningful imagery – moving east can signify either moving away or toward the presence of God as noted above (cf 2.3.4.1a; 4.5.3).

In the ancient Near East sacred mountains were identified with male deities, and rivers and springs with female deities (Bryce 2002:147; cf De Vaux 1997:278). Rivers were considered important places (liminal places) that connected the land of the living and the netherworld (Bryce 2002:185). A Hittite text describes a sacrificial ritual that takes place on a riverbank to appease the Gulš goddesses (Putthoff 2020:86).²⁵² The cult objects of (Hittite) gods such as the *huwasīs* were set up in open fields, in groves near rivers or springs or on mountain tops (Bryce 2002:156-157). Bryce (2002:157) remarks that the *huwasīs* labelled an area as sacred and a place where the gods were really present.²⁵³ Walton (2018) notes that some temples in the ancient Near East were thought to have been founded upon springs (compared to the primeval waters) 'which sometimes flowed from the buildings themselves.' Sacred springs were also created such as the one created by Moses via supernatural means in Exodus (Ex 17:5-6; Orloff 2009:245).

4.3.1.3 Other places of religious significance

In this section doorways and threshing floors as they relate to the sacred will be examined. Liminal space is where humans connected with the divine (see Levinson 2004:381; cf Prosic 2016:73; Walton 2017:145; Marlow 2021). Liminal places where the ordinary people could connect with the deity were doorposts (as well as their inscriptions that lend them that air of sanctity sought by

²⁵¹ The storm theophany in Judges 5 has led scholars to determine YHWH to be a storm god similar to other Canaanite weather gods such as Baal (Van Der Toorn 1996:332) and even the Ugaritic god El (Green 2003:256). However, unlike storm god Baal who is part of the storm (Herrmann 1999b:704), YHWH is autonomous of the storm.

²⁵² The Gulš deities (also Gulšeš or Gul-ses) were Hittite goddesses of fate that were also associated with childbirth (Leick 2003:77; Taracha 2009:109; cf Archi 2013:19). As divine midwives they also appear in the *Song of Ulikummi* in which they assist in the birth of Ulikummi (Goetze 1969d:124). The ritual mentioned above is called: 'A River Ritual with a Mythology on the Creation of Humanity' (Putthoff 2020:86). In a similar Hittite ritual, the priest would take a dagger and dig a hollow in the riverbank that would be used as a pit sacrificial offering. A sheep was killed and its blood mixed with beer, wine and other drink offerings which would then be poured into the pit together with offerings of a meal including bread (Bryce 2002:185).

²⁵³ A *huwasī* 'was apparently a stone stele, sometimes carved with a relief which was set up on an altar in a temple's sanctuary' (Bryce 2002:156). A *huwasī* received the same care as a statue of the god, including being washed, anointed, and provided with food and drinks (Bryce 2002:156).

people) (Levinson 2004:381), threshing floors, altars and the *bamot* (the *bamot* are discussed in 2.3.4.3a-b)

a. Doorways and their sacred inscriptions

In Israel and the ancient Near East, the doors of homes and temples were seen as significant transitional spaces associated with ‘religious-legal’ rituals and where holy images might be kept (Ex 12:7; 21-23; 21:6; Is 57:8; Levinson 2004:381; cf Houtman 1996:176). The early Israelites (in Judges) would have observed Passover to commemorate the blood that covered the doorposts of Hebrew homes in Egypt (Ex 12:7) and the deliverance that the God of the Covenant brought about (Alsup 1996:148). In Israel and the ancient Near East, it was common to inscribe these liminal or sacred locations with cultic or religious invocations (Levinson 2004:381; cf Gravett et al 2008:175; see also 3.2.4.1).

In (ancient) Egypt, doorposts with inscribed with religious writings have been discovered (Weinfeld 1991:341-343; Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:178; Rogerson 2019). From Egyptian sources, it is known that the stone doorways of houses were engraved with inscriptions beseeching divine protection (Robertson 2005:209) a common practice in the ancient Near East.

Houtman (1996:176) defines doorways as boundaries between two worlds; the hospitable protecting atmosphere of the home with the potentially dangerous forces lurking in the outside world. To keep evil outside amulets and images of protector deities or monstrous statuettes were placed at the door opening and invocations were carved on the doorposts and lintel (Houtman 1996:176). This practice is the setting for the command in Deuteronomy to write the commandments on doorframes of houses and on gates (Dt 6:9; 11:20). Ramos (2021:138) affirms that Deuteronomy includes a directive to perform a ritual, inscribing personal items (such as doorposts) with blessings (or curses), which was already practised in Israel and the Levant. Although agreeing that Deuteronomy follows the aforementioned practice, Levinson (2004:381) asserts that the doorway as a sacred area is made subordinate to Deuteronomic law and authority. The words were originally intended ‘to be directly displayed on the doorposts’ as demonstrated by the stone plaques engraved ‘with the words of the Decalogue found outside ancient Samaritan dwellings’ (Levinson 2004:381). Walton, Matthews and Chavalas (2000:178) note that inscription of doorposts – writing the law on doorposts – served to ‘prevent negative consequences or dangerous situations’ (see also Houtman 1996:176).²⁵⁴

In Judges 11 Jephthah had made a vow to sacrifice as a burnt offering whatever came through the door of his house to meet him if YHWH were to give the Ammonites into his hands (Jdg 11:30-

²⁵⁴ Walton, Matthews and Chavalas (2000:178) add that ‘the idea that written texts provided protection’ is illustrated in the Mesopotamian *Erra Epic* in which text an incursion by the god of plague can be averted ‘as long as a copy of the text of this work is kept in the house.’

31; see also 2.2.5.6c; see also Miller, B 2005:6-7, 65, etcetera). Jephthah's vow to make a human sacrifice to YHWH speaks of cult syncretism (2 Ki 23:10; Jr 32:23) and specifically Ammonite cult that practised child sacrifice. The Ammonites worshipped Molech which was associated with child sacrifice (see 3.6.1.1). The author/s present Jephthah's vow as an irony – he fought against the Ammonites but adopted a foreign rite for his victory although he believed that YHWH had the power to grant him victory. Wiersbe (2007:457) concurs that Jephthah's vow contained elements of Canaanite influence since YHWH did not ever condone human sacrifice (cf Jordan 1999:202).

Jephthah launches a victorious campaign against the Ammonites (Jdg 11:32-33) and when he returns home, his daughter, his only child, is the first to meet him (Jdg 11:34). She crosses the doorway, exits the safety of her home and walks into a perilous situation. Jephthah's daughter meets him with joy; singing and dancing to the sound of timbrels to commemorate her father's military victory (Jdg 11:34; Gunn 2005:156-157). Walton, Matthews and Chavalas (2000:263) comment that the celebrations for Saul and David (1 Sm 18:6-7) and partially Miriam's song in Exodus 15:20-21 attest to the custom of women and daughters going out to welcome home victorious men with song and dance. The tambour, a tiny drum, has been identified in archaeological reliefs, as the tambourine that the daughter played (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:263). However, the daughter's joy would turn into lament as she submits to her father's vow and requests to roam the hills and weep with her friends for two months because she would never marry (Jdg 11:37). Consensus cannot be reached on the fate of the daughter (see also 6.3.3.2d; 7.5.1.1a). Exum (1994:16-21) and Wiersbe (2007:457), for instance, both have different ideas about the daughter's fate. It does appear, however, that she was sacrificed (Jdg 11:39; Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:262; Amit 2004:537; Sha 2018:74).²⁵⁵

Since the sacrifice of the firstborn is the foundation for the building of the house, it was traditional in the ancient Near East to kill children at the doorway and build the house on their graves (cf 1 Ki 16:34; Jordan 1999:202). Jordan adds that the death of the firstborn was intended to appease the gods' (or God's) wrath and bring peace to the city.

Even though it is a sacred location, the doorway in the Judges 11 narrative could represent the disintegration of personal and public morality within the framework of Deuteronomy's legal code (see Sha 2018:75; cf Cundall and Morris 2011:128). The idea of personal and public moral bankruptcy is further reinforced by another incident involving a doorway; the concubine of a Levite,

²⁵⁵ See also Exum (1994:16-118); Walton, Matthews and Chavalas (2000:263); Wiersbe (2007:457); Talbot (2022:12-40). It can also be imagined that she spent some of her time as a Nazirite, devoting herself fully to YHWH and finally completing her obligations as a Nazirite in the prescribed rituals at the *Miskhan* (Nm 6:1-21). However, Miller, C (2005:90) opines that the ritual in Judges 11:37 may refer to young women being sequestered before marriage in order to make sacrifices before taking on the role of wife and motherhood. Nevertheless, the sorrow of Jephthah's daughter of never having a family life of her own might be connected to YHWH's prophecy that He would provide the Israelites with a deliverer – the promised Messiah in Genesis 3:15. Deffinbaugh (2004) states that this was the probable hope of every pregnant woman in the Old Testament: to give birth to the promised deliverer (see also Sha 2018:160).

pushed out of the door of the house they were staying in to be violated by a group of Benjamites. After being severely abused throughout the night, she returned home and fell dead at the entrance (door) with her hands on the threshold which may either reflect her powerlessness and defeat or symbolize a ritual act (see below) (Jdg 19:27; see Figure 4.11). In 1 Samuel 5:4-5, the Philistines place the Ark of the Covenant that they had captured and set it beside their god Dagon in the god's temple. The next morning, Dagon is found lying face down before the Ark of the Covenant with his head and hands broken off and lying on the threshold of temple representing his powerlessness and defeat by YHWH.

The Hebrew term for threshold is derived from the root word *caph* that also has the meaning of a basin or goblet for holding blood or wine.²⁵⁶ This meaning could reinforce the idea of ancient doorways functioning as apotropaic spaces (see above) where possibly drink offerings were placed for the protective deity/s (see above).



Figure 4.11 Entrance to a Middle Eastern house (photo by Halima Sha)²⁵⁷

Gibeah was an Israelite town (Jdg 19:16) so that the doorway of the house of the old man where the Levite and his concubine stayed would have been inscribed with the words of the law if the house owner was a Yahwistic believer (see also 3.2.4.1). It is perhaps only by sheer willpower that the concubine managed to find her way back to the house (Jdg 19:26). Is it possible that the concubine made her way to the house after her ordeal in order to perform a last ritual – to call upon YHWH in a sacred place and if it was a (sacred) container that she was touching that was positioned at the doorway one can only wonder at the significance of such a gesture.²⁵⁸ Is she perhaps

²⁵⁶ See Bible Hub 2022. *caph*.

²⁵⁷ This entrance to a modern Middle Eastern house may resemble houses with entrances in antiquity. The two Hebrew words for door used in the narrative come from the root *pethach* (Jdg 19:26; see Bible Hub 2022. *pethach*) with the meaning doorway or entrance and *deleth* (Jdg 19:27; see Bible Hub 2022. *deleth*) which means actual door (of a house).

²⁵⁸ Foster (2020:265) remarks that in Mesopotamia every sight, sound and event in the 'home, workplace, street, community, or country' was thought to be an omen by the observer, 'if water is spilled in the doorway of a man's house' in the 'the shape of a man with an arm outstretched' this is an omen 'that the man will himself stretch out his arm'(to beg) in the streets of his city.

holding on to a vessel on which a curse is inscribed (in YHWH's name [cf 8.5.5.2]) and the result may be the decimation of the Benjamites in the war narrated in Judges 20?

Doorways are liminal spaces separating life from death as demonstrated in Judges 11 and 19. Both the daughter and Jephthah (Jdg 11:34) and the concubine of the Levite (Jdg 19:26-27) cross the threshold of a house in which there is safety to step outside where there is death. Jordan states that Eli is sitting by the side of a gate (an entrance) when he is told about the death of his sons but falls dead when he hears that the Ark of the Covenant had been captured by the Philistines (1Sm 4:18; Jordan 1999:202).

b. Threshing floors

Threshing floors in the ancient Near East were places rich with sacred symbolism (cf 6.5.2). Wheat is emblematic of the fruitfulness of the land (Musselman 2020; cf Franke and Oden [eds] 2014:123). Wheat was an integral part of the sacred sacrifices²⁵⁹ at the Tabernacle and a sign of YHWH's blessings and abundance (see Haak 1992:162-167; cf McKenzie 2008:110). Bread was an important staple of the Israelite diet and also representative of the spiritual nourishment that YHWH provides (Dt 8:3). The threshing floor assumes both a literal and numinous aspect in the Book of Judges (Jdg 6:36-40; cf 6.5.2).

The purpose of the threshing floor was to receive the grain crops that farmers delivered there after harvesting their crops of grain (see Keener and Walton 2019).²⁶⁰ Ancient Near Eastern farmers loaded the grain onto flat carts pulled by oxen or donkey²⁶¹ and the sheaves of grain were brought to the threshing floor placed outside the village like the one discovered next to a terrace in the Modi'in area (Golani 2005:85; Sha 2016:318). Threshing which involved separating the grain from the stalks and could be carried out by using a sledge, a cart and by flailing with a stick (Deist 2001:151-152; Borowski 2003:28; Feliks and Gibson 2007:485; Ebeling 2010:35; Sha 2018:318). Threshing wheat was done on a large threshing floor of compacted dirt or stone located in the open air allowing light winds to blow the chaff away (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:253). Oxen trod out the grain or the grain was driven over by the wheels of a cart that were driven by oxen. At

²⁵⁹ Leviticus 2:1-11 explains that the sacred grain offering must consist of the finest flour; olive oil could be poured on it as well as incense; the priest was to take a handful of the mixture and burn it on the altar as a memorial. Bread cakes made with the best flour (well sifted of all sand or grain or foreign particles) could be baked in an oven, cooked in a pan or grilled without honey and yeast as yeast was symbolic of sin and honey probably was used in offerings to the Canaanite gods (see for example Gibson [2004:51] describing offerings of mandrakes, bread and honey made by the goddess Anat). It is probably the combination of the offerings such as putting various ingredients together in a bread offering that YHWH forbade for these were offered to the gods. Schmandt-Besserat (2001:391-403) reports on the variety of offerings made to the gods in the ancient Near East. Many of these animals, ritually impure, YHWH excluded from being sacrificed on His altar (see Lewis 2013:88-89). Walton and Matthews (2000:146, 753) state that the bread offerings contained no raisins, dates or figs since these bread combinations were offered to the Canaanite deities and thus considered sacrilegious and evil (cf Jr 7:18; 44:19; cf Hs 3.1).

²⁶⁰ Holman Reference Staff 2022.

²⁶¹ Holman Reference Staff 2022.

times a threshing sledge was used to separate the grain from the stalk and chaff (Mattingly 1996:332; Pfeifer, Vos and Rea [eds] 1998:34).²⁶² Once the grain and stalks were separated a winnowing fork was used to remove the straw and chaff from the grain. This was done by flinging the grain into the air with a wooden fork made with curved tines or a large spade for the wind to blow the chaff away (King and Stager 2001:89; Ebeling 2010:35; Sha 2018:318). The threshing floor was a raised platform to make best use of the wind for winnowing (King and Stager 2001:89). In contrast to a threshing floor, ‘a winepress is sunk into the ground’ and thus it was more effective for Gideon to hide the grain from the Midianites in Judges 6:11 (Amit 2004:523; see also 8.3.1.1).²⁶³ Feliks (2007:488) remarks that the Israelites not only harvested their crops in haste but they also concealed them from marauders in secret containers (cf Jdg 6:2, 11). Tischler (2006:612) comments that the Midianites waited until the grain had been threshed and stacked before they plundered the threshing floor. Raiding the threshing floor was an effective strategy in abrading the (military) strength of an enemy (Keener and Walton 2019). According to Keener and Walton (2019) the Judges 6 presents a parallel instance of agrarian looting and devastation (Jdg 6:3-6; cf Jdg 6:11; see also 4.2.2.3c).

The thread of covenant runs throughout this narrative as it does throughout the entire Book of Judges which is what the author/s of Judges wish to convey to the reader (see also Harris, Brown and Moore 2000:187). In Judges, the threshing floor symbolized YHWH’s power and authority – always in association with the covenant promise of protection – over the environment and the defeat of the Canaanite storm god Baal. Judges 6:36-40 is the place of an oracle experienced by Gideon and a place of YHWH’s judgement of the Midianites as reflected by the favourable war outcome indicated by the miracle of the fleece (see 6.5.2). The abundance (see above), dependability, and safety of an area (Canaan) where YHWH’s rule is willingly accepted and where YHWH’s blessings are subsequently given and received may all be represented by the threshing floor (Brueggemann 1997:468):

If you follow my decrees and are careful to obey my commands. I will send you rain in its season and the ground will yield its crops and the trees their fruit. Your threshing will continue until grape harvest and the grape harvest will continue until planting, and you will eat all the food you want and live in safety in your land (Lv 26:4-5; Brueggemann 1997:468).

Threshing floors were also closely associated with fertility cultic practices and chthonic deities, divine judgment and divination (Noegel and Wheeler 2010:334) as well as ‘business, law and life’ (in the ancient Near East) (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:199).²⁶⁴ In Ugarit, the threshing

²⁶² Holman Reference Staff 2022.

²⁶³ A winepress was either a square or round pit hollowed out of rock and located either within or in the vicinity of the vineyard that has two levels: a treading floor at the higher, first level and a collecting basin, the vat, at the second level (Fritz 1995:182; Lee 2021:64). The winepress was large enough for only a few people and threshing activities in a winepress were therefore less noticeable (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:253; cf Walsh 2000:142).

²⁶⁴ Noegel and Wheeler (2010:334) mention that the Mesopotamian goddess Ishtar and her partner Dumuzi consummated their marriage on the threshing floor. An Ugaritic necromancy ritual banquet scene takes place at the threshing

floor is the location of a necromancy ritual feast where the spirits of the dead and the living dine together in the royal house of El (Noegel and Wheeler 2002:334; Mullins 1992:904). Boaz celebrates the culmination of the harvest by eating a meal on the threshing floor (Ruth 3:2-7; Sasson 1996:150). The threshing floor is where the Ugaritic Aqhat experience and an augury vision and it is also a place where divine judgement takes place (Noegel and Wheeler 2002:334).

4.3.2 Sacred High Priest?

Early Israelite sacred space was defined by the religious activities performed at the established sacred sites (Jdg 2:1-5; 11:10; 18:31; 19:18; 20:1, 9, 18, 26-28; 21:1, 19 cf Jdg 6:24-25; Gaskill 2019:103-126; cf Shiner 1972:425-436; Faust 2019:1-25). The events in Judges 2:1-3; 6:7-10; 10:10-16 would have been followed by a prescribed ritualistic pattern: a communal assembly at a sacred place; the making of a burnt offering to atone for sin (idolatry) by probably the (High) Priest (cf Jdg 2:5; 20:26-28). Scholars are of the opinion that there was no high priest during the time of the judges. Robertson (1946:92), for example, claims that ‘the high-priest seems to have unaccountably vanished from the scene in the account given of this period, and at a time too, when his services were particularly needed.’ Robertson also claims that ‘the absence of any professional and organised priesthood seems evident’ and that ‘laymen are depicted as offering sacrifice... not at the official sanctuary’ which was ‘a point stressed’ by ‘Wellhausen.’ The Book of Judges, however, should be allowed to speak for itself: The narrator/s emphasizes the fact that the period of the Judges was a time of mayhem, militancy and anarchy; in other words, a dysfunctional anti-covenantal society is depicted (Jdg 2:10-19; 17:6; 21:25).

This most probably would have had a detrimental impact on the priesthood at Shiloh interfering with the priests’ ability to carry out their religious duties. Worship of the Canaanite gods and constant conflict would have, for example, interrupted the three annual pilgrimages to Shiloh. The Israelite society was so idolatrous and dysfunctional that it negatively affected the priesthood and the elders (cf 1 Sm 2:12-17; Jr 5:31; Ez 22:27; Hos 5:1; 6:9; Mi 3:11). In other words, the priests and elders themselves were morally corrupt so that they did not follow the covenant (cf Jdg 17, 18 and 19). As mentioned before, the entire Israelite community were came under the Angel of YHWH’s judgement for their disobedience (Jdg 2:1-3).

Judges 19:18 relates that the Levite was ‘going to the house of the LORD’ (cf 7.3.2). The phrase ‘house of the LORD’ is also used in Judges 18:31 and 1 Samuel 3:15 for example to refer to the Tabernacle. It is not logical that there would be a Tabernacle (cf Jdg 19:18; 18:31; cf Jdg 21:19) and the Ark of the Covenant as referenced in Judges 20:27-28; but not a High Priest. The Phinehas

floor in which the ghosts of the dead kings (Rephaim) partake in a meal with ‘the living royal house’. The threshing floor is also the place where Aqhat experiences a vision oracle. Lapp (1996a:925); Rouillard (1999:692-700) expounds on the subject of the Rephaim. Walton, Matthews and Chavalas (2000:252) mention that in the *Ugaritic Tale of Aqhat* (ca 1500 BC) King Daniel sits on the threshing floor before the city gates, judging the cases of the orphans and widows.

mentioned in the Hebrew text is not explicitly identified as a priest or High Priest. Nevertheless, it can be inferred that he held the position of High Priest, as only the High Priest had the privilege to enter the Holy of Holies where the Ark of the Covenant was kept (and remove it – which accounts why the Ark is at Bethel in the narrative of Judges 20:26-28). Furthermore, only the High Priest wore the *Urim and Thummim* and the ephod which were used to seek divine guidance for determining the outcome of wars, as mentioned in Judges 20:28. Additionally, the Old Testament does not prohibit ordinary individuals from making sacrifices. However, it does provide instructions for the official sacrifices, particularly the atonement sacrifice, which were to be performed exclusively by the High Priest at the Tabernacle.

In light of the aforementioned, there was most probably a High Priest, but the narrator/s of Judges dismiss him as being too ineffective to restore the covenantal relationship which accounts for YHWH raising up judges. Perhaps it is too dishonorable to mention that the High Priest too was part of a dysfunctional and corrupt community. Exell and Spence-Jones (2013) assert, with regard to Shiloh's central sanctuary, 'in the de-centralisation of Israel,' its (the Tabernacle's) significance was reduced, similar to Jerusalem when the ten tribes rebelled against the house of David. Consequently, it is most probable that the influence of the High Priest was also diminished. Exell and Spence-Jones (2013) further elaborates: each tribe established its own worship in the turbulent times (of the Period of the Judges) and each had its own priest and ephod (cf Jdg 4:4-5; 6:27; 17:5; 18:30-31). This probably further eroded the Priest's authority. Exell and Spence-Jones adds that 'the descendants of Phineas were weak men who would not make the priesthood respected or even retain it in their own families' (Exell and Spence-Jones 2013; see also Torrey, Dixon and Andrews 2022:135).

In what follows next, the discussion will focus on the sacred precinct at Shiloh. I shall introduce the topic with a discussion of Shiloh followed by a description of the metaphorical meaning of the *Miskhan*. This I do in order to further illumine the religious worldview of the author/s of Judges. In addition, I will look at the contribution of the archaeology to add to and lend further clarification on the unique mindset of the author/s.

4.4 THE PRIMARY RELIGIOUS CENTRE

4.4.1 Introduction

Van Seters (1998:18) observes that the most distinguishing element of the Book of Deuteronomy is the centralization of worship in one region. Deuteronomy 12:5 reads: 'But you are to seek the place LORD your God will choose from among all your tribes to put his Name there for his dwelling.' The Book of Joshua reveals the establishment of the central sanctuary of YHWH in the city of Shiloh (Jos 18:1; 21:2; Schley 1989:125; Nakhai 2001:171), where the early Israelites went up to worship YHWH (cf Dt 12:5-7) also during the period depicted in the Book of Judges (cf Jdg 18:31 19:19 21:19). The Book of Deuteronomy does not reveal the location of the sacred city of

YHWH and while the Book of Joshua points towards Shiloh, the Book of Kings indicates that it was (always) understood to be Jerusalem and the Temple there (Van Seters 1998:18; see also Pierce 1973:105-108). Although Shiloh may be considered as the axis mundi of religious life in the Book of Judges, Judges also indicates that the pre-monarchic Israelites worshipped YHWH at other sacred sites including Bochim (Jdg 2:5), Ophrah (cf Jdg 6:25-26), Bethel (Jdg 20:18, 26), Mizpah (Jdg 21:1), Shechem (Jos 24:25-26), probably Zorah (cf Jdg 13:2) and Gilgal (before and probably after it became a place of idolatry (cf Jdg 3:19, 26; see 2.3.4.2a, c-d; 4.3.1-4.3.1.1biii). Nevertheless, the discussions in the following sections aim to provide a more comprehensive understanding of those factors that contributed to and highlighted the worldview of the author/s of Judges. Shiloh and the Tabernacle are referenced in the Book of Judges in Judges 19:18; 18:31 and possibly 21:19. Mayes (1992:212-216) ponders whether the early Israelites had a primary religious centre (at Shiloh) since there is little that points to it (in the archaeological record). However, the following criteria: location of the Ark of the Covenant, the three yearly festivals and recognition by the Israelites tribes determine Shiloh to be the central place of worship (cf Jdg 18:31; 19:18; 21:19). The aforementioned criteria was proposed by Irwin (1965:161-184) according to which an Israelite central sanctuary is located at Shiloh (cf Mayes 1992:212-216).

4.4.2 Archaeology and epochs

The archaeological record demonstrates that at around 1200 BC, the early Israelite settlement in the highlands of Canaan began (see also 4.2.1.1). The Iron Age I settlement was the third phase in a series of occupations of the highlands that started in the Early Bronze Age (Finkelstein and Silberman 2002:113-114; see).²⁶⁵

During the Middle Bronze Age, Hebron, Jerusalem Shechem, Bethel and Shiloh (see Figures 4.12-4.14) were foremost fortified Canaanite cities before they emerged as the major religious centres of the Israelites (see 2.3.4.2a-c; 4.3.1.1a).²⁶⁶

²⁶⁵ Settlement patterns stabilize from the Iron Age I until end of the Iron Age II. No major ecological crises on the same scale as previous eras occurred that would threaten the new settlements. This study proposes that a stabilized settlement pattern during Iron Age I, which was the result of a significant shift from pastoral nomadism to a more sedentary subsistence lifestyle, gave the settlers the opportunity to acquire skill sets for the invention of technologies that improved the cultivation of the land. In addition, a more sedentary life led to an increased knowledge of the land and environment that also improved animal husbandry methods. At this time, communities developed a network of inter-reliability and an economy of barter and trade in a system of reciprocal sharing that helped them to survive in times of (food) crises. In Judges, the towns of Ophrah and Sukkoth appear to have food supplies (cf Jdg 6:11; 8:5-6) in a time of scarcity (cf Jdg 6:6). This food supply including the provisions for Gideon's army of initially 32 000 men (Jdg 7:3, 8) would have been possible if the communities with supplies were part of the communal network described above.

²⁶⁶ For a description of these religious cities and highland settlement phases in Canaan from the Bronze Age to the Iron Age see: Hebron – Ofer (1993:606-609); Magen (2007:185); Jerusalem: Mazar, et al 1993:698-804); Bethel: Avi-Yonah (2007b:524-525); Kelso (1993:192-195); Shiloh: Kempinsky and Finkelstein (1993:1364-1370); Shechem: Avi-Yonah and Gibson (2007:143); Avi-Yonah (2007a:429-430); Campbell (1993:1345-1354).



Figure 4.12 Ancient Shiloh. The Tabernacle was once situated here (Kornbluth and Aronstam 2019)

Shechem, Bethel and Shiloh were important early Israelite religious centres in the Period of the Judges whilst Hebron and Jerusalem gained the most prominence in the Iron Age II, particularly when King David first established his royal throne at Hebron and subsequently, Jerusalem (Finkelstein and Silberman 2002:114; see also Figure 4.13).²⁶⁷

In Joshua 18:1, the Israelites assemble at Shiloh where they set up the tent of meeting. At Shiloh, Joshua casts lots before the LORD and ‘apportioned the land to the people of Israel’ (Jos 18:10). Judges 18:30 describes the house of God being there all the time when the Danites established their shrine (Jos 18:1, 8-10; 19:51; 21:2; 22:9, 12; Jdg 18:31; see Rooker 2010:49-50).

Shiloh has likely been chosen as the primary sanctuary site due to its central location in Canaan (see Figure 4.13). This location holds spiritual importance and reflects the ancient Near East’s belief in the temple as the cosmic centre (cf Jos 18:1, 8-10; 19:15; Jr 7:12-15; see also 4.2.2.2a). Sacred location (see 4.5.6.1a) and sacred geometry (see 4.5.5) provided the validation for certain cities to be elected and function as religious capitals to the exclusion of all other places and buildings (see also Zevit 2002:74-75).

²⁶⁷ In addition, Hebron and Jerusalem were important Middle Bronze cities. Judges 1:8,10 narrates the capture of the cities of Jerusalem and Hebron (cf Jos 15:13-14, 63) which became prominent Israelite socio-economic and political and religious centres in the Iron Age II (cf 2 Sm 5:1; 1 Chr 29:27). In the Old Testament, Hebron has a long religious history dating to the time when the patriarch Abraham establishes an altar to the LORD at the site (Gn 13:18).

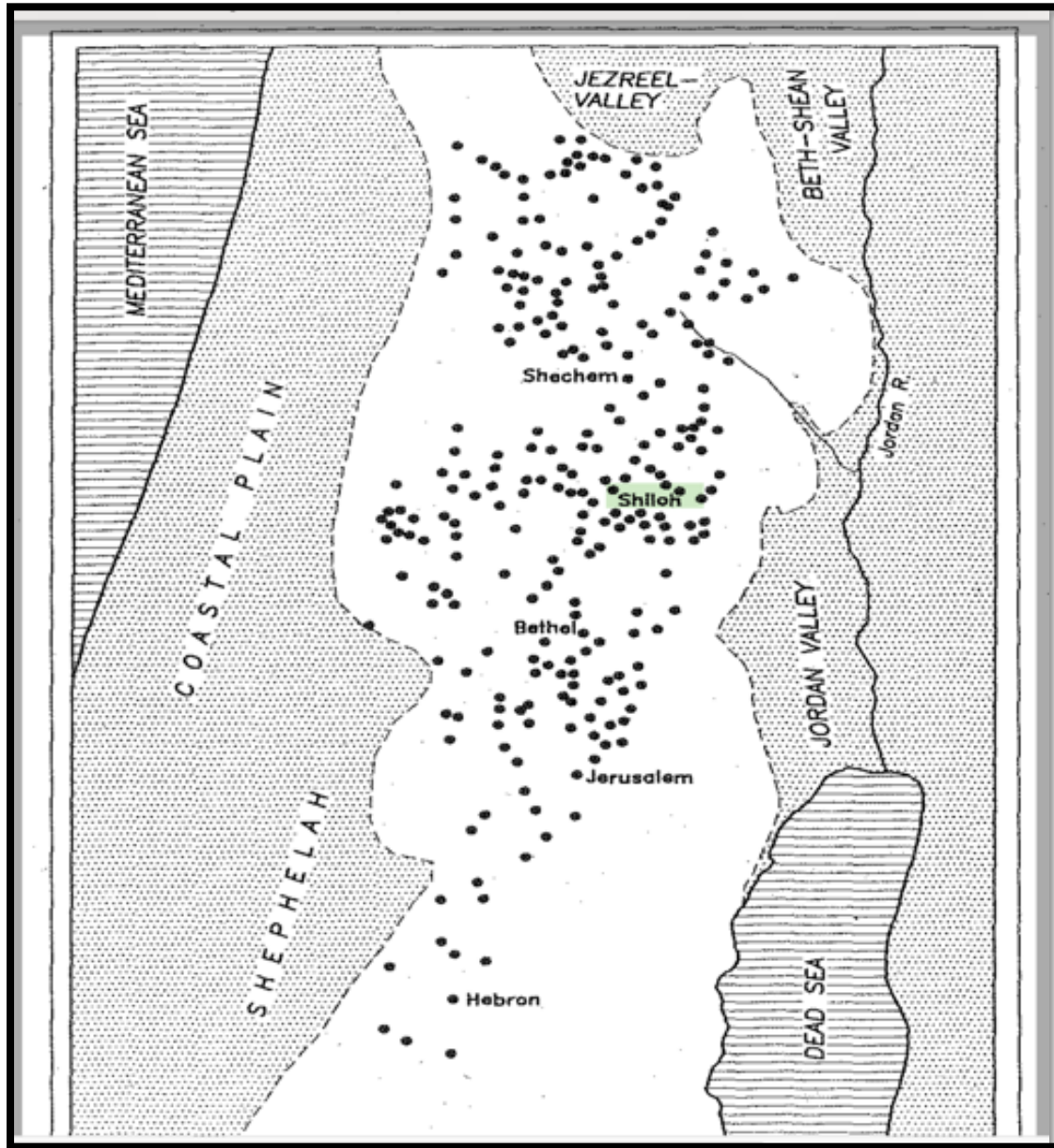


Figure 4.13 Iron Age I Settlements along the north-south highway (adapted from Finkelstein and Silberman 2002:116)

In what follows next, I shall endeavor to provide a brief early cultic history of Shiloh until the time when the Israelites settled in Canaan to show that the cultic history of Shiloh could be a reason why it was elected as the Israelites' primary religious site.

4.4.2.1 Possible early cultic history of Shiloh

a. Early Bronze Age (ca 3300 BC- 2100 BC)

The settlement of the highlands in the Early Bronze Age was synchronous with the widespread initiation of the production and trade of olive oil (Rosen 1995:28). A Late Bronze Age olive oil

press uncovered at Bethel with all its installations intact and an adjacent amount of olive refuse is reminiscent of the Early Bronze Age production of olive oil (Kelso 1993:194). However, at the end of the Early Bronze Age, settlements were abandoned, during a time of crisis, which also ended any trade routes in the area.²⁶⁸ The material cultures of the Early Bronze Ages and the subsequent two phases, the Middle Bronze Age and the (early) Iron Age, were comparable and display a continuity in ceramics, architecture, and the design of villages. These similarities arose from related environmental as well as economical contexts (Finkelstein and Silberman 2002:115) which were encouraged by trade – the trade of olive oil, for instance, which was mentioned previously. The abandonment of settlements at the end of the Early Bronze Age might have allowed sites such as Shiloh to emerge as prominent cities during the second phase of highland habitation – the Middle Bronze Age. Whilst occupation of Shiloh in the archaeological record is dated to the Middle Bronze Age (Finkelstein 1986:22-41), it is possible that the site would have been familiar to the population in the region prior to this period (cf 4.4.2.1b; cf Ackerman 2022b:88-89). The Shiloh site was possibly utilized by shepherds and tent dwellers for grazing their animal herds. It might also have been used as camping grounds, similar to the use of the site of Bethel as camping grounds by people in the area before its permanent occupation (Kelso 1993:193).²⁶⁹ Kelso (1993:193) reports that in Bethel shepherds' camping grounds were established prior to the site becoming a village in the Early Bronze Age (3200 BC). These camping grounds were set up in an area around that would later become the premises for a sanctuary (Kelso 1993:139).

b. Middle Bronze Age (2100 BC-1550 BC) – Late Bronze Age (1550 BC-1200 BC)

An important travel and trade route was already in existence when the early Israelites emerged in the highlands (see also 4.2.1.1).²⁷⁰ Shiloh is identified with modern-day Tell Shiloh or Khirbet

²⁶⁸An environmental origin for such a catastrophe has been given by Rosen (1995:26-44), although the effects of warfare cannot be excluded. Ilan (2002:96) provides information regarding the latter. Finkelstein and Silberman (2002:115-117) discovered that in the intervals 'between the peaks of highland settlement, when the cities and towns and most of the villages were deserted, the highlands were not entirely empty of its population.'

²⁶⁹ It is more than probable that the shepherds and tent-dwelling nomads who would frequent the environs of Shiloh in the periods before the Middle Bronze Age and after, took their household idols with them wherever they travelled. The archaeological record attest to the Egyptians, (the Egyptian armies, for example), who brought statues of their gods, Hathor, Bes and Ptah (as discovered in Hazor) with them to Canaan (Cornelius 1994:2; Cross 1997a:19) and in particular to the cities that were under their control (Golden 2004:152; Noll 2013:130). In the Late Bronze Age, during their flight from Paddan-Aram to Canaan, Rachel takes her father Laban's household gods with her on the journey (Ex 31:19). The Danites, in Judges 18, steal the household idols of Micah on their way to find new territorial land. These analogues indicate that people take their household gods and other religious paraphernalia wherever they went. People were likewise ready to serve their gods wherever they were by bringing with them objects for cultic worship. Jacob for example had oil with him on his journey to Paddan-Aram which he used to anoint the pillar of stone in Genesis 28:18. It is possible that he came prepared to worship YHWH at the altar built by Abraham in Genesis 12:8.

²⁷⁰ In the archaeological record Shiloh along with (Biblical) Hebron, identified with Tell Hebron (Ofer 1993:607), Jerusalem, Bethel, identified with modern village of Beitîn (Kelso 1968:1-128; 1993:192-195) and Shechem, identified with Tell Balâtah (Campbell 1993:1347; Avi-Yonah 2007a:429) were part of a settlement system along the north-south mountain travel and trade route in the highlands of Canaan.

Seilun²⁷¹ and is located along the north-south mountain highway with Jerusalem and Hebron situated further down to the south of the city (see Figure 4:13). Shiloh is about 19 kilometers from Shechem and approximately 16 kilometers from Bethel. The precise detail in which the location of Shiloh is described in Judges 21:19 is quite unique in the Old Testament (see Finkelstein 1986:22-41; Niditch 2008:210). The intentional mention of a precise location for Shiloh in Judge 21:19 is noteworthy. It is described as being situated north of Bethel, east of Shechem, and south of Lebonah. This deliberate detailing gives the impression that this location holds a concealed message of some significance to certain Israelites (see 4.5.3 for further information).

Previously (see 4.4.2.1a), it was mentioned that the Shiloh area probably was known to the local populace – shepherds and tent dwellers specifically – who might also have used it as a religious site before the Middle Bronze Age. As indicated before there is no trace evidence of this in the archaeological record (Ackerman 2022b:88). Apparently, Bethel already had a cultic significance long before the construction of a temple (see 4.4.2.1a) and it is possible that Shiloh may have a similar cultic status (see 4.4.2.1).

Ackerman (2022b:88-89) reports that no shrine building from the Canaanite period of the Late Bronze Age (ca 1550-1200 BC) has been uncovered at Shiloh. However, archaeologists have discovered ashes, stones in which fragments of broken pottery, animal bones (sheep and goats), and ‘nearly intact vessels containing ashes and more animal bones were found’ at the site. Ackerman (2022b:88) states that according to Finkelstein’s premise, the aforementioned evidence indicates that the Late Bronze Age worshippers residing in the Shiloh region retained remembrance of a temple from the sixteenth century BC and ‘who, despite the site’s lack of a shrine building’ nonetheless came to this sacred site to leave ‘dedicatory offerings’ and ‘to participate in animal sacrifice’ (Ackerman 2022b:88). That Shiloh remained a central assembly place and ‘perhaps a sacred centre, for the Israelites who inhabited the surrounding hill country during the subsequent Iron Age I period is further’ supported by ‘two factors’ according to Finkelstein: the significant amount of other Iron Age I Israelite sites adjoining Shiloh. Additionally the evidence mentioned earlier

²⁷¹ Stripling and Latimer (2017) provide a brief history of excavations at Tell Shiloh. Biblical Shiloh was linked to Khirbet Seilun by the American Orientalist Edward Robinson in 1838. The ruins of Khirbet Seilun (Tell Shiloh) were surveyed first by Major Charles Wilson under the auspices of the PEF in 1866 (Wilson 1873:38). In 1875, the Frenchman, Victor Guérin, a second investigator documented his observations (Guérin 1875:21-23) followed by Conder and Kitchner in the 1880’s (Conder and Kitchner 1882:365). After WWI a Danish team excavated the site. Assisted by William Albright the leader of the Danish excavation team, Aegé Schmidt in 1922 accurately identified the order of the pottery collection at Shiloh (Albright 1923:10). Three seasons of excavations (in 1926, 1929, 1932) followed under the leadership of Hans Kjaer. Kjaer died in 1932 from unknown causes. Glueck (1933:66) believed that Kjaer’s death was caused by exhaustion brought on by the excavations. Directorship of the dig was taken over by Nelson Glueck who immediately closed the site without explanation (Stripling and Latimer 2017). In 1963, under Svend Holm-Nielsen, a second Danish team excavated Shiloh and published their final excavation report in 1969 (Stripling and Latimer 2017). Between 1981-1984, Israel Finkelstein excavated Shiloh and published his final report in 1993 (Finkelstein et al [eds] 1993). See Stripling and Latimer (2017) for more information on excavations conducted since 1985 with the latest exploration of the site being in 2017 under the direction of Stripling.

may indicate the existence of sanctuary building dating back to the 12th-11th century BC (Ackerman 2022b:88-89; see also Van der Steen 2004:70-71).²⁷²

Shiloh's proximity to Shechem in the north and Bethel in the south most probably facilitated any cultic (and cultural) exchanges between the sites (see Niditch 2008:210). The exchanges between these two cities provide additional evidence to support the notion that individuals were acquainted with the region during the Early Bronze Age. It is likely that they would have passed through this area, possibly utilizing it as a resting point on their journey to Shechem (see 4.4.2.1a).²⁷³ The cultic development of Shiloh, consequently, would have followed the same pattern as the rest of the cities situated along the north-south mountain highway and would have been polytheistic in nature. Based on the information provided above, Shiloh possibly had a cultic significance before it became an important fortified city in the Middle Bronze Age II. This religious background is important (to the early Israelites) – it was the tribes' tradition to elect cities with well-established and age-old cultic contexts as their religious centres and particularly when these sites had patriarchal connections.

Shiloh began as a large village or town in the Middle Bronze Age II B (1750 BC -1650 BC) before it became an important city with fortified walls in the Middle Bronze Age III C (1650 BC-1550) (see Finkelstein and Silberman 2002:108-117; cf Finkelstein 1986:22-41). The massive fortification walls around Shiloh enclosed about 17 dunams or 4.5 acres of land (Stripling and Latimer 2017). At this time, the city-state of Shechem was an important and major political and economic and cult centre in Canaan (see Wright 1971:572-603).²⁷⁴ Shiloh was smaller in size (Mizrachi and Veeder 2014:7) and due to the city's strategic position location along the north-south mountain highway, as mentioned above, it probably fell under the authority of the much larger city-state of Shechem (Stripling and Latimer 2017).

²⁷² Ackerman (2022b:89) herself remarks that evidence may point at a cult site at 12th century BC Shiloh. She adds that just as the possible 'memory of a Middle Bronze Age cult site at Shiloh persisted in to the Late Bronze Age,' so it can be theorized that 'the memory of a shrine at twelfth-eleventh century BCE' remained among the early Israelites into the eight century BC.

²⁷³ The earliest knowledge of Shiloh as a (Canaanite) cult site is unknown since it lies in the pre-historic age (Schley 1989:191). I have therefore in the sections above (see 4.4.2.1a-b) attempted to provide such a history based on that of Bethel specifically, I have also kept in mind the early beginnings (Early Bronze Age) cultic activities in areas such as Jerusalem, Hebron, Shechem as well. The Middle Bronze Age sees Shiloh surrounded by a fortified wall and a sanctuary. Schley (1989:191) observes that people in the area of Shiloh continued in the Late Bronze Age to worship at the Middle Bronze Age site which was possibly rebuilt. The people in the region consisted of nomads. The archaeological record indicates sparse settlement with no indication of permanent settlement. In light of this evidence, this was probably the situation in the pre-historic and Early Bronze Age periods. Ancient inhabitants usually returned to regions of cultic significance after times of crises. Since nomads leave little trace of their occupation in the material culture of a region, these were the people that worshipped in Shiloh long before the Early Bronze Age.

²⁷⁴ In terms of the Israelite tribes, Wright (1971:572-603) essentially refers to Shechem as an (early Israelite) 'amphictyonic centre;' that is, the early Israelite tribes were allied to each other by means of the Yahwistic religion. Judges 9 indicates that the population of Shechem possibly consisted of a mix of early Israelites and Canaanites.

This enormous fortification system (and the contemporaneous fortification of cities such as Shechem, Gezer, Jericho and others (Stripling and Latimer 2017) implies that Shiloh needed protection from an unknown external source of danger. Considering the strategic location of Canaan, contact – trade and cultural interactions – with the rest of the ancient Near Eastern nations would have been inevitable. Archaeological evidence for trade relations between Egypt and ancient Canaan as well as between Canaan and Syria-Mesopotamia in the Bronze Age has been documented.²⁷⁵ It is thus conceivable that a (military) threat, aimed at acquiring dominance over important trade routes in Canaan, could have emerged during the period of 1650-1483 BC from one of the formidable empires that eventually would come to devastate Shiloh. The resulting conflagration left the city abandoned.

Shiloh was rebuilt in the Late Bronze Age (Stripling and Latimer 2017; cf Finkelstein and Silberman 2002:113-115). Stripling and Latimer (2017) mention ‘pit deposits of bone, cultic vessels, scarabs and an abundance of pottery’ to support their idea that Shiloh was used a cultic centre at this time (cf Ackerman 2022b:88-89; Van Der Steen 2004:70-71). Shiloh was more likely utilized as a cultic site rather than as a place of (continued) residential occupancy. The Late Bronze Age occupants continued with the extant Middle Bronze Age cult sites, organization, and practices (of offerings and sacrifice) (Stripling and Latimer 2017). Shiloh experienced another period of abandonment due to the disasters and eventual downfall of the Late Bronze Age. Similar to the surrounding highlands, the site remained sparsely populated for a duration of four centuries (see Finkelstein and Silberman 2002:114).

The aforementioned information may offer additional insight into the religious legacy of Shiloh, which, as previously mentioned, potentially traces its origins to the Early Bronze Age. This historical background of religious practices could also shed further light on why Shiloh was selected as the religious and administrative centre for the early Israelites under the guidance of YHWH (Jos 18:1; 22:12). The establishment of the Tabernacle at Shiloh further demonstrated the Israelites’ adherence to YHWH’s directives regarding its installation at that location. As previously mentioned, the early Israelites followed the custom of settling in Canaanite cities that had long-standing patriarchal religious traditions. The cities along the north-south mountain highway, as previously stated were places where the patriarchal traditions had established a religious history (for posterity) (see 4.3.1.1a). Although it is not recorded in the Old Testament, the patriarchs may have travelled through Shiloh. How could they not have, considering the strategic position of the city along the north-south mountain highway? In what follows next, I will go over further suggestions as to why the early Israelites selected Shiloh as their primary place of worship and why YHWH gave them

²⁷⁵ Hesse (2008:5) mentions Hazor’s geographic location facilitated trade between Egypt and Syria-Mesopotamia in the Late Bronze Age (1550-1180 BC) (see also Van Koppen 2007:367-374). However, long before this period Hazor had trade relations with the city of Mari (1800-1750 BC) (Hesse 2008:13).

the instruction to erect the Tabernacle there. An overview of the cultic background of Shiloh in the early Iron Age – the period of the judges – will also be provided.

4.4.3 The Iron Age I: Shiloh and the early Israelites

Shiloh was reinhabited at the beginning of the early Iron Age, after a hiatus at the end of the Late Bronze Age (Van der Steen 2004:71; see 4.4.2.1b). Van der Steen reports that the pottery repertoire is domestic and dated to the second half of the 12th century and the start of the 11th century BC. Shiloh's demographics changed once again in the Iron Age I (ca 1200 BC) with the arrival of the early Israelites in Canaan (Finkelstein and Silberman 2002:115). Stripling and Latimer (2017) place the Israelite conquest at the earlier 1400 BC date based on the archaeological footprint of the early Israelites at Shiloh.

The Shiloh area was under the control of the Amorites²⁷⁶ (who lived under Shechemite authority[see below]) at the time of the Israelite conquest (cf Nm 13:29; Jos 7:7; 2 Sm 21:2; Stripling and Latimer 2017). Stripling and Latimer (2017) mention that the remains of the Amorite sacrifices on the summit of the Shiloh hill were found in a faunal pit. The authors state that the animal bones in this area were the result of an 'Israelite clean-up of the Amorite' sacrifices. This deposit may demonstrate that the Israelite system of sacrifices began as early as 1400 BC. Amorite cultic activities in Shiloh are attested to in the archaeological record (see also 2.3.5.3b; 4.3.1.1b-c). However, apparently, like Shechem there is no mention of a military conquest (Lace [ed]1972:54; Keener and Walton 2019:401) of Shiloh by the early Israelites and similar to Shechem occupancy of the site appears to have been peaceful (cf Jos 18:1). The lack of an Amorite objection against Israelite control of Shechem probably was due to the defeat of Sihon, the Amorite King of Heshbon (Jos 12:2-3) and the kings defeated in Joshua 12:4-5, 9-24 (cf Jdg 1:1-36), which also accounts for the sparse inhabitation of Shiloh as people tend to flee from war. It is therefore possible that there was a peaceful agreement between the Israelites and the remaining inhabitants of Shiloh. Shiloh probably fell under Shechem's sphere of authority, as stated before, and since the Israelites had a peace treaty with Shechem (see Grant 1984:54) there would be no objection from the Shechemite authorities.

As indicated before (see 4.4.2.1b), the early Israelites strangely did not have any connection with Shiloh, none via the patriarchal traditions in Canaan documented in the Old Testament unlike the other cities on the north-south mountain highway, Shechem, Bethel, Hebron, and Jerusalem.²⁷⁷

²⁷⁶ According to the biblical tradition, the Amorites were one of multiple 'Canaanite subgroups' and are named in practically all of the several lists of the Canaanite nations (Gn 10:15-18; 15:19-21; Dt 7:1; Jos 3:10, etcetera) (Levin 2022:25). The Amorites dwelled in the hill country (Levin 2022:25). Judges 1:35 mentions that the Amorites restricted the Danites to the hill country and did not allow them to dwell in the plain as also stated elsewhere.

²⁷⁷ This connection probably did exist but as indicated before (see 4.4.2.1b; 4.4.3), it was not documented in the Old Testament.

These are the cities traversed by the patriarchs,²⁷⁸ where they had supernatural encounters with YHWH and made covenants with Him (see 4.3.1.1b). Definitive evidence for the patriarchal presence and activities in ancient Canaan as yet cannot be attested to in the archaeological record. However, I believe that traces of the patriarchal journeys in Canaan exist in certain extra-Biblical texts and topographical names. Hendel (2005:137) observes that the name Jacob may be an abbreviated form of Jacob-El based on the Late Bronze Age placename of Jacob-El that is found on the *topographical lists of Thutmosis III, Rameses II and Rameses III*.²⁷⁹ This placename is in northern Israel and may be related ‘to early Jacob-traditions.’ See also Hendel (2005:53-55) referring to the *Mari tablets* that show cultural similarities between the ancient Amorite tribes and later Israelite tribes. Apparently, ‘the names of Abram’s lineage’ as well as ‘the geographic location of the patriarchal homeland’ denote the culture of the Amorites in the area of Harran and the upper Euphrates – part of the Amorites’ homeland in the 2nd millennium BC (Hendel 2005:53). Hendel further highlights that the Bible designates this region as Aramean due to its Aramean status during the period of the Israelite nation – ‘the patriarchal traditions were updated to reflect the current geographical and ethnic reality’ (see also Rainy 1978:1-17).

The cities along the north-south were greatly influenced by the religious activities of the patriarchs, as the reader is already familiar with (refer to 4.3.1.1b). This resulted in a significant and enduring (Yahwistic) religious and cultural legacy (see also Chapter Two).

According to the perspective of the author/s of Judges, the Israelites’ claim to the land and their occupation of their (ancestral) territories were justified based on their covenant with YHWH and the (historical) presence of their patriarchs, to whom the land had been promised. According to the Book of Judges, the Israelites appeared to maintain a strong attachment to the cities that were associated with their patriarchal traditions. The Judges document the presence of the Israelites in cities such as Bethel, Mizpah, Hebron (inhabited by the Kenezites) as well as their partial occupation of Shechem and Jerusalem (see 4.3.1-4.3.1.1). It is plausible that despite losing their faith in YHWH and forsaking their covenantal way of life, the Israelites clung to their cities due to the cultural and traditional significance they held. Nevertheless, the author/s would not have approved of this situation, as evidenced by Judges 2:1-3. This passage highlights the importance of serving

²⁷⁸ Considering Figure 4.13, the north-south mountain highway is also known as the way of the patriarchs because it was travelled upon by the patriarchs on their journeys in Canaan. When the patriarchs travelled down this well-used route in Canaan, it appears, apparently, as if they were mapping the land for posterity.

²⁷⁹ Kennedy (2020:38) reports the discovery of 27 scarab seals bearing the name ‘Yaqob’ (Jacob) and the element ‘EL’ (perhaps meaning ‘protected by God’) in Egypt, Canaan and Nubia dating to about 1800-1600 BC. At the very least these inscriptions attest to the usage of the name Jacob in Canaan and Egypt at the time of the patriarchs and thus the narratives in Genesis accurately reflect the historical usage of this name (Kennedy 2020:38).

YHWH above all else in order to maintain possession of their land and experience its bountiful blessings.

Shechem and Bethel, being major cities, possessed robust urban and agricultural infrastructures, enabling them to exercise dominion over their respective territories. The tribal dominance over these cities consequently extended their influence and control over the surrounding regions, encompassing smaller vassal cities and towns. This expansion bolstered their authority and facilitated their regulation of trade and agricultural resources. According to Deuteronomy (31:20) the Israelites would inherit a land abundant with prosperity and blessings as indicated in the above description of Shechem and Bethel. However, this verse also carries a somber prediction regarding the Israelites' potential for complacency, betrayal and idolatry; 'when they eat their fill and thrive.'

Nevertheless, presumably Shiloh was a liege city under the control of Shechem (present day Tell Balata) as also mentioned before. For this reason, it was also possible that Shiloh, like Shechem, was peacefully occupied as stated above (see Hess, Block and Manor 2016). The archaeology indicates that Shiloh was smaller than the other cities in the highlands area such as Nablus and Jerusalem (Mizrachi and Veeder 2014:7). Subsequently, any one of the other bigger cities in the region would have been appropriate as a main tribal centre with Shechem, given its rich heritage of patriarchal religious activity, fitting the role of the best candidate among them. Wood (1997:245) remarks that during the Middle and Late Bronze Age and into the Iron Age I, Shechem was 'the most powerful city state in the region' (see 4.3.1.1a).

However, despite its military power, the city is conquered by the early Israelites as mentioned before. Shechem does not feature on the list of destroyed cities in Joshua 12 and Judges 1. Rather, the Israelites enter the city, peacefully, a strategic move that was apparently planned well in advance (see below). After the great defeat of Jericho (Jos 6:1-24) and Ai (Jos 8:1-29), the next strategic move in Joshua's military campaign would be to initiate a southern campaign against Jerusalem and Hebron – to also defend the rear of the army – whilst a central campaign moved ahead to conquer Bethel (see Figure 4.14; see also Jdg 1).

However, after the fall of Jericho and Ai, the tribes go to Shechem travelling through dangerous and 'unconquered territory' for a 'covenant ceremony' (Jos 8:30-35; Wood 1997:246). As curious as it may be the journey to Shechem is not an unexpected move. Woods (1997:246-247) notes that it was planned well in advance before the conquest of Canaan (see Jos 8:33; Dt 11:29-30; 27:4-13). Another instance that denotes the relationship between the early Israelites and the Shechemites as a peaceful one was the act of burying the bones of Joseph in Shechem (Jos 24:32)²⁸⁰ which only adds to Shechem's appeal as the most likely choice for a capital city.

²⁸⁰ See New World Encyclopedia 2021. Shechem.

The early Israelites (Manasseh) had a land claim in Shechem – Jacob’s land (see Gn 48:22; see 2.3.4.2a) was probably bequeathed to Joseph who according to Wood (1997:247) had ‘presumably passed on it to Manasseh.’

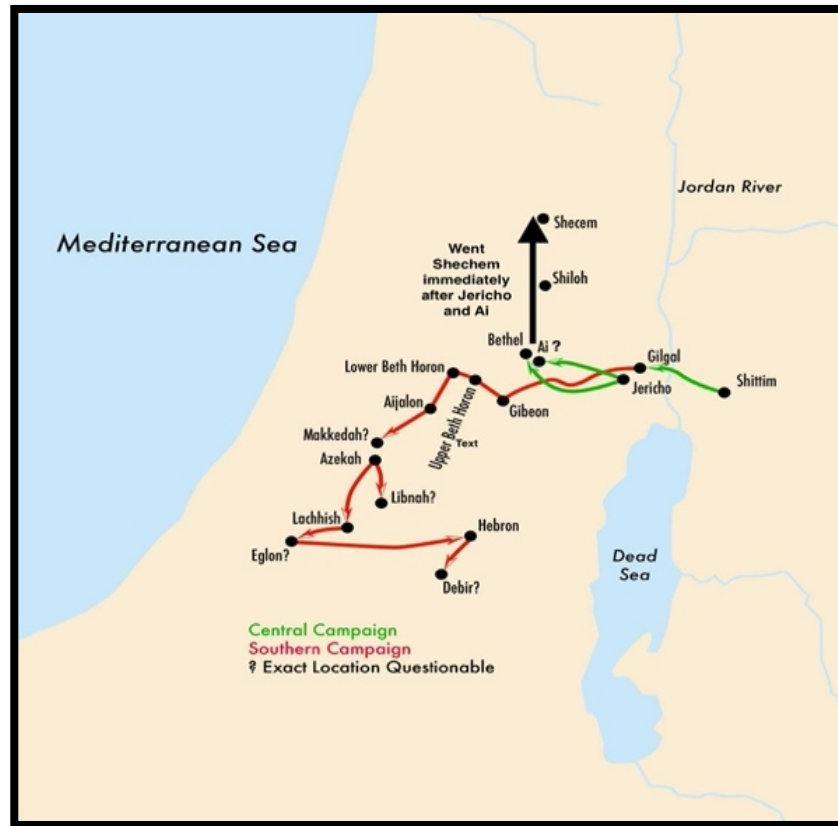


Figure 4.14 Joshua’s route to Shechem (iBible Maps 2021)²⁸¹

Further evidence of friendly relations between early Israel and Shechem is the settlement of the tribes of Manasseh and Ephraim under the authority of Shechem (Wood 1997:247).²⁸² Shiloh was chosen by the Israelites over Shechem, most likely for the reasons that will be enumerated below (see 4.4.3.1).

4.4.3.1 Unto Shiloh we go

Several ideas for the early Israelites’ establishment of Shiloh as their main place of worship have already been discussed (see 4.4.3). These suggestions and others will be listed in this section.

²⁸¹ I have adapted the map to show the early Israelites’ sudden move to Shechem instead of immediately attacking Bethel (see Figure 4.14).

²⁸² Wood (1997:247-248) provides various reasons for the ‘unusual relationship that existed between Israel and Shechem.’

The following is noteworthy: Genesis shows that Abraham frequently uses the north-south mountain highway to travel through Canaan – from Shechem to Bethel and further south to Hebron where he builds altars (see 4.3.1.1a). Shiloh, however, is apparently overlooked by the patriarchs as a sacred location despite being the most central location on the north-south mountain highway as well as in the entire land of Canaan (see Figure 4:13). This is an intriguing omission. Given its prominent location between Shechem²⁸³ and Bethel and the fact that Shiloh was a major fortified city throughout the patriarchal age, it is safe to assume that the city served at the very least as a much-needed rest stop between Bethel and Shechem (see 4.4.2.1b). As indicated previously (see 4.4.2-4.4.2.1a-b), Shiloh presumably, had a long cultic background that may date back to the early Bronze Age. Genesis reveals that the patriarchs established religious sites in cities with established cultic activity. Given that Shiloh shared an age-old cultic background (Seow 1989:37-38; Russell 2009:39; King 2009) with the rest of the cities along the north-south highway why would the patriarchs overlook Shiloh as a place of religious interest?

In light of the early Israelite stratagem to conquer the most key sites in Canaan (along the important north-south mountain highway) why select apparently ‘insignificant’ Shiloh as their capital city? Shiloh appears not to have been of great political significance to the ancient Near Eastern nations.²⁸⁴ Shiloh could be one of the best kept secrets in the Old Testament. Considering the forty years of wanderings in the desert, the early tribes undoubtedly send their scouts to gather (military) knowledge of Canaanite cities and territories, particularly along the north-south mountain highway. In Joshua 18:4 three men from each tribe are sent off to survey and record a description of the land, similar to what may have happened before entry into Canaan (Jos 2). These early Israelite expeditions would have been known to or expected by the Canaanites (cf Jos 2:2; cf Ex 23:28-29).

Considering how well Moses and Joshua planned their military campaigns (cf Dt 11:29-30; 27:4-13; Jos 8:33), either man (or both in unison) would have already chosen and planned the route for the site where the Tabernacle would be set up in accordance with YHWH’s will. Theoretically, this site would have been known only to Moses and Joshua and their inner circle, possibly Caleb.

²⁸³ Muhly (1983) observes that although some scholars believe Shechem is mentioned in the mid third millennium BC *Ebla texts*, this claim has been refuted by a team of Italian scholars who assert that in addition to Shechem, the *texts* do not reference Jerusalem, Lachish, Megiddo, Hazor and the Biblical cities of the plain. Shechem is mentioned in the 1350 BC *Amarna Letters* and so is Hazor (Malamat 1960:12; cf Wood 1997:246).

²⁸⁴ The political and strategic importance of Shechem and Jerusalem are indicated, for instance, on the *Egyptian Execration Texts* from the 18th-19th centuries BC (Toombs 1992:1179; Finkelstein 1994:173; Ben Tor 2006:67). Of Shiloh, however, no mention is made. This situation I find to be an enigma. Shiloh was a major fortified city (Finkelstein and Silberman 2002:114) when the *Egyptian Execration texts* were created in the 18th-19th centuries BC (the Middle Bronze II Age), and as such, would have been of importance to the Egyptians. On the *Execration Texts* that list Shechem, Shiloh most likely fell within the purview and jurisdiction of the city-state of Shechem and thus was not named (Stripling and Latimer 2017). The *Egyptian Execration texts* lists the enemies of the Egyptians. The names would be inscribed on pottery which was then broken in a ritualistic manner to invoke a curse (Encyclopedia Britannica.com 2021. Execration Texts. The *Egyptian Execration texts* inform about the relationship between Middle Bronze Age Egypt and the nations in Canaan and Syria (Malamat 1960:12-19). The importance of a city could be concluded from being mentioned on these texts (Wood 1997:245-246).

The Canaanites would have anticipated the tribes to set up their primary (religious) centre in one of the major cities along the north-south highway and therefore would have to defend their cities when the offer of peace was made by the early Israelites (Dt 20:10) and which was most probably rejected by the Canaanites.²⁸⁵ Shiloh came under Israelite sovereignty (peacefully) when the tribes took control of Shechem because, as was previously mentioned, Shiloh most probably fell under the jurisdiction of Shechem (see 4.4.3; Stripling and Latimer 2017; cf Cargill 2019). There was, thus, no need for time-consuming rebuilding. The early Israelites' control of an intact city would have led to its smooth and continued function as their primary centre almost immediately. Considering all the information presented above (see 4.4.1-4.4.3), the early Israelites, under the guidance of YHWH, designated Shiloh (Jos 18:1) as their primary religious centre. This decision was made based on the following:

- Shiloh most probably had a long standing cultic history that appealed to the early Israelites (see 4.4.2.1-4.4.2.1a-b). In evidence of Shiloh's longstanding cultic history, Stripling (2016:89-94) mentions the discovery of anthropomorphic and zoological statuettes as well as incense stands and votive bowls from the Middle Bronze and Iron Age I eras.
- The city was sparsely inhabited. The Israelites could easily assume control of Shiloh without a military invasion unlike the other cities listed in Joshua 12:4-5, 9-24. Because it was probably sparsely occupied at the time of Joshua there was none to dispute the Israelite takeover of the cult site (cf Jdg 6:27-32; see 4.4.3).
- It would profit from whatever peace deals Shechem struck with other cities such as Shiloh. Shiloh, on the other hand, was probably a satellite city under Shechemite rule. Either situation would have facilitated the Israelites' acquisition of Shiloh or allowed them to engage in land negotiations. Shechem's prosperity brought economic benefits to Shiloh as well making it ideal for occupancy (see 4.4.3).
- The city had a strategic location (on a hill) that could be defended from attack if necessary (Junkkaala 2006:42).
- Shiloh had abundant water supplies and was enclosed by fertile agricultural land (Finkelstein 1986:22-41; Junkkaala 2006:42; cf Finkelstein and Silberman 2002:108).
- Thoroughfares were easily accessible from Shiloh (Junkkaala 2006:42). The centrality of Shiloh on the north-south mountain highway played a vital role in maintaining an organized infrastructure of trade and rule and the facilitation of Israelite ascendancy in the highlands.

However, all the other cities on the north-south mountain highway would have been suitable in terms of their strategic positions, access to water, agricultural land – the most important reasons people chose settlement sites (Junkkaala 2006:42; cf Finkelstein and Silberman 2002:108). It is

²⁸⁵ Israelite ties to Canaan might have been recognized by means of the earlier patriarchal traditions (of establishing religious sites in the cities along the mountain highway).

highly likely that patriarchal activity occurred in Shiloh (see 4.4.1-4.4.2.1a-b). Additionally, the early Israelites kept their interest in Shiloh well concealed from the Canaanites (see section 4.4.3). Consequently, the early Israelites selected Shiloh as their primary religious centre as they were led by YHWH for the reasons described previously in this section (see also 4.4.2.1b) and specifically because it most likely had a patriarchal connection.

4.5 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SHILOH

4.5.1 The metaphors of the Tabernacle

Parallel to the temple that served as a marker of ritual space in the ancient Near East, the sacred space of the Israelites was characterized by the Tabernacle or *Miskhan*.²⁸⁶ This structure served as the most prominently discernible representation of the official religious life of the Israelites and the authorized rituals of which that were performed within its confines (Gaskill 2019:103-126; cf Shiner 1972:425-436; Faust 2019:1-25). Consequently, the Tabernacle was at the heart of early Israelite religion; it was the sacred landscape of YHWH (see also 4.2.2.2a-b).

Some of the metaphors²⁸⁷ of the *Miskhan* included its numinous image as the embodiment of the sacred mountain (of YHWH) (cf 4.3.1.2). Positioned at the cosmic and terrestrial centre, the *Miskhan* served as a significant site for communication and divine revelation. Inside the *Miskhan*, the Ark of the Covenant represented the presence of YHWH (Goodenough 1992:215). The *Miskhan* was also the symbol of the early Israelite theological doctrine in its entirety (Zevit 2002:75). In addition to the aforementioned purposes, the function of the *Miskhan* is primarily fourfold:

- It is a place where the divine power of YHWH rests (the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies which contained the Ten Commandments) (Zevit 2002:75),
- It is where official communication with YHWH occurs where the divine mind is revealed through revelation²⁸⁸ (Zevit 2002:75),

²⁸⁶ Some believe that there was a Yahwistic temple built at Shiloh (based on 1 Samuel 1:9) (see for example Haran 1985:27). The Book of Samuel apparently indicates that both a temple and the Tabernacle existed at Shiloh (see Schley 1989:80). Apparently, there was only one sacred structure in existence at Shiloh at that time – the Tabernacle. Judges 18:31 and 19:18 refer to the House of God and the House of YHWH respectively. The Hebrew word for house בַּיִת (*bēt* – bayith/bayt) although it generally refers to a solid structure can also mean household/family (cf Jos 24:15) or home such as a tent dwelling. The Arabs share the same word bayt/beit for house. Modern Bedouins living in ‘Palestine’ refer to their tents as *beit sha‘ar* – ‘house of hair’ (Wight 1953:14). Accordingly, the House of God referred to in Judges is most likely the Tabernacle. If it does mean a solid structure it could be referring to one that was added to the Tabernacle. The Hebrew word used in 1 Samuel 1:9 for temple is *hēkal* that can also mean a nave or a palace – a grand and spacious building. Evidently, a building – the *hēkal* or nave – was erected at the entrance to the *Miskhan* which led to the inner courtyard of the Tabernacle (see Biblehub 2021.1 Samuel 1:9). 2 Samuel 7:5-7 reveals that no solid temple structure was built in the pre-monarchy. The *hēkal* might have been constructed of cedar wood although it was not required by YHWH (cf 1 Sm 7:7) (see Seow 1992:386-393; Torrey and Andrew 2016:90; Lyons 2011).in

²⁸⁷ My term for the metaphorical aspects of the Tabernacle (and the city of Shiloh).

²⁸⁸ In the Book of Judges, YHWH also appears in places outside of Shiloh (Jdg 2:1-3; 6:11; 13:3-20; see 6.3.4-6.3.5).

- It provides form and organization to the early Israelite religion (Lapidoth 2002:22).²⁸⁹
- It unifies the tribes under a distinct religious identity (see Chapter Eight).

The provided description of the Tabernacle reveals that there are both similarities and differences between the Israelite sanctuary and the ancient Near Eastern temple, for example, the Canaanite temple (cf Jdg 9:27). Previously, I have discussed the similarities between the Israelites' and ancient Near Eastern sanctuary (see 4.2.2.2). Many of the sacred elements attached to ancient Near Eastern temples and sacred sites can also be attributed to early Israelite religious places and structures (Zevit 2002:74-75). Zevit describes (ancient Near Eastern) temples as:

... incorporating the ideas of: the centre, the sacred mountain, sacred water and trees of life, sacred geometry, orientation to the four cardinal directions, initiation ritual, sacred dance, the mysteries, New Year festivals, ideas of cosmos/chaos and creation myths. It was within the temple that these other symbols, rituals and sacred textual traditions arose....

As said, despite the connections between the ritual sites of the Israelites and the Canaanites, there were significant and irreconcilable distinctions between the Israelite religious concepts represented by the Miskhan at Shiloh and the temples of the Canaanite cults, which were previously listed (see 4.2.2.2). The religious systems of the Israelites and Canaanites both incorporate sacred elements such as the sacred mountain, sacred water, and the sacred tree (see 4.3.1.2). However, the differences between these systems lie in how each religious group interprets and attributes significance to these elements. As previously mentioned, YHWH reinterprets the ancient Near East customs and gives them a new meaning. Consequently, Deuteronomy and the author/s of Judges consistently eliminate ancient Near Eastern and Canaanite religious concepts, and incorporate into the framework of the covenant and monotheistic belief system.

In Chapter Three, it was explained that the early Yahwistic religion, characterized by monotheism, stands out distinctly from the religions of the ancient Near East. This distinction is emphasized by scholars such as Hurtado (2010:550), MacDonald (2012:36-37), and Cataldo (2012:25). Over time, Israelite monotheistic worship would influence the polytheistic aspects associated with sacred elements like the sacred mountain and sacred water, for example, connecting them to YHWH (see 4.3.1.2). In addition, a comparison of the diagrams of the Esagila, an ancient Babylonian temple (see Figure 4.17) and the Tabernacle (see Figure 4.19) demonstrate a similarity in the (divine) preference for rectangular and square geometrical shapes (see Dandamaev 1993:42). The square and the cube were perceived by the ancient Near Easterners as symbols of stability and eternal representations of their deities. This belief is supported by Vidal-Casellas (2019:49). However, it is important to note that in the religion of the Israelites, these shapes hold a unique significance as they symbolize the immutability and eternity of YHWH. Unlike other gods who can die or

²⁸⁹ I will be applying both Zevit (2002:75) and Lapidoth's (2002:22) descriptions of sacred places to the Tabernacle (cf 7.4.2-7.5.4.2).

transform into different forms, monotheism allows for the existence of an uncreated, supreme, and eternal Deity. This concept is explored in detail in Chapter Three.

4.5.1.1 Sacred elements

I have categorized and adapted Zevit's sacred elements regarding sacred space in the ancient Near East (Zevit 2002:74-75; see 4.5.1)²⁹⁰ as seen below in Table 4.1. Accordingly, this section will discuss the importance of the sacred elements of cosmology, sacred alignment, sacred geographical features, sacred geometry and sacred sanctuary as outlined in Table 4.1. These elements played a crucial role in the establishment of Shiloh as a religious centre. The discussion on sacred rituals will be presented in Chapter Eight.

Table 4.1: Sacred elements (adapted from Zevit 2002:74-75)

SACRED ELEMENTS (OF SHILOH)					
Cosmology	Sacred Alignment	Sacred Geographical Features	Sacred Geometry	Sacred Sanctuary (Tabernacle)	Sacred Rituals ²⁹¹
Beginnings: creation accounts, cosmic order/chaos birth and rebirth	Location: orientation to the four cardinal points	Landscape: sacred mountain, sacred water sea of brass, tree(s) of life – inside Ark of the Covenant, Aaron's staff	Sacred proportions: size and shape Sacred position: entrance to the east	Construction materials used for making the <i>Miskhan</i> and furniture that are considered sacred	Initiation ritual, sacred song/dance Worship rituals and festivals Sacred mysteries

I have primarily employed the titles of the sacred elements of Zevit mentioned earlier, while only incorporating a few of Zevit's own ideas concerning these sacred elements.

4.5.2 Cosmology: Shiloh, the anatomy of a sacred site

4.5.2.1 Background

The concept of Shiloh as a sacred place parallels the ancient Near Eastern belief in the strong connection between cosmology and sacred cities. In the ancient Near East, city-states were seen as representations of divine authority, similar to how the Tabernacle at Shiloh symbolized the supremacy and presence of YHWH through the Ark of the Covenant (Harmanşah 2013).

The fall of the powerful empires during the final stages of the Late Bronze Age marked the end of the magnificent cities dedicated to the gods (see 1.1). The commencement of the Iron Age I in Canaan witnessed the emergence of the early Israelites in the region (see 4.2.1.1) and the

²⁹⁰ I have replaced the term creation myths in Zevit's (2002:74-75) description with the phrase creation accounts since the ancient Near Eastern nations and the early Israelites would have viewed these stories as a true account of the creation of the earth, the universe and the human race. I have also added a few of my own elements to describe the numinous meaning of the city of Shiloh.

²⁹¹ The discussion on sacred rituals takes place in Chapter Eight.

establishment of Shiloh as their main sacred centre (see 4.4.2.1; 4.4.3.1). Strong and vigorous cities soon enough emerged in the regions surrounding and within Canaan following the cessation of the Late Bronze Age.²⁹² Philistines city states, for example, rose to power at this time (see Strange 2000:129-140) while other formidable territorial states began to control the ancient Near Eastern regions (see Strange 2000:129; Harmanşah 2013; Grabbe 2016:17; cf Cline 2021:170). It is probable that in the worldview of the author/s of Judges, the emergent power of Canaanite nations, and in addition, the Philistines was due to the disobedience of the Israelites to complete the conquest and settlement of Canaan as previously described (Jdg 2:1-3; Jdg 13-16).

Harmanşah (2013) notes that urban centres arose from mammoth building constructions whilst, in the adjoining countryside, farmsteads and irrigation projects transformed the landscape (cf Grabbe 2016:17). These events which were always communal in nature, developed into a fundamental element of the official belief systems of city-states (Harmanşah 2013).²⁹³ Communities saw them as creation processes and incorporated these construction events into their cosmology. It was written about Babylon that the city was created with mud bricks by the gods themselves who made sure that a tall shrine was constructed (Dalley 2000:262; cf 4.5.5.2). The creation of Babylon exemplifies the way in which a city could become a part of the cosmology of a nation. Other civilizations in the ancient Near East made similar claims regarding their cities. They firmly believed that their cities were built by the gods, and this belief was integrated into their own creation narratives (see Baghos 2021:3; cf Rochberg 2005:326).

A city-state's creation story lends legitimacy to the rise and privileged status of a nation. Nemet-Nejat (1998:20) remarks that the citizens of the Mesopotamian cities identified with their cities that also importantly 'functioned as trade centres and regional shrines' (see 4.2.2.3a-b). Under the leadership of a king who represented the national god/s, a nation, as stated above, acquired the divine right to supremacy and the conquering of other lands and devoting them to the gods (Trimmm 2017b:346; see also Berman 2008:57; Duvall and Hays 2020; cf Darr 2016:20; cf 4.2.2.3a).²⁹⁴ The Assyrians believed that the exclusive connection to their god Ashur made them an elect people endowed with the important task of conquering the world for their god/s (cf Is 36:18; Schreiber 2010:141; see Bulliet et al 2015:40; cf Tracy 2013:13; Rollin 2018:388).²⁹⁵ Iron Age I cities, similar to previous eras, retained their symbolic expressions of the gods' presence and power. Thus,

²⁹² Harmanşah (2013) mentions the new urban centres that emerged in northern Syria and southeastern Turkey that reconfigured the geopolitical landscape of the ancient Near East at the end of the Late Bronze Age. To the east were the remnants of the still powerful Assyrian city-states that would expand to territories in the west and south. The regions in the west and northwest were under the control of Syro-Hittite states (Harmanşah 2013).

²⁹³ Harmanşah (2013) observes that these building events were memorialized in written and pictorial form: 'Palaces, temples, gates and the public spaces of the Assyrian and Syro-Hittite cities were famously surrounded by finely carved orthostats (finely cut upright stones lining walls) and a variety of monuments featuring pictorial narratives and commemorative inscriptions.'

²⁹⁴ See also Katz (1993: 11); Zettler (1998:3); Nemet-Nejat (1998:20); Nielsen (2018).

²⁹⁵ The second movement of Assyrian expansion, for example, began when the god Ashur ordered Adad-nirari (1305-1274 BC) to undertake conquest wars (see Ashur 2021. Encyclopedia.com; see also Harmanşah 2013).

the continued cosmological beliefs that provided ancient Near Eastern nations with the justification of political hegemony and sovereignty for conquest and expansion by means of divine inspiration remained in place (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:205; Arnold and Beyer 2002:140; cf Green 2003:131; Liverani 2014b:138; Pongratz-Leisten 2019:291).

Given the foregoing, within the ancient Near Eastern culture that retained a similar tradition, the Israelites' claims of being a sacred and chosen people and having a right to the land by divine appointment (cf Jdg 11:24) along with a central sanctuary representing the divine presence and control were not new or unique (see Novak 1995:245; McKenzie 2000:132). However, the early Israelites' ideas regarding divine election and those of sacred cosmology differed vastly from the other nations in the ancient Near East given that these Israelite concepts had a monotheistic drive (cf Ex 20:8-11; see 2.5.5; 4.2.2.2b; 4.5.1). In the worldview of the biblical authors, divine election is (the Israelites), for example, representing the image of YHWH (see 4.3.1.1a-d) 'to others in a way that radically includes God's purpose of blessing others' (Gn 12:1-3; McDonald 2010:113). And although the Israelites established their central sanctuary at Shiloh which embodied the power and presence of YHWH, the narrator/s of Judges show that their presence in Canaan is 'legitimized' by their covenantal faithfulness (cf Jdg 2:1-3; 6:8-10; 10:10-14; Dt 28:36, 64).

Canaan was promised as an inheritance to their patriarch Abraham and his descendants (Gn 12:7; 13:14-16; 15:18-21; see 2.2.4-2.2.5 also 4.3.1.1a). Shiloh, apparently, was part of that inheritance (cf 4.3.1.1). The city subsequently became the axis mundi of the early Israelites at that time following in the tradition of the ancient Near East (Dando 2005:288; Hagelia 2017:128; Baghos 2021:106; see 4.5.2.2c). However, in the worldview of the biblical authors it was always YHWH that defined the early Israelites' identity (cf 3.2.2.1b) and Shiloh as the centre of their monotheistic religion would have been representative of this concept.

In the material culture of ancient Israel, the tribes were a rather nondescript people who lived in small settlements with no remarkable literature and no monumental architecture (Finkelstein and Silberman 2002:108-109; see also 4.2.1.1). Nevertheless, as previously mentioned (see 4.2.1.1), the Israelites introduced an exceptional monotheistic faith that resulted in significant transformations within the prominent Canaanite highlands of the ancient Near East. These endeavors, as evidenced by the accounts in Judges 1:1-36, 18:1-31 (cf Jdg 11:29-32), exhibited a remarkable level of determination and courage, comparable to the formidable imperialistic forces of the surrounding ancient Near Eastern civilizations during that era. The subsequent segment elucidates the distinctiveness of Israelite held notions regarding cosmology.

4.5.2.2 Early Israelite cosmology

Biblical cosmology revolves around the concept of origins – new beginnings, specifically the beginning of the earth, time, and humanity (see Chapter Three for further details). The concept of a

‘novel covenant’ following the events in Eden (see 2.2.3.1) is also evident in the notion of a ‘novel beginning’ for the Israelites. This ‘novel covenant’ signifies the establishment of a ‘new religion’ and the settlement in a ‘fresh’ land, where their sacred religious centre and Tabernacle were located (see the subsequent section)

a. Earth, time and man

The cosmological connection of Shiloh and the Tabernacle can be observed through the sacred components listed by Zevit (2002:74-75) (see Table 4.1). This association can also be argued in the context of the Sinaitic Covenant. The narrative of creation is succinctly presented in the fourth commandment (Ex 20:11; see also Chapter Three). The observance of the Sabbath day would have been practised by the priesthood at the Tabernacle.

According to Genesis, YHWH created the celestial bodies (sun, moon, and stars) and time itself, thereby establishing the cycle of seasons, days, and years on Earth. The book of Genesis also suggests that the cycles of seasons, days, and years were intentionally set up to govern life on Earth, especially human life.²⁹⁶ Additionally, Genesis highlights the strong bond between mankind and the land. This is evident when YHWH creates man from the ‘dust of the earth’ (Gn 2:7), symbolizing their interconnectedness. Therefore, the Genesis creation story ultimately culminates in the creation of man and emphasizes his intimate relationship with the land.

Considering the Israelites in Canaan, a covenant is formed to affirm their entitlement to inhabit the land of Canaan. Upon examining the Old Testament, the reader may observe how the author/s of Judges potentially allude to the parallelism between people and the land, which was initially established in the Garden of Eden by means of covenant keeping. This concept is also shown in the author/s intense struggle to assist the Israelites in retaining their land. The threat of being expelled from their land signifies YHWH’s disapproval and a fractured relationship. This concept is initially

²⁹⁶ Knowledge of the celestial sky, as mentioned above, was a necessity for the observance of religious rites and festivals (Gn 1:14-18). The early Israelites used a lunisolar calendar in conformity with the nations in the ancient Near East (cf Ex 13:4; 23:15; 34:18; Lv 23:4-11; De Vaux 1997:188-189) that they derived from their observations of the (celestial) sky, or perhaps it was knowledge acquired from Egyptians where they had been enslaved for centuries. Nonetheless, the early Israelites at the very least possessed a basic knowledge of astronomy to be able to follow their agricultural and religious seasons (Taylor 2020:41; cf Pearce 1996:701-702; Issitt and Maine 2014:98; cf Lawson 2021:xix, 22, 192). The Israelites attributed the movement of the celestial objects across the sky as well as terrestrial weather phenomena to the sovereignty of YHWH (See also Leick 2003:164; Green 2003:151; Rochberg 2005:319; Stiebing 2016:214; Benavides 2016:567 describe ancient Near Eastern attitudes towards celestial and terrestrial phenomena. Hill and Walton (2010:469); cf Sumney (2021:126); McKenzie (2008:110) provide information on Baal and Asherah and their fertility aspects. McKenzie (2008:110) observes that the Israelites believed that fertility was a sign of a supernatural power at work, but they had a far different conception of this power (which belonged to omnipotent YHWH) than the fertility cults did (cf Jdg 5:4-5).

illustrated in the Old Testament through the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Eden following their rebellion (refer also to 2.2.3.1a-b).

b. ‘New grounds’

YHWH’s original kingdom was Eden (Neusner 2001:11; Heiser 2015; Perrin, N 2019:209; Chilton and Neusner 2012:92; see 2.2.3.1c). But Eden is lost and YHWH is still a King still – of the early Israelites (Ex 19:5-6) – and He desires to set up His people in His new kingdom – Canaan. In the latter lies the concept of kingdom at the creation that is remade anew in Canaan. It is in Canaan that the idea of YHWH’s kingdom, originally present at the creation, is revitalized and reestablished.

Hence, Canaan might be construed as the divine attempt to restore Eden; that is, where ‘man can atone and attain reconciliation with God’ (Chilton and Neusner 2012:92; see 2.2.3.1b-e). At the Tabernacle in Shiloh, both atonement and reconciliation are achieved through, the annual Day of Atonement ceremony. Hence, another driving force behind the author/s of Judges’ desire to uphold the Yahwistic religion becomes evident (see above).

Previously, I have attempted to explain that Shiloh possibly had a long cultic history (see 4.4.2.1a-b): the *Miskhan* was set up on sparsely occupied (sacred) land,²⁹⁷ new grounds as it were. It was a fresh start for the Israelites, free from the competitive polytheistic religious ideologies in major cities such as Jerusalem (cf Jdg 1:21) and Shechem (cf Jdg 9). It is ironic that later in pre-monarchic Judges, Israelite cities and towns would become inhabited by idol-worshipping, covenant-breaking Israelites. Previously, I have mentioned that the priesthood perhaps fell prey to corruption (cf 1Sm 2:12:17, 22-25, 27; cf Jdg 17:7-13; cf 4.3.2). However, Schley (1989:56-57) asserts that the priests preserved an unadulterated Yahwistic religion at Shiloh until the destruction of the Tabernacle (Schley 1989:56-57; cf Fesperman 1983:67).²⁹⁸

Shiloh, at least for some time was Yahwistic (cf Jdg 2:6-7). Harmanşah (2013) remarks that the concept of constructing a new city ‘on fresh ground’ is frequently thought of as ‘a generative force of civilized life for societies.’ A city may also denote the power of a god’s creation and the presence of the deity among a nation as well as legitimizing that nation’s occupation of the city (see 4.5.2.1). Likewise with the establishment of the *Miskhan* within which the Ark of the Covenant was placed, the power and presence of YHWH in the land was announced. Shiloh may represent a visible of the Israelites’ transformation from tent-dwelling nomad to urbanization (Jdg 1:1-8, 10-11, 22). A new people’s group and prevailing player had appeared on the on the political and

²⁹⁷ At the conclusion of the Late Bronze Age, Shiloh was abandoned. It was afterwards rebuilt in the Early Iron Age I (Schley 1989:75; Van der Steen 2004:70; Bryce 2009:641).

²⁹⁸ Schley (1989:56-57) discusses the idea of the preservation of a pure Yahwistic religion at Shiloh as it was first proposed by Rudolph Kittle (cf Lemche 2014).

religious scene of Canaan (cf Jdg 3:7-11, 28-30, 31; 4:22-23; 7:22-25; 11:32, etcetera; see also 2.3.1; 4.2.1.1).

b. The ‘camp’ at the centre of the world

The previous section provided a concise overview of the Tabernacle’s significance as the focal point of the cosmos (see 4.2.2.2; also 4.5.1). This segment will now delve further into the ongoing discussion (see also 4.5.5). The Tabernacle was symbolic of all that preserved order in the lives of the early Israelites (see 4.4.1).

It was the axis mundi of the early Israelite world, the sacred centre (Villeneuve 2021:68; cf Weinfeld 2004:19-20; Klingbeil 2007:163; Baghos 2021:104; see also 4.2.2.2) where the tribes could practise their rituals and worship YHWH. Baghos (2021:104) comments that the Tabernacle’s overall placement in the middle of the Israelites’ mobile camp (in the wilderness) serves as more evidence that it served as a ‘sacred axis.’ YHWH would manifest Himself from this centre as evidenced by the Tabernacle’s final construction when the cloud that had earlier shrouded Sinai (Ex 19:16) covered the tent of meeting and the glory of the Lord filled it (Ex 40:34; Baghos 2021:104). Weinfeld (2004:20) asserts that the Tabernacle in Shiloh is called the camp, *הַמַּחֲנֶה* – *hammahāneh*, (Jdg 21:12; cf Jos 18:9) and thus remains the tradition of ‘the tent of meeting’ and ‘camp’ of the tribes in the desert.

The camp according to Weinfeld, forms the backdrop of the entire activity of conquest and settlement. The camp at Shiloh served as the place of the divine oracle for division of the land among the tribes (Jos 18:1-10; 19:15; 21:2; Weinfeld 2004:20). The camp was first set up at Gilgal (Jos 4), a site that also served as the base for all Joshua’s military endeavours (Weinfeld 2004:20; Longman, Enns and Straus [eds] 2013; see 4.4.3-4.4.3.1). Evidently, the camp situated at Shiloh is characterized by its non-militaristic nature, as it assumes the ordained religious functions such as the commemoration of the Passover and other important festivals observed by the Israelites. It was at Gilgal that the Israelites were circumcised and celebrated their first Passover in Canaan (Jos 5:4-12). However, Judges 21:12 that four hundred young women from Jabesh Gilead was taken to the camp at Shiloh, as wives for the Benjamites. The Benjamites had suffered heavy losses of life in the tribal war against them.

The Tabernacle did not contain any cult images (Ex 20:2-3). However, throughout history, humans have consistently felt the need to manifest their religious and cosmological convictions in physical forms.²⁹⁹ The early Israelites, in light of their prohibition against images, expressed their mystical

²⁹⁹ The Babylonian Esagila sacred complex expresses the ancient Babylonians’ need to visibly represent the rule of their god, Marduk and the creation of the ‘black-headed people’ (Dalley 2000:262, 268; cf Lewis and Feldman 2021). Babylonians living or travelling outside of Babylon took with them statues of their gods and possibly portable models of the shrines associated with these gods to commemorate the Esagila and their beginnings as a people (see Ackerman 2010:544-545; Mumcuoglu and Garfinkel 2020:1-19; Koch 2021:98; also Pierce and Keimer 2023:475-476). To attest

convictions through ritualistic practices and potentially sacred bodily postures both within and outside the city of Shiloh. It is plausible that the act of raising their hands in prayer (cf Ex 9:29, 33) was accompanied by a turning towards the *Miskhan*, symbolizing their devotion and confirming their cosmological origins. This act of prayer may have served as a validation of their supplication, reinforcing their connection to the divine (Ps 134:2; 143:6; cf Dt 32:40; 1 Ki 8:22, 54). Weinfeld (2004:20) observes that faithful Israelites could always orientate themselves towards Shiloh which they regarded as their ‘exclusive religious centre’ since it enclosed the Tabernacle with the Ark of the Covenant (cf Jdg 19:18; 19:31; 21:19).

d. Prayer position

Although it is not indicated in Judges, it is possible that the early Israelites adopted certain prayer positions and prayed in the direction of the *Miskhan* when inside the city and eastward towards Shiloh if they were outside the city since blessings and relief from trouble came from the east – the direction favoured by YHWH (see 2.3.4.1) (Ryken, Wilhoit and Longman [eds] 2010:225; see cf 2.3.4.1a). The worshippers would be praying kneeling (2 Chr 6:13) or standing up (1 Sm 1:26; 1 Ki 8:22; Jr 18:20), total prostration (Ps 5:8; 99:5, 9) or the raising of hands (Ps 28:2; Is 1:15) (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:452). Keener and Walton (2019:904) remark that in the ancient Near East, raising hands in prayer is one of the postures of devotion that is frequently described and depicted pictorially (cf Gerstenberger 1988:128; Quinn and Wacker 2000:210; Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:452; Calabro 2022:128-129). Additionally, the Mesopotamians had a whole class of prayers known as ‘prayers with raised hands’ (Keener and Walton 2019:904; Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:452). The early Israelites would have directed their prayers to Tabernacle in Shiloh in supplication and devotion to YHWH (cf Ps 121,³⁰⁰ 1 Ki 8:35; Hurowitz 1992b:290; see also Klingbeil 2007:165).

c. The birth of a deliverer: a theme in Judges and in the ancient Near East

Early Israelite cosmological concepts also were about their physical and ultimate spiritual destiny. It is possible that the Israelites were aware that they were following a certain destiny as directed by YHWH, a progression of (historical) events that would culminate in the birth of a deliverer (cf Gn 3:15; 49:10) – the promised Redeemer (cf Jdg 13:5).

to these beliefs, a wealthy ancient Mesopotamian man or woman could also have a stone statue made of him or herself which would be placed near the statue of the god to watch over the person and his or her family (Podany and McGee 2005:68-69).

³⁰⁰ In Psalm 122 one finds a similar expression of religious ideology by means of the position of the body: I lift up my eyes to the mountains, where does my help come from? My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth. Raising one’s eyes to the mountains require the body to be turned towards them. After the Babylonian Exile, the Jews would pray towards Israel. This is a tradition that is still upheld in countries in modernity wherever the Jews are. Shurpin (2021) notes that Jews in the diaspora face towards Israel when they pray, those in Jerusalem towards the Temple Mount and those in Jerusalem towards the Holy of Holies. Shurpin (2021) also mentions that Daniel prayed towards Jerusalem three times a day (cf Dn 6:10).

The judges were considered deliverers. In Judges the Angel of YHWH prophesies the birth of Samson who ‘will take the lead in delivering the Israelites from the hands of the Philistines’ (Jdg 13:5). Following the birth of Samson, he underwent circumcision (Lv 12:3) as a visible sign of the covenant established between YHWH and the Israelites (via Abraham). Additionally, being the firstborn son, Samson was consecrated to YHWH, and his lifelong commitment as a Nazirite signified his belongingness to the LORD.

In the *Enūma Eliš*, the gods are born from the union of Apsu and Tiamat (sweet and bitter waters). Ea and Damkina are named as the parents of the ‘deliverer’ Marduk (Dalley 2002:233, 235). In the *Ras Shamra text*, 70 gods are created of whom Baal was the most important deity (Wright 1962:106-107; cf 3.4.4.2a; 3.6.1.1). In ancient Egyptian, the creator god Ptah fathers the god Nefertem with his wife Sekhmet. Nefertem represents sunlight and sheds this lifegiving element on Horus (Elshamy 2021:180). He is also a protector deity (Breasted 2001:162). The ancient near Eastern deliverer deities are always born as divine beings.³⁰¹ They are also in a sense reborn in their cult image.

In light of the aforesaid, the concept of the birth or creation of a deity was not novel and unique to the Israelites. However, the concept of a deity as a deliverer born in human form would have been an absolute antithetical concept in light of the aforementioned. The theophanies in Judges (Jdg 2:1-3; 6:11-20; 13:3-20) and elsewhere in the Old Testament show that YHWH may reveal Himself to people in human form. These theophanies may set a standard for the prophesied birth of a God-Messiah who will appear in human form to save and rule over the Israelites (Gn 3:15; Nm 24:17-19; Ps 110:1; Is 9:6). This study proposes that (the name of) Shiloh and the singular ritual of atonement that occurred at the Tabernacle may allude to this idea (see below). It is also plausible that, according to the perspective of the author/s of Judges, the judges could potentially symbolize or hint at the aforementioned concept. Regrettably, the continuous idolatry of the Israelites and the event surrounding this may have diverted the focus of the reader of Judges from this remarkable notion.

d. Shiloh: the prophecy

The name Shiloh (Hebrew: שִׁלּוֹ – *šilōw*/שִׁלֹחַ – *šilōh*) occurs for the first time in Genesis 49:10 in the blessing of Jacob. The word Shiloh appears 33 times in the Old Testament. Of these 33 appearances of the word in the Old Testament, 32 entries refer to the name of a city or town that was in the Ephraim hill country some 31 kilometers north of Jerusalem (Jdg 21:19; Lockyear 1999:256). Lockyear mentions that ‘the remaining appearance of the word Shiloh’ has been the subject of a longstanding controversy (see also Yilpet 2021:54-61). Scholars disagree as to the definition and

³⁰¹ They can die as gods and resurrect as well. Tiamat dies at the hands of Marduk. Osiris is murdered by his brother Seth. The Ugaritic Baal kills Yam and is later slaughtered by Mot who in turn is killed by Anath. However, the idea of God dying to redeem humanity is unique to the Bible (Is 53; Rm 5:7-8) .

etymology of the word Shiloh. Lockyear (1999:256) asserts that currently it serves as a homonym for the location utilized in the other 32 instances it appears in the Old Testament.

Levenson (2004:97), however, remarks that it is unclear, however, what the word Shiloh means in its other remaining use (see above). Walton, Matthews and Chavalas (2000:76),³⁰² on the other hand, argues that it could possibly mean: ‘to whom it belongs’ or ‘He whose it is’ (a Messianic title).³⁰³ As previously stated, the word Shiloh appears in the blessing of Jacob to his son Judah (Gn 49:10); as an epithet of the Messiah, according to Jewish tradition (Lockyear 1999:256). Shiloh is thus best understood in relation to messianic expectation, as seen in the oldest *targum texts*³⁰⁴ and throughout all of rabbinic tradition (cf Gn 3:15; Grypeou and Spurling 2013:378; Levenson 2004:97).³⁰⁵ It therefore may not be a coincidence that the place where the central sanctuary of the early Israelites was located possibly has a messianic association (cf Gn 49:10). In the ancient Near East, it was common for places to be named after the resident god (cf Jdg 1:33; 3:3; 9:4; 20:33).³⁰⁶ As stated before, the many deliverers in the characters of the Judges is a theme that connects with the idea of Shiloh and the possibility of its messianic association. Divine redemption and restoration of the idolatrous Israelites permeate the narratives of Judges (Jdg 2:16-19). This is ironic since the early Israelites ideally represented the image of YHWH in Canaan and yet are continually rescued from cyclical idolatry by the judges raised up by YHWH (see Shirley and Wingo 2011:45; Gordon and Gordon 2012:147). Rydelnik and Vanlaningham [eds] (2014) observe that ‘the author of Judges despaired of the possibility of a mere earthly kingdom...’ because of the sin problem of the Israelites – the latter had to be dealt with first. Perhaps the prophecy in Genesis 49:10 and Numbers 24:17, 19 is not about a mere human ruler but a divine ruler in human form after all. Such a redeemer is much needed (in Judges), considering the fallibility of the early Israelites and the judges.³⁰⁷

³⁰² Walton, Matthews and Chavalas (2000:76) explain ‘to whom it belongs’ as referring to ‘a gift offering (Hebrew *shay*) paid in tribute, thus until one brings him tribute.’

³⁰³ See Bible Hub 2021. Shiloh.

³⁰⁴ The *targum texts* are translations of the Hebrew Bible into ancient Aramaic that dates to the first century AD. Bascom (1985:301-316); Grelot (1992); Smelik (2015:8-10); Van Staalduine-Sulman (2014:9-30) provide more information regarding the *targum texts*.

³⁰⁵ Grypeou and Spurling (2013:374-378); Pentiu (2006:107) discuss the various interpretations of Shiloh. Grypeou and Spurling (2013:378) add that the Messianic understanding of Shiloh was also found in early Jewish interpretations of Genesis 49:10, such as the Dead Sea Scrolls. See also Kušmirek (2020:95-122) regarding the *targumic* interpretation of Jacob’s blessing in Genesis 49:10.

³⁰⁶ Considering the information provided above, perhaps the early Israelites did believe in a Divine Messiah that would potentially set up His rule in Shiloh – the central sanctuary of the Israelites at that time. Given the symbolic nature of the Old Testament, Aaron’s staff preserved in the Ark of the Covenant may have symbolized the scepter mentioned in the Genesis (Gn 49:10) narrative that represented Israelite rule (in Canaan). A ruler’s staff is mentioned in Judges 5:14 the author/s of Judges familiarity with concept of the birth of a saviour (See also Bible Hub 2021. Genesis 49:10). The blessing/ prophecy was made by the patriarch Jacob while the tribes were in Egypt, living in the land of Goshen (Gn 47:1) perhaps in the context of pharaonic power as represented by the Sphinx emblems (see Hawass 1998:24 and Hartwig (2007:122) describing Thutmose IV’s claim to divinity.

³⁰⁷ In the ancient Near East where the redemption of people and land were common traditions (cf Dt 15:12-18), relatives in many cases were unable to redeem family members (Chirichigno 1993:338; see also Wells 2005:191). People

In what follows, I shall describe the involvement of the other sacred elements (see Table 4.1) that designated Shiloh as early Israelite sacred space. Certain environmental phenomena and astronomical elements will be included in the section.

4.5.3 Sacred alignment

Of all the cities situated along the north-south mountain highway, Shiloh is geographically the most central city in Canaan (see Figure 4.13). Finkelstein (1986:22-41) observes that Shiloh is located in the heart of the territory of Ephraim. As indicated previously, Shiloh is also at the centre of the early Israelite religion and world and the universe itself since the Ark of the Covenant (see 4.5.6.5a), associated with YHWH's presence, rested in the Holy of Holies of the Tabernacle (Millgram 2018:7; cf Murphy-O'Connor 2008:478; Lundquist 2008:26). Shiloh acquires the attribute of sacredness, consequently, because it is where YHWH dwells (Merrill 1991:160; Beyer and Jones 2022: 88; cf McConville and Möller [eds] 2007:209; Torrey and Andrews 2016:90; Smith 2022:109). It is God who directed the Israelites to the city (for all the reasons referenced above) (Miller, C 2005:89; cf Merrill 1991:169): Deuteronomy 12:5 reads: 'But you are to seek the place the LORD your God will choose from among all your tribes to put his Name there for his dwelling. To that place you must go.' The identification of the location as Shiloh can be inferred from the fact that Joshua and the Israelites established the 'camp' there, as mentioned in (Jos 18:1; Jdg 18:30; 19:18; 21:19).

The description above of the 'triple central locality'³⁰⁸ (central location in Canaan and status as the religious centre and cosmic centre) of Shiloh may have been seen as a divine element that possibly served to enhance the mysticism that the early Israelites attached to Shiloh as the centre of their religion (Friedman 2019:108; cf McConville and Williams 2010:74; Kaiser and Wegner 2017; see also 4.2.2.1b; 4.4.3; 4.4.3.1).

As stated before, in the ancient Near East a city is created by the gods (see 4.5.2.1; cf 4.5.5.2; Dalley 2000:262; Garfinkel 2013:107; Walton 2018; Pongratz-Leisten 2022:323; cf Orlin 2007:170; Niehaus 2008:86) and its location is always ascribed to divine decision and direction (Niehaus 2008:30; cf Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:428; Longman 2008:550). The purported '*Babylonian Map of the World*' shows Babylon to be at the epicentre of the universe and

often lost their land and frequently became chattel-slaves when captured in war (Wells 2005:191). Other people who with less rights than the average Israelite were: people born to secondary wives or concubines (Sha 2018:370-373) were denied full heritage rights. The mother of Jephthah described as a 'prostitute' was possibly a secondary wife which disallowed her son full heritage rights (Jdg 11:1-2; Zvi 2006:191; Sha 2018:371). However, in Israelite tradition, the children of a concubine were included among the heirs (cf Gn 29:30; Ramsey 1999:30; see also Millgram 2010:270; Sha 2018:371). The denial of Jephthah's inheritance rights is another indication of the flaunting of Israelite law in the Period of the Judges.

³⁰⁸ 'Triple central locality' is my term for the spiritual and physical position of Shiloh.

the earth³⁰⁹ (Lewis and Feldman 2021; see Figure 4.15; cf 4.2.2.2; 4.5.5.2). The map portrays an enduring Babylonian worldview of Babylon as a city of great significance because it was founded by the gods in a specific locale (Lewis and Feldman 2021; see also Swart 2021:80-81, 87; cf Dalley 2000:262).

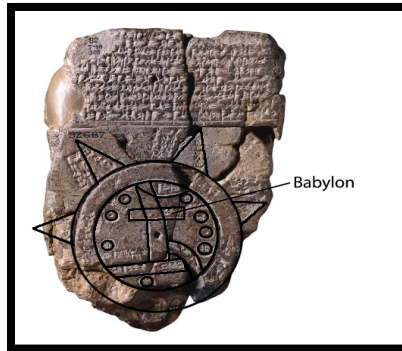


Figure 4.15 Babylonian map of the world (Lewis and Feldman 2021)

The ancient Near Easterners attributed a certain inviolability to the alignment of their temples. The orientation of sanctuaries was decided by regional tradition, which varied from place to place (Hurowitz 2019:35). For instance, in Egypt many funerary temples were designed with their long axis running perpendicular to the Nile's flow from east to west (Hurowitz 2019:35; cf Shaw 2003:86; Hawass 2005:343). Hurowitz adds that other temples were angled in accordance with the topography of the area, some on an east-west axis and others parallel to the Nile's flow from north to south (cf Arnold 1991:15; Magli 2013:236; Gates 2013:106). One temple was oriented towards the star of Sirius' heliacal rise (Hurowitz 2019:35; see also Sabbahy 2019:39).³¹⁰ Most Mesopotamian temples had their corners facing the four cardinal directions of the compass (Poulton 2018:129; Hurowitz 2019:35; cf Shanks and Cole 1990:89; Machlin 1991:168-169). The two temples discovered at Tell Tayinat (located on the east bank of the Orontes river in the Amuq valley, in the Hatay province of Turkey) stand perpendicular to each other one with an east-west axis and the other north-south (Hurowitz 2019:35; cf Harrison 2014:417-418).

The early Israelites, apparently, held a comparable religious mindset regarding sacred structures and the cardinal points of north, south, east, and west, accordingly took on sacred colourations. Hurowitz (2019:35) states the three 'temples' mentioned in the Old Testament – the Tabernacle, the Jerusalem Temple or Solomon's temple, and Ezekiel's temple – are oriented on an east-west

³⁰⁹ The *Babylonian World Map* is an inscribed cuneiform tablet that is dated to the 6th century BC and was probably a copy of an earlier map (see Lewis and Feldman 2021; see also Lewy and Lewy 1943:10-14).

³¹⁰ The four corners of the Giza Pyramids for example, are aligned with the four cardinal directions. Hugo (2018) reports that the orientation of the Great Pyramid of Giza is almost flawless and only 0.067 degrees anticlockwise from absolute cardinal alignment (cf Haack 1984:119-125; Kittler and Darula 2008:407-412; Dash 2017:1-8). Similarly, the four corners of the early Israelite altar at Shiloh are oriented towards the four cardinal directions (Elitzur and Nir-Zevi 2003:31; Zwickel 2010:404n20; Stripling 2016:89-94). The method used for this alignment (in both cultures) is unknown (Hugo 2018; cf Dash 2017:1-8).

axis (cf Kaufman 1988:46-49, 52; Chyutin 2006:77-78; Fee and Hubbard 2011:231; Block 2014:xxxix). Another, early Israelite sacred space, the altar at Mount Ebal, has its corners oriented towards the four cardinal compass points (Machlin 1991:169; Zertal 1985:26-35, 38-41, 43). In Joshua 8:30 the Israelites are instructed to build an altar to the LORD on Mount Ebal. In the early 1980s the archaeologist, Adam Zertal, discovered an altar on Mount Ebal which he subsequently identified as the burnt offering altar described in Joshua 8:30-35 (Zertal 1985:26-35, 38-41, 43). About the altar, that is described as a structure before it was identified as an altar, Zertal makes this observation: another curious discovery: two corners of the structure point precisely within an error of less than one degree to the north and the south; since the structure is rectangular, the other two corners point nearly but not exactly east and west.

An altar discovered in the vicinity of Shiloh also had its corners (or horns) aligned with the four compass directions and in this regard is similar to the one discovered on Mount Ebal (Elitzur and Nir-Zevi 2003:31; Zwickel 2010:404n20; Stripling 2016:89-94; see Figure 4:16). Elitzur and Nir-Zevi (2003:30-36) postulate that this altar was Israelite and ‘used for monotheistic worship’. The orientation of the altar near Shiloh and the altar on Mount Ebal demonstrates how the early Israelites may have given the four cardinal directions mystical meanings that had to do with covenant renewal rituals at sacred structures oriented in these directions (cf Jos 8:30-35). A parallel for these early Israelite religious activities may be found in the Tell Tayinat temple complex (described above) where rituals performed suggest ‘covenant renewal ceremonies’ (Harrison 2014:418).



Figure 4.16 Horned altar at Shiloh (Stripling 2016:94)

The Book of Judges also references the specific directions of Shiloh. Judges 21:19 places it ‘north of Bethel, the east of the road that goes from Bethel to Shechem and south of Lebonah³¹¹ (see Figure 4.13; Brinker 1946:164). The directions in Judges 21:19 possibly served as an aide-memoire to help the idolatrous early Israelites find their way to Shiloh. It may have been part of a larger

³¹¹ Lebonah is situated northwest of Shiloh and is identified with Lubban Sharqiyah approximately twenty kilometres from Nablus (Finkelstein 1986:22-41; Dyck 1992:270). Lebonah might also mean frankincense. Walton, Matthews and Chavalas (2000:580) interpret the word ‘*L’bonah*’ as frankincense (see also Fowler 1992:409). In my opinion, this one reference to a minor site in Judges might be associated with the (possible) meaning of its name. Frankincense in the Old Testament is always associated with deity, sacred space, and holy living.

body literature, a poem for example, that was rhythmically chanted or sung to remember where places were located. Poetry and songs were part of the oral tradition in the Old Testament of conveying history and knowledge from one generation to the next (cf Jdg 5). These memory tools were of great use in a predominantly illiterate tribal society.

Apparently, poetry, songs, and chants and even dancing were literature types illustrative of early Israelite worship of YHWH that served to commemorate momentous historical events (Jdg 5; 11:34). The events that occurred at Shiloh were historic – the setting up of the Tabernacle as well as the tribal land allocation occur at Shiloh . As stated before, as a reflection of the early Israelites’ cosmological beliefs (Faust 2001:129-155; Bunimovitz and Faust 2014:43-54), the eastward orientation of sacred space and structures played a significant role in the worship of YHWH (see also Laie 2018). As already mentioned (2.3.4.1a), it ensured that worship rituals were performed in accordance with the divine preference for east which was believed to increase opportunities for divine blessings (cf Gn 12:8; see also 2.3.4.1a; cf 4.5.2.2.d).

The Hebrew word for east is *qedma* – forward (or מִזְרֵחַ – *zarach* [to shine] – the direction from which the sun shines; that is, light comes from the east)³¹² (see Faust 2001:129-155; cf Faust and Bunimovitz 2003:29). The Hebrew word for the west is *ahora* (achor] – backward (or מַעֲרָב – *maarav* [evening])³¹³ which may explain ‘that the east had a good connotation while the west had a bad one’ (Faust 2001:129-155; cf Faust and Bunimovitz 2003:29). Iron Age buildings and settlements were directed towards the east while the west was avoided (Bunimovitz and Faust 2014:43-54). In addition, the propensity to orientate the doorways of structures to the east rather than the west ‘influenced not only dwellings but city gates as well’... ‘and even had an impact on Iron Age urban planning’ (Bunimovitz and Faust 2014:43-54; cf Faust 2001:129-155; see 2.3.4.1a). Bunimovitz and Faust (2014:43-54) remark that the early Israelite affinity for east cannot be explained by means of an examination of climatic and functional factors but that ethnographic studies have shown the powerful impact of cosmological beliefs on ‘the planning of buildings and settlements’ and in numerous instances east was preferred. The beliefs have been discussed before (see 2.3.4.1a). Additionally, the propensity for building doorways to face east rather than west had an impact on city gates as well as residences (Bunimovitz and Faust 2014:43-54). Faust (2023:77) further explains ‘that the Israelites viewed the east as a hospitable place, and the west as an inhospitable one, and this is the reason for the eastward orientation of structures and settlements’ (see 2.3.4.1a). In an early biblical worldview an eastward movement, however, is viewed as a movement away from the presence of God. Adam, Eve and Cain, move eastward after being cast from the presence of God (Gn 3:24; 4:16; Barker and Kohlenberger 1994:19; Leithart 2003:268; cf Guthrie 2012:2).

³¹² Jerusalem Prayer Team 2024. Hebrew word of the day מִזְרֵחַ.

³¹³ Jerusalem Prayer Team 2024. Hebrew word of the day מַעֲרָב.

Evidently, the idea of moving east as moving from the presence of God is reversed when the early Israelites enter Canaan from the east of the Jordan River (Sailhamer 1998:48; Carasik 2011:243). Joshua and his army's geographical progression is described by Coleson, Stone and Driesbach (2016:106) 'as west into the Shephelah, then 'back east into the hill country.'³¹⁴ Apparently, the early Israelites making the three annual pilgrimages to Shiloh moved in an eastward direction (cf Jdg 21:19; see also above). Thus people make the pilgrimages to the Tabernacle, are moving towards the presence of YHWH. The orientation of sacred space and structures may also allude to this reversal of east that now becomes a beneficial place (see above, see Faust 2023:77). An eastward movement now becomes associated with reconciliation and restoration.

4.5.4 Sacred geographical features

Ordinary geographical features such as hills, water and trees are transformed into sacred elements required for the establishment of a religious place. See the discussion in 4.3.1.2a-c).

4.5.5 Sacred geometry

4.5.5.1 Introduction

As indicated before, the Book of Judges is replete with symbolism. Guided by their religious mindset, the author/s of Judges would have condemned the early Israelites' expression of their idolatry by means of cult figurines and the making of these idols (see Jdg 8:27; 17:5 cf 18:31). These cult images were part of the everyday lives of people in the same way that the cellphone and the Internet are ubiquitous in modern societies. Cult statuettes were held by the ancients to possess magical properties, and many were used in domestic settings as apotropaic devices to ward off evil. Terracotta statuettes of the goddess Astarte, known as plaque figurines, that are dated to the Late Bronze Age and the early Iron Age (Hadley 2000:188; see also Ben-Ari 2014:60-62; Cornelius 2008:62-65) symbolized the fertility of the goddess and were placed in houses and fields to bring fecundity to a household (see Figure 3.8; Willett 2001; Meyers 2005:29-35).³¹⁵

The Israelites, as stated before (see 4.5.2.2c), however, were forbidden to make graven images (Ex 20:4; Dt 5:8). Early Israelite aniconism (the exclusion of any images from religious worship) and iconoclasm, (the destruction of the Canaanite high places and installations) (cf Jdg 6:25-26; cf Ex 23:24) served to prevent idolatry and endorse monotheism among the early Israelites. Finkelstein and Silberman (2002:109) comment that the highland settlements lacked: public buildings, palaces, storehouses and temples...any sophisticated kind of record keeping such as writing, seals

³¹⁴ The Shephelah – an area in Israel known as the foothills or lowlands that is located between the western coastal plain and the Judean mountains to the east.

³¹⁵ For other cultic uses of these plaque figurines see Sparks (2006:16-21). See also Cornelius (2008:63) describing plaque figurines as 'the art of everyday' since the cheap materials used in making the terracotta figurines led to their mass production and therefore their availability to the ordinary person.

and seal impressions, almost no luxury items: no imported pottery and almost no jewelry. This situation can be ascribed to the equalitarian nature of the highland society (see Finkelstein and Silberman 2002:109; cf 7.2.1). However, it is also possible that the ban on making images prevented the early Israelites from making any kinds of images of any type or form. It is possible that the Israelites substituted the desire for anthropomorphic religious representations (of YHWH) with sacred symbols (cf 4.5.2.2.d). Deuteronomy 6 relates that the commandments of YHWH were to be tied as symbols on the hands and on the foreheads of the Israelites (Dt 6:8; see 3.2.4.1). Perhaps attaching numinous aspects to the size and shape of the Tabernacle when it was constructed also were regarded as sacred in the worldview of the early Israelites.

Skinner (2009:6) describes (sacred) geometry as directing the motions of the celestial bodies across the sky and the seasons. The observance of repeated shapes and symbols in nature (and the celestial sky) led ancient people to ascribe supernatural design and qualities to these recurring patterns which they replicated in identical constructions of their religious buildings (Perkins 2016).

4.5.5.2 *Building a sanctuary*

YHWH establishes foundation of the Tabernacle (Ex 26:1-37; Roberts 2002:305) in the same manner that God established the foundations of the world which was by means of a sacred blueprint based on certain approved sacred measurements and proportions (that is, sacred geometry).³¹⁶ Roberts (2002:305) notes that idea of building a temple in a place assigned by the gods was common in the ancient Near East. It was also thought that the temple foundation was constructed by the gods themselves (cf 4.5.2.1; 4.5.3). In the Babylonian Epic of Creation, the *Enūma Eliš*, for example, the gods constructed the foundations of ancient Babylon (Dalley 2000:259). The gods also created Babylon and in it the *Esagila* temple complex, the heart of the world and the universe (see Figure 4:17; cf 4.2.2.2).³¹⁷

³¹⁶ Geometry is a Greek word that means the measurement of the earth (Skinner 2009:6). In modernity, geometry is defined as ‘a branch of mathematics that deals with the measurement, properties, and relationships of points, lines, angles, surfaces and solids...’Geometry 2021. Merriam Webster Dictionary. It was believed in antiquity that the universe was created according to specific divine geometric configurations or design (Ferreirós 2007:235). This idea is also found among the ancient Greeks and in medieval Europe. The statement: ‘God geometrizes eternally’ is ascribed to Plato (see Ferreirós 2007:235-268). See also Sagan (2013:61-62) expressing Johannes Kepler’s view that ‘Geometry is God Himself.’

³¹⁷ The building of the Babylonian ziggurat with mud bricks (known as known as the Etemenanki or temple tower [Dalley 2000:262]) resembles the description of the one built in Genesis 11:3-4. The Esagila complex was located south of the Etemenanki and shows evidence of building and rebuilding over the centuries by the Babylonian kings (Encyclopedia Britannica 2021. Esagila; see also Porter 1993:50-56; Dandamaev 1993:42; Kte’pi 2012:17).

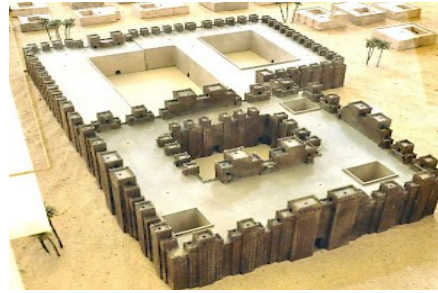


Figure 4.17 Esagila. A model of the ancient Babylonian temple

In light of the aforementioned, the proportions involved in the laying of the foundation and the construction of the Tabernacle were held to be sacred since they were given by YHWH to Moses. Skinner (2009:6) explains that included in geometry is the ‘measurement and construction of buildings’ and the setting up of boundaries between people’s land.³¹⁸ In the early Israelite community moving a neighbour’s boundary marker was subject to severe punishment that of a terrible curse since the stone markers that separated one family’s land from another were established by divine decree (Dt 19:14; 27:7). Accordingly, conceptions of sacred measurements and boundaries regarding the land would have been extended to the construction of buildings upon the land if they were sanctioned by and pleasing to YHWH (Skinner 2009:6).

a. Divine proportions

All the features related to the building of structures – the measurements that produced the size and the shape of the Tabernacle – took on qualities of the divine since, as said, they were based on instructions given and approved by YHWH (Ex 25:9; Ex 35:4-40-38). As already mentioned, the entrance of the Tabernacle faced east – a divine and sacred direction. Similarly, the shape and measurements of the Tabernacle were believed to be sacred because they formed an integral part of the divine plan given to the early Israelites for the construction of the Tabernacle and later the Temple.

In the ancient Near East, certain numbers which were believed to arise from divine reason, were combined, codified and became the arithmetical values that formed the sacred proportions which were thought to be everywhere in the sacred as well as the secular environment (Mitchell 2008). These were the sacred numerical values and proportions that governed the creation of the universe and its post-creation functions.

³¹⁸ All things pertaining to ritual places and worship acquired aspects of the divine. The tools used to construct the Tabernacle and its sacred articles were also considered in terms of the supernatural. No tool (of iron or bronze) was used to make the altar of burnt offering (cf Ex 20:25). Similarly, the measuring line and the plumb line used for the alignments of the Tabernacle acquired mystical qualities that included cosmological concepts. Roberts (2002:305) states that the ‘line and the plummet’ (cf 2 Ki 21:13; Job 38:5-6; Is 28:17; 34:11; Lm 2:8) are used to both destroy a building and to construct a new building in its place. In Job 38:5-6 the measuring line is specifically used to lay the foundations of the earth.

Skinner (2009:6) states that most of the ancient nations built their temples and holy sites according to ‘the correct numbers, geometry, and proportions.’ Ancient Egyptian builders utilized sacred geometry in the orientation of buildings (Skinner 2009:6). Temples in the rest of the ancient Near East were built according to a specific basic plan and orientation (Smith, JA 2020:12) that were considered harmonious and aesthetically appealing (Skinner 2009:6). Thus, these temples were perceived to be sacred as well as when they were constructed upon sacred springs. Walton (2018) remarks that the temple represented the figurative cosmic mountain that stood upon the figurative primordial waters – the sacred spring. The holy of holies was a feature common to ancient Near Eastern temples (Stiebing 2016:134; Babcock, Spencer and Meek 2018:123; cf Baker 2015:22n,6). Stiebing describes the floor level of Egyptian temples as gradually rising from its entrance to its holy of holies.

In the worldview of the author/s of Judges, the ground plan of the Tabernacle may also have been believed to reflect a progression of holiness – from outer courtyard to the Holy Place that leads to the Holy of Holies (see 4.5.6.5). The holy of holies of ‘pagan temples’ housed the statue of the resident god (Block 2012a:205). The holy of holies can be thought of as a throne room of the ancient Near Eastern god (Middleton 2020:24; see also Kuruvilla 2014:40). The Holy of Holies of the Tabernacle had a similar function but in the aniconic Israelite community, the Ark of the Covenant and ‘the Glory of YHWH’ both symbolized ‘the divine presence’ (Block 2012a:205; cf Morrow 2017:124; Chambers 2020:219; Palmer 2022:346). The Israelites and the people of the ancient Near East believed that the Tabernacle and the temple, respectively, represented the cosmic centre, connecting earth and heaven, and therefore these buildings had to adhere precisely to the divine design and dimensions.

4.5.6 Sacred sanctuary: the Tabernacle

The idea that heaven has now come to earth and is deeply involved with the affairs of the early Israelite men and women was conveyed by the tent sanctuary, which served as a conduit between heaven and earth since heaven was invisible and unreachable (Cross [ed]1997:1573; cf Clements 2016:64). The Holy of Holies, where God dwells,³¹⁹ the Holy Place, which is only accessible to priests, and the courtyard, which is open to the general public, all reflect a sacred triple cosmological structure indicated in the Tabernacle’s design (cf Ex 25:9; Jos 18:1; cf Jos 22:19; cf Jdg 21:19; Clements 2016:64). The arrangement of symmetry and harmony of the aforementioned parts of the Tabernacle and the meticulous nuances of the courts and priestly service (cf 8.4), replicated ‘the Divine perfection’ and ‘the Divine holiness’ (Cross [ed] 1997:1573) of an omnipresent

³¹⁹ As mentioned before the sacred mountain (presumably the Tabernacle was set up on the highest point in Shiloh), represented the dwelling place of YHWH; that is, God’s dwelling in the Holy of Holies where the Ark of the Covenant represented YHWH’s power and presence.

YHWH that existed in heaven and who may also dwell in His Tabernacle at Shiloh (cf Jdg 18:31; 19:18; 21:19).

As indicated previously, it is very probable that Zevit's sacred elements: cosmology, sacred alignment, sacred geographical features, sacred geometry and location, sacred sanctuary and sacred rituals played an important role in the establishment of the Tabernacle at Shiloh. In this section it shall become clear how the sacred elements described above further lend spiritual meaning to the physical localities and orientation of the Tabernacle and its furnishings. Sacred location, the importance of the position and orientation of the tent sanctuary in Shiloh and the furniture inside and geometry, involved in particular the size and shape and dimensions of the Tabernacle and furnishings and sacred, which were based on the preferences of YHWH for certain proportions and locations (Pennick 1982:58-61; cf Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:108).

4.5.6.1 Location and function

Previously, the metaphorical function of the Tabernacle was discussed (see 4.5.1-4.5.2.2a-f). This section will explore the physical location and function of the Tabernacle, which are closely intertwined with its sacred nature. It can be assumed that the elements of sacred space they pertained to Shiloh and the Tabernacle these were essential components of the author/s of Judges' mindset since they were associated with YHWH. The divine determined and approved the features of location, dimension, direction, sanctuary, and all other aspects related to sacred space. These qualities were considered appropriate and were adopted by people by which they ordered and organized their lives. It is conceivable that the author/s of Judges, employing his customary polemical approach, would depict Yahwistic sacred space as a means to challenge the prevalent polytheistic beliefs of the ancient Near Eastern societies.

a. Location

Since the late 1800s excavations have been conducted at Shiloh to establish inter alia the location of the Tabernacle (Finkelstein 1986:22-41; Stripling and Latimer 2017; see Figure 4.18). As shown in Figure 4.18, four possible locations for the Tabernacle have been proposed, inter alia a location to the south of the tell.³²⁰

³²⁰ Stripling (2016:89-94) presents a more detailed description of these locations. See also the article by Kaufman (1988:46-49, 52) in which he favours the location of the Tabernacle to the north of Tell Shiloh, as proposed by Charles W. Wilson, and more specifically in Area A of Wilson's site. Stripling has proposed a fourth location for the Tabernacle (see Figure 4.18). According to this postulation the Tabernacle was, at first, situated on the summit of Tell Shiloh and afterwards moved to either the northern or southern slopes of the settlement. Shiloh was the sacred space of YHWH with the Tabernacle on the summit and satellite sanctuaries in strategic places (on the northern, southern and western slopes for example). The Tabernacle was a monument dedicated also to conquest of the Israelites of Canaan and therefore smaller daughter sanctuaries would have been constructed as a part of the sacred complex.

I find a parallel for the aforementioned in the Saudi Arabian city of Medina where there exists a complex of six mosques. The mosques are situated at the site where the Muslims of Yathrib (modern Medina) defended themselves

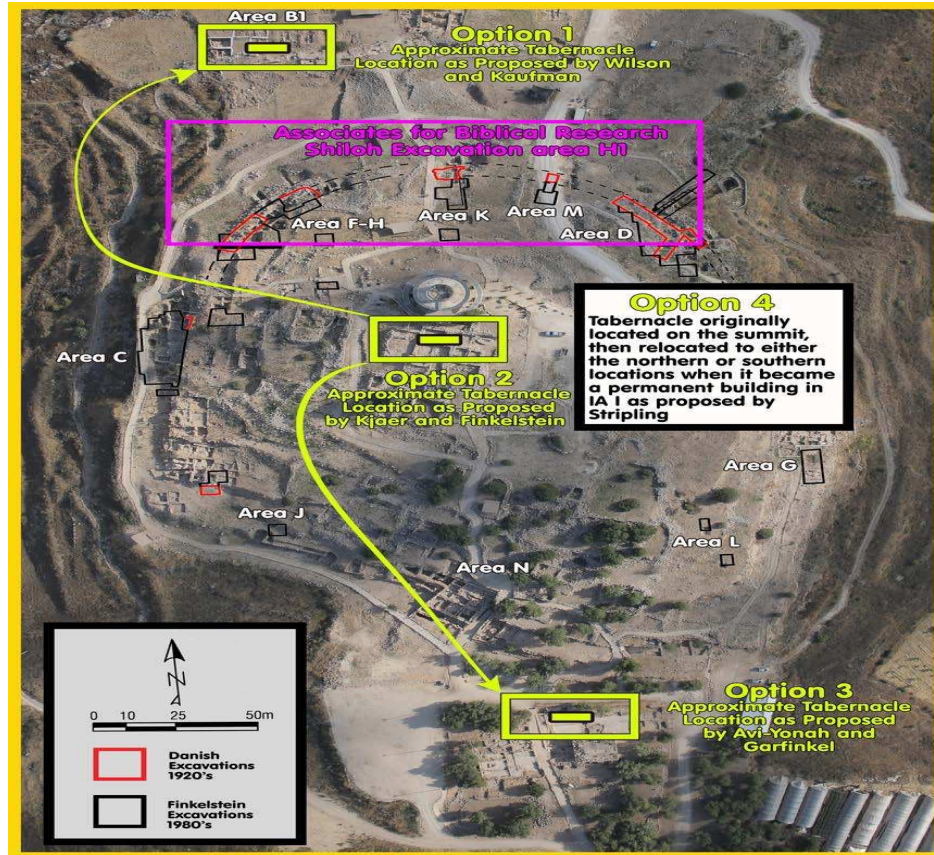


Figure 4.18 Four possible locations of the Tabernacle (Stripling 2016:89-94)

The most recent excavations at Shiloh were conducted at the northern fortification system and allied buildings under the leadership of archaeologist Scott Stripling (see Figure 4.18).³²¹ According to Stripling (2016:89-94), the fortification structure may have been a huge retaining wall for the Tabernacle complex. Stripling observes that in all probability in this area there are located storerooms for the Tabernacle and pillared courtyards houses, perhaps for the priests, from the Biblical eras.

b. Function

In addition to its religious purpose, the Tabernacle served leadership, social and economic functions as set out in the Sinaitic Covenant. The ‘law’ established the regulations and principles for the Israelites’ priesthood and their social and economic activities; therefore these functions of the

from the Arab and Jewish tribes during the Battle of the Trench. Although the mosques in their present condition are not original in appearance, they were constructed at the camp sites where the Muslim generals of Yathrib were stationed and are dated to this period. The mosques are located in various locations from north to south in the south of Mount Sela’ (see The Seven Mosques 2020).

³²¹ Previously, Stripling (2016:89-94) reports that prior to his own excavations at Shiloh, the Israel Antiquities Authority partially excavated the scarp north as well as other sites at Tell Shiloh. Excavations on the summit of the tell, the abovementioned scarp and the churches located on the southern slope were also conducted under the directorship of the Civil Administration of Judea and Samaria in the past ten years (Stripling 2016:89-94).

Tabernacle are inextricably linked to covenant; fulfilling YHWH's promise of proving for His people. The early Israelites' idolatry had a grave and detrimental effect on the functions of the Tabernacle. As mentioned before, the delivery of agriculture products would have been redirected towards the sanctuaries of the gods worshipped by the Israelites. This change had a negative effect on the Tabernacle, hindering its ability to perform its designated covenant decreed socio-economic and religious functions in the community (cf 4.2.2.3b-c). According to mindset informing the author/s of Judges, in order for the Tabernacle to resume its operations, judgement on the Israelites had to be rendered to restore the covenantal relationship (Jdg 2:1-5; 6:8-10; 10:10-16).

Finkelstein (1986:22-41) asserts that Shiloh 'was the first of the sacred sites in the hill country.' The archaeological evidence demonstrates Shiloh to be the earliest indication of the organization of the Israelite people (mid to late 12th century BC) within the wider background of the isolated highland communities (Finkelstein (1986:22-41). Finkelstein's surveys of the regional settlement patterns show that population density in the proximate area of Shiloh was two to three times larger than other areas in the region of Ephraim (Finkelstein 1986:22-41). Finkelstein (1986:22-41) mentions that 100 Israelite settlements were found in his survey of which twenty-two were located within a radius of three to four miles from Shiloh. By contrast in a similar radius around Bethel about twelve settlement sites were found (cf Jdg 2:4; 20:1, 18, 26; 21:18). People would have been drawn to settle in the Shiloh region in large numbers by the religious and economic influences of Shiloh (Finkelstein 1986:22-41).

Storehouses belonging to the Middle Bronze Age were uncovered at Shiloh (Finkelstein 1986:22-41) and indicate the storage of agricultural products such as wheat. Currid (1992:92) reports that storehouses (*miskānōt*) were buildings where anything could be stowed 'but it usually meant the storage of wine, grain and oil.' Iron Age Israelites used these storehouses to store their grain (Currid 1992:101) and I presume that they erected their own on their farmstead as well as using the storehouses at Shiloh that were already there to store the offerings, the 'crops from the field' and 'the firstfruits' of their soil (Ex 23:16, 19), delivered to the Tabernacle during the three annual pilgrimages.

Judges 6:6 recounts the food shortages suffered by Israelites during a Midianite invasion of the land. It is likely that the Israelites also experienced food scarcities during other periods of their oppression by the Canaanites. In these cases, the surplus at Shiloh would have alleviated severe famine. Israelites may have hidden their agricultural produce (cf Jdg 6:11) or closely kept their own silos and storehouses under (armed) protection (cf Jdg 8:4-6; 8-9).

4.5.6.2 *Floorplan, construction materials, shapes and sizes*

The *Miskhan* might have been less majestic architecturally than the monumental and possibly grand temple of Baal-berith at Shechem, but it would have been striking still, with its leathery

rooftop and bright colourful fence and sanctuary coloured white, blue, red and purple (Strong 1987:122-127), a sacred monument that attested to YHWH's power and presence (cf Ex 40:34; Baghos 2021:104).

What did the Tabernacle look like to the many Israelites who went there to worship YHWH and present their offerings to Him (cf Jdg 19:18; 21:19)? All the elements pertaining to the Tabernacle help to preserve the covenantal way of life that the author/s of Judges vehemently advocate.

Smith (2020:11-12) mentions that the 'basic plan' of Levantine temples (including the Jerusalem Temple/Solomon's Temple) – 'rectangular longroom structures' that were 'orientated symmetrically, or in balanced proportions, along two sides of a central longitudinal axis' reveals the 'classic ground plan of temples in Mediterranean and Near Eastern antiquity.' This floor plan also shaped the rectangular-shaped Tabernacle, and its internal furniture that was either square or rectangular in shape. The installations in the outer courtyard consisted of the square-shaped altar of sacrifice and the circular laver. The Tabernacle housed the rectangular-shaped, table of the showbread, the square-shaped altar of incense and the rectangular Ark of the Covenant inside the cube-shaped Holy of Holies (see Figure 4.19). Inside the Tabernacle was also the lampstand (Ross 2006:101-102; Babcock, Spencer and Meek 2018:123).

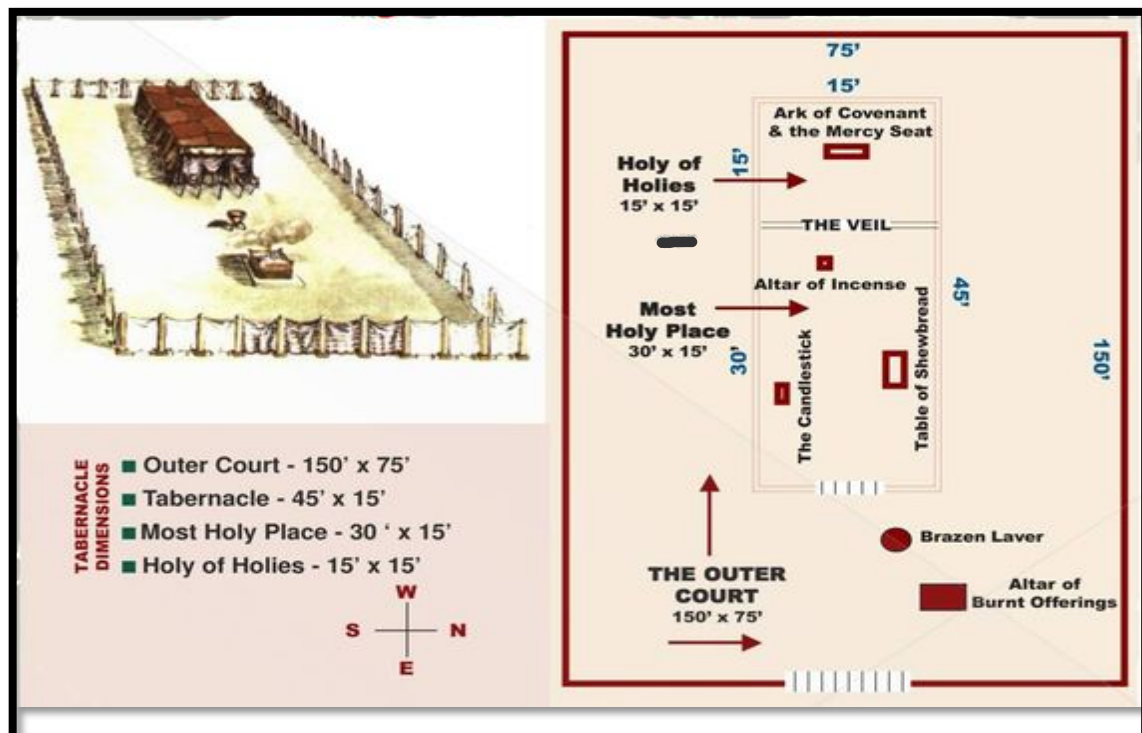


Figure 4.19 Diagram of the Miskhan (Pinterest.com)

The sacred compound contained the Tabernacle proper and an outer courtyard measuring 150 by 75 feet (Ex 27:9-18; see Figure 4.19; Harris, RW 2011:117). The Tabernacle proper (Ex 26:1-37)

was made of ten curtains of finely woven linen and blue, purple, and scarlet wool, 42 feet long and 6 feet wide (King and Stager 2001:160). Cherubim were woven into the vibrantly coloured curtains.³²² The roof of the Tabernacle was formed by a layer of heavy carpets made with ram skins dyed red which was overlaid by a top layer of ‘other durable leather’ (Ex 26:14; cf Ex 25:5).³²³ The Tabernacle consisted of two chambers: the first was rectangular in shape, the Holy Place, 30 by 15 feet, where stood the altar of incense, the lampstand and the table for the shewbread (see Figure 4.18). The second, smaller chamber located at the back of the Tabernacle was the Holy of Holies (*Kodesh Ha-Kodashim*), a perfect cube in shape, 15 by 15 feet (see also above; see also Harris, RW 2011:117-123). A heavy curtain (the *Parokhet*) separated the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place.³²⁴ The Ark of the Covenant, the most sacred object in the religion of the Israelites, stood in the Holy of Holies and symbolized the presence and the manifested power of YHWH (Ex 26:33; Block 2012a:205). A fence of 7 feet in height draped with linen coverings of blue, purple, and scarlet yarn which were supported by pillars enclosed the complex (Harris, RW 2011:117). Ryken, Wilhoit and Longman (eds) (2010:158) comment that colours are first mentioned in the Old Testament when God designates the colours of the Tabernacle and the priestly robes (Ex 25-28) as blue, purple, and scarlet.

4.5.6.3 Other divine elements

a. Sacred colours

As indicated previously the orientation, shape and dimensions of the Tabernacle complex at Shiloh would have held special numinous meanings to the early Israelites since they were the sacred directions and proportions given to Moses for the creation of the tent sanctuary and its courtyard. Likewise, the colours, the textiles, metals (gold and silver) and wood used to construct the Tabernacle and the furniture of the *Miskhan* would have held sacred significance to the early Israelites since these were the colours preferred by YHWH for the sanctuary (Strong 1987:122-127; cf Mishory 2019:9; King and Stager 2001:160).

³²² Deuteronomy 22:11 forbids the Israelites from wearing clothes mixed with linen and wool. An explanation for this could be that the Tabernacle and the priestly garments (Ex28:6-8, 15) consisted of this combination of fabrics to separate the sacred from the ordinary world.

³²³ The *NIV* mentions that the ‘other’ leather possibly consisted of the pelts of big water animals. However, it is possible that the hides or skins of large gazelle and ibex indigenous to the Sinai wilderness were used as the topmost covering of the Tabernacle since any water creature without fins and scales would have been ritually impure (cf Lv 11:9-12; Dt 14-9-10).

³²⁴ Mumcuoglu and Garfinkel (2020) discuss the *Parokhet* as ‘a sacred curtain that is depicted on several miniature clay objects known as portable shrines’. Cognates of the word *Parokhet* which is not a Semitic word but one that is derived from *barag* a Sumerian word belonging to the third millennium BC, are to be found in Mesopotamia and later in Akkadian text of the Old Babylonian period that contain similar terms: *pariktu* and *parakku* (Mumcuoglu and Garfinkel 2020). According to Mumcuoglu and Garfinkel (2020), the *Parokhet* is not unique to the Israelites and has been in continuous use in Mesopotamia since the third millennium BC until the modern age.

The *Parokhet* like the curtains of the Tabernacle (Ex 26:1) was made of fine linen and purple, scarlet, and blue yarn with cherubim woven into them (Ex 26:21; see Abrahams 2007b:418-421; see also Sha 2018:144). The curtains of the Tabernacle as well as those around the courtyard and the *Parokhet*, as stated before, were made of *linen and blue, purple and scarlet yarn*. The curtain to the entrance of the courtyard was an exception as it did not have cherubim woven into them (Ex 27:16). This combination of colours, which the Israelites mainly were knowledgeable about through nature (Ryken, Wilhoit and Longman (eds) (2010:58), were also understood in terms of the supernatural with specific cosmological meanings and connotations to the divine. It can be imagined that the ancient world of the Bible was not the often-dull monochromatic colours unearthed in archaeological digs. People experienced their secular and sacred realms through the vibrancy of colour and expressed their conceptions of the divine in embellishing their temples and statues with a rich palette of (sacred) colors (Hundley 2013:30; cf King and Stager 2001:160).

Ancient Egyptians temples were immersed in colour that had profuse symbolic connotations which could differ in accordance with the context (Hundley 2013:30). The skin of the Egyptian god Amun was tinted blue signifying lapis lazuli, an expensive imported stone worthy of a god (Hart 2005:13). Sauvage (2022:49) comments that certain colours were defined by their likeness to costly stones. Dyed wool, therefore, could be termed after valuable stones such as lapis lazuli and amethyst. Textiles (such as wool and other fabrics) were dyed to duplicate the bright hue (of the sky; cf Warburton [2007:232]) and gloss of precious stones and metals and could also acquire the properties of costly metals and stones (Sauvage 2022:49). Wool dyed purple, for examples, could be named ‘red (-tinged) lapis lazuli wool,’ indicating that purple wools were perceived to have characteristics similar to the vibrant colour of lapis lazuli (Sauvage 2022:49).

Since these colours were associated with expensive materials, precious stones, and metals and therefore wealth, royalty, and the gods, it is against this background of symbolism in the ancient Near East that the colours and materials (fine linen and wool) of the *Miskhan* can be understood (Duvall and Hays 2012). Ryken, Wilhoit and Longman [eds] (2010:158) concur that fine linen and wool tinted in blue, and purple were textiles and colours associated with opulence and the aristocracy (cf King and Stager 2001:160). In the ancient Near East blue and purple were the colours of the noble classes and powerful kings and the gods. An Ugaritic text lists among the tribute paid to a Hittite king, blue purple and red purple wool and linen robes (Kuhrt 1997:250-266). Dyed textiles were made from natural dyes that were expensive and only affluent and potent kings could adorn their palaces with colorful fabrics (cf Jdg 5:30; Ryken, Wilhoit and Longman [eds] 2010:158). If the Canaanites were successful in the war against the Israelites, the majority of the booty gathered by Sisera, and his troops mentioned in Judges 5:30 would gone to Jabin the king and his royal household. The booty that Sisera’s mother eagerly anticipated included colourful garments which

she hoped to adorn herself with.³²⁵ Ryken, Wilhoit and Longman (2010:158) list royal garments as part of war booties (cf Jdg 5:30). During the early period of 'Israel,' in the absence of a royal court, it is likely that the highly anticipated garments were sourced from wealthy Israelite women who were part of affluent households.

The early Israelites analogous to the ancient Egyptians and other ancient Near Eastern nations believed that the colours and materials of their Tabernacle denoted the mystical and sacred aspects of their religion. In the worldview of the author/s of Judges the 'richness' of the materials of the *Miskhan* was a reflection of YHWH's status as King of the tribes and His affluence that He imparts to His people. The blue, purple and scarlet colours that adorned the *Miskhan* denoted YHWH's status as the all-powerful God-King of the early Israelites. Sicker (2014:36) mentions that the colour code (described below) was used to denote 'the order and degree of the sacred appurtenances in the Tabernacle' (cf King and Stager 2001:160). The *Miskhan*,³²⁶ along with its furniture and the courtyard installation, held great significance for the author/s and the early Israelites due to perceived sanctity of their nature and consecration to YHWH and which accordingly reflected the holiness of their God.

In the mindset informing the biblical writers, the colours of the *Miskhan* and the *Parokhet* represented a type of image of the universe at its creation and afterwards: scarlet denoting fire, the linen (flax) the earth, the colour blue denoted the earth and purple the sea (see Mumcuoglu and Garfinkel 2020:3; cf Warburton 2007:232).³²⁷ On the other hand blue is also the colour of the sky representing the elevated majesty of YHWH that is with His people (see Ryken, Wilhoit and Longman [eds] 2010:158). The scarlet yarn (red wool) of which the *Parokhet* was also made may have symbolized

³²⁵ A text describing an expedition of Ashurnasirpal II (883-859) to Carchemish and the Lebanon during which he collected a tribute from the Hittite king, Sangara, that included 200 young girls dressed in linen garments adorned with multicoloured trimmings made of red purple dyed wool (Oppenheim 1969b:275).

³²⁶ That YHWH's sanctuary was a tent-dwelling instead of a stone temple is not uncommon in the ancient Near East and does not exclude the idea of YHWH's kingship (Seow 1992:386-392). The residence of the principal god and divine king of the Ugaritic pantheon, El, as he is frequently portrayed in iconography and in texts, is designated as a tent-dwelling (Seow 1992:386-392). Walton, Matthews and Chavalas (2000:107) observe that portable structures of a design similar to the Tabernacle have been found in ancient Egypt that date as far back as the mid-3rd millennium BC. Egyptian royal tents from the 19th dynasty were used for secular and sacred purposes and consisted of two chambers of which the external chamber was double the length of the internal one. A Midianite tent shrine was discovered at Timnah. Dated to the 12th century BC, the shrine, albeit not portable, was constructed of draperies arranged over poles (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:107).

³²⁷ This is an interpretation of the colours of the curtain before the Holy of Holies in the Temple by Josephus as mentioned by Mumcuoglu and Garfinkel (2020:3). They mention that the *Parokhet* was described by Josephus as having embroidered on it everything that was numinous in the universe excluding certain signs that represented living creatures (perhaps what is referred to by the signs that represented living creatures is the stars and the moon that symbolized the ancient Near Eastern gods) (Mumcuoglu and Garfinkel 2020). See also Yadin (1983:27-28) as cited in Mumcuoglu and Garfinkel (2020:3) stating that the 1st century AD Temple Scroll at Qumran describes a golden curtain that hung in front of the Holy of Holies.

the sacrificial blood (sprinkled by the High Priest over the people) and thus divine forgiveness and redemption of sin (Ryken, Wilhoit and Longman [eds] 2010:158).

The colours of the *Miskhan* symbolized the divine radiance of YHWH. The sanctuary was a visual representation of the divine realm and fit for the inhabitation of the presence of YHWH (Sauvage 2022:49). The golden light of the Ark of the Covenant (Ex 25:11-13 17-18), the lampstand (Ex 25:31), the table of the showbread and its vessels (Ex 25:24-26, 28-29), the gold of the *Miskhan* (Ex 26:29) were divinity itself (Sauvage 2022:49). The sacred colour code, as previously indicated, was also utilized to denote the order and level of sanctity of the sacred adornments in the Tabernacle (Sicker 2014:36).

Despite the fact that the author/s of Judges would have acknowledged and valued all the aspects highlighted in the aforementioned description, they would have specifically emphasized the significance of redemption from sin that could be attained at the Tabernacle, considering the prevailing context of Israelite idolatry and the restoration of their status as the holy people of YHWH (cf 4.3.2). The author/s of Judges illustrate that YHWH by His actions in Judges remains resolute in preserving His people and His Tabernacle. It is plausible that the author/s hold the belief that YHWH aims to restore not only His people (Ex 19:6) but also to reinstate the Tabernacle to its sacred state. Throughout the period of the judges the Tabernacle remained intact (cf Jdg 18:31).

b. A progression of holiness

Parallel to the ancient Near East, the ‘architectural symmetry’ of the Tabernacle indicates the important role of geometry in early Israelite sacred space (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2002:108). The architectural symmetry (of the Tabernacle) referred to by Walton, Matthews and Chavalas demonstrates a certain sacred order in the performance of rituals at the Tabernacle and the religious apparatuses involved in the execution of these rituals. Similar to the geographical location of the *Miskhan* at Shiloh that acquires sacred tones, so too did the location of the religious installations in the courtyard and the sacred furniture in the *Miskhan* obtain sacred qualities. YHWH was the epicentre of power in the universe and the *Miskhan* symbolized this sacred central role by the division of the Tabernacle compound into sectors of ‘progressive holiness’ (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:108).

In ancient Near Eastern temples, the altar and the ‘object associated with the god’s presence [the statue of the god or an animal image representing the god]’ was placed at the precise centre ‘of the most holy spot in the sanctuary’ (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:108). In this geometric alignment a sacred energy grid was generated that animated and released the power of the god which spiraled out into the outer sectors of the temple. Prayers, invocations, and sacrifices (in the outer regions of the temple) affected by this sacred energy dynamo became more powerful and

active (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:108). Temples may have been considered as magic-energy devices for the generation of divine power that could be put to use by humans.

The *Miskhan* too symbolized the power of the Israelite God. However, the *Miskhan* held no magical qualities by itself, and neither could the arrangement of religious objects or their utilization forth the power of YHWH. On the contrary, the *Miskhan* already housed the power and presence of YHWH through its connection with the Ark of the Covenant. But the author/s of Judges also show that YHWH's self-revelation in Judges occurred in other forms – the Spirit of YHWH and the Angel of YHWH – that challenged people's beliefs regarding the Ark as (solely) representative of the presence of YHWH.

The High Priest's entrance into the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement, to atone for the sins of the Israelites, was a sacred ritual that bestowed the utmost sanctity upon the *Miskhan* (Rooker 2000:212; Snaith 2009:67-68). However, one might wonder how this could be accomplished if the Tabernacle was tainted by corruption and idolatry within the priesthood during the cycles of covenantal desertion as documented in Judges.

The narrative in Judges 1 regarding the unfinished land acquisition and establishment serves as a clear indication that the reader of Judges is being primed for the subsequent events that will unfold. This incomplete conquest of the land is of utmost importance, as it sets the stage for the second chapter of Judges and highlights the severity of the Israelites' disobedience in failing to fulfil the command to fully occupy the land (cf 2.2.1.1b; 2.2.2.1). The fact that YHWH Himself addresses this matter further emphasizes its significance (cf Jdg 2:1-3) and may indicate that the Tabernacle had lost its association with the covenant (see Barton & Muddiman [eds] 2001:9). The theme of 'covenant and redemption' is a fundamental theme in the Old Testament (Barton and Muddiman [eds] 2001:9) and it is most evident in the Book of Judges (cf Jdg 2:1-5; 6:8-10, 11-40; 10:10-16; 13:5, 25, etcetera). But the Tabernacle, like the early Israelites, has lost its ability to symbolize the holiness of YHWH. The Tabernacle is 'fallen.' Still the author/s of Judges offers the Israelites hope: YHWH will Himself redeem His people, revive His covenant and reinstate His sanctuary (cf Jdg 2:1-5; 3:10, 15, 31; 5:31; 6:11-34, etcetera). The Tabernacle may be fallen but, unlike Eden, not lost.

i. The layout of the Tabernacle

In light of the aforesaid, in periods of peace and covenantal restoration, the Tabernacle regains its sanctity and becomes a sacred space once more. The layout of the sacred precinct also reflected the varying holiness of the different sectors that made up the sacred precinct and related religious objects (Flesher 1992:780-781; cf Sicker 2014:36):³²⁸

³²⁸ According to Flesher (1992:780-781) there is a hierarchy of (of holiness and ritual) in the Tabernacle complex that had to do with several factors. The location of religious objects utilized in the performance of the rituals: the closer

- the zenith of holiness was in the Holy of Holies and accessible only to the High Priest (Flesher 1992:780-781),
- the Holy Place was second in holiness to the Holy of Holies and accessible to the entire priesthood (Flesher 1992:780-781), and lastly,
- the courtyard was third in holiness to the Holy of Holies and the Holy Place and was accessible to everyone (Flesher 1992:780-781).

Considering the aforementioned, the rituals performed at the Tabernacle complex also varied in significance (of sanctity) which was also related to their location (see Flesher 1992:780-781). The holiest of rituals, as stated before, took place once a year, on the Day of Atonement when the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies to make atonement, firstly for his sins and that of his household and the entire Israelite community (Lv 16:3-23; cf 8.4). Secondary to the ritual on the Day of Atonement, three holy rituals occurred in the Holy Place: the perpetual offering of the bread of the Presence, the burning of incense and the burning of the lamps every night. Flesher (1992:780-781) notes that these three rituals were equal in status ‘for they all take place on a golden piece of furniture.’ Flesher (1992:780-781) observes that other rituals – animal sacrifice and the offerings of grain, for example occurred in less important areas such as the courtyard. The Book of Judges does not contain any of these rituals, as the author/s primarily documented the events that took place during the idolatrous cycles of the Israelites, where everyone acted according to their own desires. Nevertheless, based on the recurring indications in this study, it can be inferred that during periods of covenantal peace and restoration, the faithful Israelites and priests would have observed their rituals. As indicated before the holiness of the early Israelites and their Tabernacle was inherently connected to their association with YHWH. It is only when the covenant is reestablished that both the Israelites and the Tabernacle can truly embody the holiness of the one true God.

4.5.6.4 *The Holy Place and furniture*

The following segments will further show the importance of the Mishkan that as stated earlier regained its sanctity and significance during times of covenantal peace.

The blueprint for the construction of the *Miskhan* for example is given by YHWH, who requires the Tabernacle to be constructed according to the precise measurements (sacred proportions) and

they are to YHWH the more sacred they are (Flesher (1992:780-781). The Tabernacle (that only the priests may enter), therefore, is more holy than the public courtyard. Within the Tabernacle proper, the Holy of Holies is more sacred than the Holy Place (Flesher 1992:780-781). The differing area of holiness is also evident by the personnel of priests that attended to the rituals: only the High Priest was allowed in the Holy of Holies and only once a year, while all other areas were accessible to all the priesthood. In addition, the furniture of the Tabernacle was gold while that of the courtyard was bronze (Flesher 1992:780-781). The rituals in the Tabernacle are performed by the High Priest while those in the courtyard are done by the ordinary priests. The purpose of the rituals performed in the area of the courtyard and within the Tabernacle also differ: the rites in the Tabernacle served to maintain a relationship between YHWH and the community while those in the courtyard, the offerings of Israelites, symbolized the relationship between YHWH and individuals (Flesher 1992:780-781).

construction materials that He has given to Moses. Exodus 25:9 reads: ‘Make this tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you’ (see also Ex 25:40; 26:30; Nm 8:4). The furniture of the *Miskhan*, the table of the shewbread, the incense altar, the Ark of the Covenant, for instance, were made according to divine measurements and proportions and only then could these furnishings be found suitable to be housed in the Tabernacle. However, as stated before, none of these things really mattered if they were not associated with explicit *unadulterated mono-Yahwistic* worship (cf Jdg 2:10-19; 3:5-7, 12; 4:1; 6:1; 8:27, 33; 10:6; 13:1).

a. The table of the shewbread

As indicated previously, in the Holy Place was the rectangular table of the shewbread (or the table of the bread of the Presence), three feet long, one and a half feet wide and 2 and a quarter feet high. The bread of the Presence were twelve loaves made with the finest unleavened dough of the finest flour (yeast was symbolic of sin) and presented on a portable offering table that stood on four legs. The offering table was made of acacia wood encrusted with gold and was placed on the northern side of the sanctuary (Lv 24:5-9; Ex 26:35; Flesher 1992:780-781). The northern location of the gold offering table that held the shewbread shows the significance of geometry in sacred space. The bread of the Presence, in the perspective of the author/s of Judges reflect YHWH’s provision of the twelve tribes (represented by the twelve loaves – their purity in turn symbolized by the finest flour with which the loaves were baked)

The vessels of the offering table or the table of the shewbread, consisting of bowls, dishes and pitchers, were also made of gold which according to the author/s would have befitted the status of YHWH as the God-King of the tribes (Ex 25:23-30). On the table of the shewbread, the twelve loaves of shewbread were continually displayed and only substituted at the end of the week with freshly baked loaves (Walter, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:107). The loaves were arranged in two piles of six loaves each with pure incense burned (probably in the gold bowls; Meyers 1992a:410) next to each pile. The incense served a practical purpose as well, that of keeping flies and insects from the shewbread. The loaves of bread arranged on the table of the shewbread represented the covenant – a unique concept attributed to a sacred offering – and was made holy by its close proximity to YHWH (Lv 25:5-9; Flesher 1992:780-781).

In the ancient Near East offerings made to deities were primarily for purposes related to fertility and a successful life on earth. Thus, offerings served as type of ‘ritual bribe’ into motivating the deity into bestowing favour on the individual (Beckman 2005:347). To this end, food offerings came in the form of fruit and sweets such as honey and a variety of baked goods which were placed on the offering table for the ancient Near Eastern god or placed about the ritual spot (Beckman 2005:348-349). In the ancient Near East, some of the meal offerings of bread and cakes came in a

special shape or design (Sha 2018:194, 210).³²⁹ Deuteronomy, on the other hand, severs the link between these offerings and the ancient Near Eastern practices, instead associating them solely with YHWH. As a result, specific elements like honey were prohibited from being placed on the altar as a food offering or as an ingredient in a food offering (cf Lv 2:11). Yet, Canaan is referred to as ‘the land flowing with milk and honey’ giving it a quality of YHWH’s abundant provision. It was not forbidden to present honey as a food offering to the LORD, only that it should not be burnt on the altar (Lv 2:12; Bowie 2020:1-13). This was possible due to their association with the ancient Near Eastern fertility rites. In ancient Egypt honey was used in rituals to attract the gods and to revivify the gods of the dead (Bowie 2020:1-13). The author/s of Judges narrates the account of Samson eating honey made by bees in the carcass of a lion (Jdg 14; see also 2.2.5.4). It is an unclean act. It is possible that the author/s are connecting the violated covenant and brokenness and impurity of people’s lives with Samson’s deed of scooping the honey from the carcass of a dead animal (see Klein 1989:129).

At the *Miskhan*, however, the most acceptable and sacred baked product placed in the sanctuary was the shewbread. These were probably flat, thin round cakes the shape of the flat traditional bread still baked in modern Near Eastern and Middle East countries. No other shape would have been allowed since as stated before, bread offering in special shapes were part of the ancient Near Eastern cultic offerings. The shewbread was specifically baked as an offering to YHWH by the priests themselves or most probably the women connected to the priesthood (Walton and Matthews 2000:182; Sha 2018:152; cf Marsman 2003:436). Although the table of the Presence held bowls and pitchers for other food and drink it was likely that these food items consisted of the meat from the burnt offering and wine or water.³³⁰

Ryken, Wilhoit and Longman (2010:158) mention that the colour blue separated the furniture and religious articles of the Tabernacle from the ordinary people. Blue signified the setting apart of people (the priests) and religious objects for the sacred purposes of the LORD. Whenever the Tabernacle was disassembled and moved, a blue cloth covered the Ark of the Covenant, the table of the Presence, the lampstand, and the altar of incense (Ryken, Wilhoit and Longman 2010:158; cf 1 Sm 4:4-5). This would have been the case if the Tabernacle was moved to Bethel where the author/s document the presence of the Ark of the Covenant during the war between the Benjamites and the rest of the Israelite tribes (Jdg 20:27-28). However, in Judges 21:12, the author/s reference

³²⁹ In Christianity the hot cross bun is a round spiced sweet cake, decorated with a cross on top that is eaten on Good Friday in countries such as the UK, South Africa, Australia and Canada. Similarly, the breads and cakes offered to the ancient gods were made in a special design or decoration associated with the god to whom the offering was made. It can be imagined that the ingredients in the food offerings were considered as items of magic associated with the power of the deity.

³³⁰ The vessels of the table of the shewbread could be used by the priests to eat the meat of the burnt offering and to drink the wine offering or water. However, no other type of baked good apart from the shewbread was to be perpetually presented on the table of the shewbread and nor would any other baked product have been allowed in the Tabernacle (cf Ex 30:9).

the camp (the Tabernacle as resident in Shiloh). It may be argued that the Ark was removed from its resting place in the Holy of Holies (by the High Priest [see 4.3.2]) (cf Jos 4; see also 4.5.6.5a). According to Judges 20:28 it might have been used in the divination ceremony which involved the *Urim* and *Thummim* that was attached to the breastpiece of the High Priest to divine the outcome of the war against the Benjamites (see also 4.5.6.5a). The reason behind the absence of this ceremony at Shiloh (cf Jdg 21:11), despite the close proximity of Bethel (approximately 16 kilometers away), remains a mystery (See also Bible Hub 2024. Judges 20:18). This occurrence serves as yet another example by the author/s of Judges to highlight the disregard for authority and the lack of adherence to proper conduct exhibited by all individuals, including the High Priest (Jdg 21:25).

b. The altar of incense

Incense played a significant role in the rituals at the Tabernacle. Fowler (1992:409-410) provides two Hebrew words from the Old Testament for incense: ‘*lēbōnâ* and *qēṭōret*.’ Fowler (1992:409-410) states that ‘*lēbōnâ*’ is translated as frankincense and referred to as an ingredient of ‘*qēṭōret*’ in Exodus 30:34-38 which was burned in the *Miskhan*. Fowler (1992:409-410) also describes the incense altars or burners that have been excavated. In the worldview of the author/s of Judges, the utilization of incense was intricately linked to YHWH, and the priestly duties, thus rendering it an essential component of the ceremonial worship at the Tabernacle (see Renn [ed] 2008:415).

The altar of incense and its four horns were made of a single piece of acacia wood that was overlaid with gold. The portable square-shaped golden altar was one and a half feet long and wide and three feet high (Ex 30:1-6). It was placed on the eastern side of the Most High Place in front of the *Parokhet* and the Ark of the Covenant behind the curtain. This eastern location signifies the importance of the altar of incense in religious rites at the Tabernacle and was associated with the power and Presence of YHWH. Nielsen (1992:404-409) observes that the position of the altar of incense, between the priest and YHWH, resembles the location of the incense altar used in Assyro-Babylonian invocation ceremonies that was also between the image of the god and the priest. Despite this similarity, the purpose of incense differed in the Tabernacle and the temples of the gods. The horns of the golden incense altar symbolized strength; that is, the power of YHWH (Fowler 1992:409-410; cf 4.5.6.6).

In the ancient Near East incense was used as a purifying and apotropaic artifact in the secular and sacred lives of people. Nielsen (1992:404-409) reports that the cult related to Rameses III at *Medinet Habu* temple possibly was ‘symptomatic in its lavish use of incense.’ Incense was burned to purify the statue of the god Amon-Re – to prepare the statue and to induce the god to enter into the statue (Nielsen 1992:404-409). It was thought that incense transported the prayers (also spoken for the absolution of transgressions) of faithful individuals to the realm of heaven (Nielsen 1992:404-409).

Deuteronomy and the author/s of Judges, in their familiar fashion, would have associated this practice of using incense in the ancient Near East exclusively with YHWH and His ability to forgive sins. In the Book of Revelation, the incense from the gold altar in front of the throne (of God) went up together with the prayers of the saints to God (Rv 8:4) – a narrative that draws from the tradition in the Old Testament. Nielsen (1992:404-409) reports that in the Tabernacle, for instance, the incense smoke carried the prayers to God who is appeased by the aromatic fragrance.

Prohibited rituals in the unadulterated Israelite religion were always associated with the incorrect performances of Israelite ritual practices ‘or a pagan cult’ (Nielsen 1992:404-409). Accordingly, the proper use of incense at the Tabernacle required the High Priest to burn incense on the golden stand in front of the Holy of Holies only in the morning and at night (Ex 30:7-8; see Nielsen 1992:404-409). Only the incense made according to the specifications in Exodus 30:34-36 was approved for use in the Tabernacle. This specific recipe for the incense used in the Tabernacle was to prevent the burning of incense mixed with other ingredients that was used in the temples of the gods (see Fowler 1992:409-410; cf 4.5.6.4a; 5.3.2.4ai). The burning of incense in the Tabernacle served other purposes such as repelling insects (cf 4.5.6.4a) and disguising odours coming from the courtyard – the blood of the sacrificed animals, for instance (Fowler 1992:409-410).

The author/s of Judges may have cleverly linked Shiloh with a location known as Lebonah (Jdg 21:19) through a play on words. This word, Lebonah, shares the same meaning as the noun לבונה (*lěbōnâ* – lebonah), which refers to frankincense derived from the verb לבן (*laben*) which has the meaning ‘to become white’ (Abarim Publications 2024. Lebonah meaning; cf Footnote 311). In contrast to contemporary interpretations of white as a symbol, the Bible may portray white as representing either a void state (and consequently emptiness or foolishness) or the state of utmost resistance to the adaptation of light, which ultimately signifies pride, obstinacy, and further foolishness (Abarim Publications 2024. Lebonah meaning). It is intriguing to ponder the intentions of the author/s of Judges as they convey the narrative in Judges 21, considering the foolish choices, deception, and misguided counsel of the elders. The devastating intertribal conflict had decimated the tribe of Benjamin. In order to prevent the extinction of the tribe, the elders suggested that the Benjamites should kidnap young women from Shiloh, a suggestion that the Benjamites indeed acted upon (Jdg 21:19-23). Prior to this, approximately 400 young women had already been abducted to become wives for the Benjamites and were taken to Shiloh. Tragically, their families were completely annihilated in the process. With this account, the author/s concluded the Book of Judges not without a touch of irony. The Book begins with the portrayal of empowered and named independent women (Jdg 1:14-15; 4) only to end with the abduction and subjugation of nameless women (Jdg 21:12; 23) linked to a site known as Lebonah (Jdg 21:19-23) encased within a disorderly society (Jdg 21:25).

c. The lampstand

The Hebrew word for lampstand that stood in the Holy Place of the Tabernacle is *menorah* (Meyers 1996b:589-590). The lampstand was placed in the southern part of the Holy Place, opposite the table of the shewbread (Ex 40:24). The lampstand was an object made with beaten gold and ‘the floral and technical terminology used to describe it’ indicates that the lampstand was symbolic of a sacred tree that ‘represented God’s unseen presence’ in the Tabernacle (Meyers 1996b:589-590). The tree of life (or sacred tree) structure is illustrated in the six branches that extended from the side of the lampstand (the central shaft/branch) – three on one side and three on the other side (Ross 2006:101-102; cf James 1966:viii; cf 4.3.1.2b). Three cups in the shape of almond flowers adorned each branch (Ex 25:31-40; 37:17-24; Ross 2006:101). The seven lamps set up on each of the branches and the central shaft of the lampstand illuminated the Holy Place (Ex 25:37; Ross 2006:101-102).³³¹ Pure olive oil provided the lamps with fuel (Ex 27:20-21). The priests tended to the lamps which they lit at night and extinguished in the morning to clean and refill them with oil (Ex 30:7-8; Lv 24:3-4; Meyers 1992b:141-143). The lampstand in the Tabernacle is believed to function symbolically as a tree of life (James 1966:vii; Wenham 1994:401; Wenham 1994:401; Ross 2006:102) that indicated the perpetuity of life (Ross 2006:100-102; (Dt 28:1-14).

Special trees play an important role in Judges (see 4.3.1.2b; cf 2.2.3.1a). They are closely associated with the acquisition of divine knowledge (cf Jdg 9:6, 37) and rule (cf Jdg 9:7-15) Trees are places of divine revelation and instruction (Jdg 4:5; 6:11-19; 9:6, 37). The author/s reports that special trees may confer the idea of receiving counsel from YHWH (Jdg 4:5) or engaging in ‘pagan’ or Canaanite divination practises (tree of knowledge of good and evil [cf Gn 2:17]) (Jdg 6:11; 9:6, 27). It is likely that the palm tree of Deborah would have been regarded as a ‘tree of life’ (cf 2.2.3.1a) According to the *NIV*, the Hebrew word טָרֵף – *šāqêd* (almond tree) sounds similar to טָרַף – *šōqêd* (to watch) (cf Jr 1:11-12). The lampstand’s depiction in Exodus suggests that it was skillfully fashioned to resemble an almond tree, symbolizing God’s unseen presence as He diligently oversees the welfare of His people and ensures the realization of His divine purposes for them. It is possible that the authors of Judges believed that the lampstand, with its flower-shaped cups on each branch, symbolized the assurance that YHWH would fulfill His promise to safeguard His people (see 2.2.5) even if they were a community prone to idolatry.

4.5.6.5 *The Holy of Holies*

a. The Ark of the Covenant

In the book of Judges, specifically in chapter 20 verses 27-28, the Ark of the Covenant makes an appearance at Bethel. This occurs when the Israelites turn to YHWH for guidance in their war

³³¹ Watson (1992:253-255) comments that the seven lamps of the lampstand in the Tabernacle are identified as the seven stars of planets (or angels).

effort against the Benjamites. The reason for this conflict stems from a group of Benjamites who had committed a heinous act by violating the concubine of a Levite in Judges 19. In response, the leaders of the Israelites gather at Mizpah (Jdg 20:1) and demand that the Benjamites hand over the perpetrators. However, the Benjamites refuse to comply, leading the Israelites to declare war against them. The Ark of the Covenant seemingly holds significant importance in securing victory in the battle against the Benjamites (cf Jdg 20:28). However, the Ark apparently was designed for a different purpose.

The blueprint for the mysterious Ark of the Covenant was given to the Israelites at Mount Sinai (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:105; Leeming 2005; cf Scharfstein 2008:227; Ryken, Wilhoit and Longman 2010:963; MacArthur 2021:109).³³² The Ark of the Covenant was made to contain the sacred tablets of stone on which the Ten Commandments are inscribed (cf Ex 24:12; 25:21; Leeming 2005; Scharfstein 2008:227; Watts 2016b:22). It was, however, a second set of stone tablets that was placed inside the Ark (Dt 10:1-2) when the original tablets were destroyed (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:105).

During his forty-day stay on Mount Sinai (Van der Kam 2010:25), YHWH instructed Moses to construct the Ark of the Covenant and to place inside it ‘the tablets of the covenant of the law’ that YHWH would give him (Ex 25:16; see also Ex 24:12). In Exodus 24:12, YHWH had instructed Moses to come up Mount Sinai where He would give him the stone tablets. Exodus 31:8 relates that when YHWH had finished speaking to Moses, He gave him ‘the two tablets of the law’ that were engraved by YHWH, ‘the finger of God’ (see also Ex 32:15). Exodus 32:15 describes Moses coming from the mountain ‘with the two tablets of the law in his hands’ engraved on both sides with God’s writing. Berlin and Brettler (2004:163) state that stone was customarily utilized for ‘permanent inscriptions such as royal and ceremonial inscriptions, boundary inscriptions and treaties’ and the tablets may have looked like square stone tablets big enough to contain the entire Decalogue (or the Ten Commandments) written on both sides of the tablets (see also Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:105; see 2.3.2.1).³³³ Having descended the mountain to join the early Israelites, Moses discovers the celebrations surrounding the golden calf and in his anger smashed the tablets to pieces (Ex 32:15). Walton, Matthews and Chavalas (2000:116) remark that the breaking of the tablets, although done in anger, also symbolized the ‘severance of a covenant.’ In Exodus 34:2, YHWH writes the Ten Commandments on a second set of stone tablets as well and this

³³² The Hebrew words *tebah* and *aron*, both of which denote a ‘box’ or ‘chest’, are translated as ‘ark’ in the Old Testament (Porter 1996:70; cf Seow 1992:386; see also Le Roux 2009:114). *Tebah* is used for Noah’s ark (Gn 6-9) and *aron* is used for the Ark of the Covenant and designates a ‘coffin’ (Gn 50:26) and a ‘chest’ (2 Ki 12:9) but it is usually a designator for the Ark of the Covenant (Porter 1996:70).

³³³ Walton, Matthews and Chavalas (2000:105) observe that ‘there is no certainty about what was written on the stone tablets, although the tradition that it is the Ten Commandments is very old.’

action characterizes the primary similarity between the first and second set of stone tablets (Dt 10:4-5; cf Ex 34:1, 28; Watts 2016b:23).

The making of a second set of stone tablets apparently reenacts the covenant between YHWH and the Israelites (cf Ex 32:19).³³⁴ This is an action that will be carried out in Judges on multiple occasions. In the book of Deuteronomy, there are several instances that suggest a violation of the covenant once the Israelites enter the land that was promised to them (Dt 31:16, 29; 32:15-19; cf Dt 4:25; 6:14; 8:14; 13:1-2). The authors of Judges document the Israelites' fulfillment of these foreshadowings and the repeated restoration of the covenant (Jdg 2:1-3; 10-19; 3:5-7, and so on).

In addition to the two stone tablets of the Ten Commandments, the Ark of the Covenant also contained a jar of manna (Ex 16:32) and Aaron's budding staff (Nm 17:10) (see Friedman 1980:241-248; Abrahams 2007b:418-421; Harris, RW 2011:117:123; cf Sha 2018:146). The jar of manna was a sacred reminder of YHWH's provision in the wilderness when He fed the Israelites with manna for forty years which they ate until they reached Canaan (Scharfstein 2008:202). Aaron's budding staff (Nm 17:1-13) is connected with the tree of life (Kugel 1998:792; cf Evans 2009:171). Despite the abundance of symbolism associated with these sacred items, upon entering Canaan, the Israelites demonstrated a marked lack of respect for these objects that served as reminders of their covenant with God. They reversed the profound symbolic significance that these items held. This can be observed in the accounts written by the author/s of Judges, which detail the oppression (Jdg 2:10-19; 3:8, 12-14; 4:3, etcetera), impoverishment (Jdg 6:1-6), and loss of life (Jdg 20) experienced by the Israelites.

b. Symbolism, function, parallels

i. Symbolism

In addition to being crafted from exquisite materials that showcased its aesthetic appeal as a sacred artifact, the Ark of the Covenant possessed a profound spiritual significance that distinguished it as a truly sacred object of YHWH's (see below). Consequently, it can be inferred that the author/s of Judges viewed the exploitation of a deeply revered sacred object by the Israelites for their own self-serving purposes as sacrilegious acts against YHWH Himself. The Benjamites are equitably punished as predicted in Judges 20:28, by YHWH, for the heinous act they committed in Judges

³³⁴ There are differences between the two sets of tablets that comprise their creation. The first set of tablets was made and inscribed by YHWH and given to Moses on top of Mount Sinai which was taken down to the people (Ex 32:15). Berlin and Brettler (2004:191) comment that Moses spent forty days and forty nights on Mount Sinai similar to when he received the first tablets (Ex 34:28; see also Ex 24:18). The second set was made by Moses at the foot of Mount Sinai and taken up the mountain to YHWH (Ex 34:4). Berlin and Brettler (2004:191) aver that in view of Exodus 34:1 and Deuteronomy 10:4 it appears that YHWH wrote down the Ten Commandments on the second set of tablets as He did on the first tablets (Ex 24:12; 25:16). However, Exodus 34:28 also points to Moses inscribing the Ten Commandments on the second set of tablets.

19 since YHWH is a God of justice. The Benjamites could have handed over the perpetrators of the crime as they were requested but they refused and instead launched a full scale war that nearly eradicated their own existence (Jdg 20:13-14; 21:6-7). Despite the presence of the *Urim* and *Thummim* and the Ark of the Covenant, the distressing consequences resulting from the Israelites' ill-advised choices are evident. These include the tragic loss of lives, both men and women, as well as innocent children (Jdg 21:10-12; 19-23). Additionally, the mistreatment of women in providing them as wives to the Benjamites further contributes to the overall distressing nature of these events (Jdg 21:12, 23). The vow of the Israelites not to give their daughters as wives to the Benjamites could have been reversed. Throughout the book of Judges, the author/s repeatedly highlight the redemptive and merciful nature of YHWH by consistently rescuing the Israelites, despite their violation of the covenant. However, it is noteworthy that the author/s of Judges choose to conclude the narrative on a rather troubling note, which may suggest that the elders and leaders were more concerned with winning the war against the Benjamites at all cost. As a result, they either neglected to seek guidance from YHWH on how to provide wives for the Benjamites or deliberately disregarded His instructions.

The Ark of the Covenant was a gold-encrusted container of acacia wood, 3.75 feet long and 2.25 feet wide and high (Ex 25:10-22; 37:1-9; Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:106). It had four gold-covered rings attached to the sides for the insertion of two poles also overlaid with gold that were used to carry the Ark and to protect it from the touch of all but the High Priest (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:106). It had four gold-covered rings affixed to the sides for the insertion of two poles that were likewise covered in gold that were used to transport the Ark and guard it from being touched by anybody but the High Priest (see 4.5.6.4a) (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:106).

The profound spiritual aspects of the Ark of the Covenant is revealed below and further exemplify the early Israelites disregard and lack of respect for this remarkable symbol of YHWH's power and presence:

The cover of the Ark of the Covenant was made of pure gold with a cherub at each end of the sacred object. The cherubim faced each other, looking down at the atonement cover – the *kappōret*. Their wings were spread out and upwards over the cover (Ex 25:10-22). The place between the cherubim above the cover was called the Mercy Seat (symbolic also of part of the throne of God) (Ex 25:22) and the Ark was thus associated with the presence of YHWH. Walton (2019:349-354) states that the overarchingly important cult statues in the ancient Near Eastern religions had no parallel in aniconic early Israel (cf 2.3.2.1; 8.2.1). The Ark of the Covenant which stood at the

centre of Israelite sacred space represented a part of the heavenly throne of YHWH, but it was not a vessel for the divine essence such as the statues of the gods were (Walton 2019:349-354).³³⁵

The Ark has various designations, and it is associated with the divine name: ‘YHWH of hosts who sits enthroned upon the cherubim’ (1 Sm 4:4; cf 2 Sm 6:2; 1 Chr 13:6) which is probably the most complete and oldest ceremonial name for the Ark (Seow 1992:386-393). Other associations of the Ark with the divine name are: ‘Ark of God (2 Sm 6:2),’ ‘Ark of YHWH (Jdg 20:27; 2 Sm 6:19),’ ‘Ark of the Lord of all the earth’ (Jos 3:11), and so on (Seow 1992:386; see also Walton Matthews Chavalas 2000:115 and Porter 1996:70). Seow (1992:386) mentions that scholars suggest that it was only at Shiloh that the name of the Ark was changed from ‘Ark of God’ to ‘Ark of YHWH’. However, the names ‘Ark of God’ and ‘Ark of YHWH’ were probably used interchangeably (cf Dt 10:8; 31:9; Jos 3:3; 1 Ki 2:26).

Deuteronomy 10 provides a different version of the Ark of the Covenant’s construction. According to this narrative, Moses received the instructions from YHWH and made a simplified Ark (an ordinary wooden box) from *shittim* (acacia) wood without any gold or cherubim (Le Roux 2009:114).

ii. Function

The characteristic feature of the Ark of the Covenant was that it could be carried around (Porter 1996:70). Its main purpose, however, was to house the tablets and act as a footstool for YHWH's throne, thereby demonstrating an earthly connection between God and the Israelites (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:106). The Ark of the Covenant is thus given the function of the bearer of Covenant or the Ten Commandments (Le Roux 2009:115).

Walton, Matthews and Chavalas explain that in ancient Egypt it was customary to store important documents such as international treaties beneath the feet of a deity. According to Walton, Matthews and Chavalas (2000:106), the ‘footstool/receptacle combination’ is in line with Egyptian practice. During Egyptian festivals, images of the gods were frequently carried on portable barques. In paintings these are depicted as boxes, practically the size of the Ark, carried about on poles and either decorated with guardian creatures or flanked by them (Walton, Matthew and Chavalas 2000:106; cf Porter 1996:70). A chest of comparable size with pole rings was discovered in the tomb of Tutankhamen (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:106; see Figure 4.20).

³³⁵ The technology involved in the making of the Ark of the Covenant and the lampstand has been lost. Meyers (1992b:141-143) observes that the technology involved in shaping the complex ‘appurtenance’ of the lampstand is unknown. According to Exodus the knowledge and skill was given by the Spirit of YHWH who inhabited the craftsmen and workers (Ex 31:1-11). It can be imagined that this knowledge was kept secret and then eventually lost.



Figure 4.20 Tutankhamun's chest (Eichler 2016)

Scholars have found parallels for the Ark of the Covenant in various other objects in the ancient Near East (George 2009:61). Seow (1992:386-393) observes that the Ark has been likened to the procession sailing vessels of the ancient Egyptians which held the statues of the gods, the sarcophagus of Osiris and the Babylonian Tammuz chest. The Ark has also been compared to the step shrine at Petra and the ceramic model temples found at Megiddo (Seow 1992:386-393).

The Ark of the Covenant is described as a meeting place: above the cover between the two cherubim that are over the Ark of the Covenant (see directly below) (Ex 25:22). In the pre-monarchic period, the Ark of the Covenant frequently led the Israelites in battle (cf Jos 3:6, 8, 11-17; 4:10-18; 6:4-13; Jdg 20:27-28; 1 Sm 4:3-5; Porter 1996:70; see also 4.5.6.4a) and since it was 'the symbol of YHWH [presence]' it possessed a special supernatural power (insertion mine; Seow 1992:386-393; see also Arnold 2003:92). As indicated before, the early Israelites believed that the Ark of the Covenant represented the presence of YHWH (McEntire 1999:72; Grindheim 2013:59; Grudem and Allison 2015; Gallaty 2017:414).

Judges 20:27 demonstrates that the Ark of the Covenant came to represent YHWH's presence in early Israelite worship (Gallaty 2017:414). Gallaty asserts that the Israelites had a propensity to believe that YHWH would demonstrate His power in battle simply by having the Ark of the Covenant there (cf Jdg 20:27-29). However, the narrative of 1 Samuel 4 indicates that the latter concept was not always realised when the Ark of the Covenant is captured by the Philistines. Additionally, as stated before (see 4.5.6.4a), Judges (1; 3:10; 4; 6:8, 6:34; 14:6, etcetera) indicate that YHWH miraculously fought the wars of the Israelites against their enemies without the Ark of the Covenant in attendance.

Nonetheless, the early Israelites were never instructed to replace YHWH's real presence for rites and symbols (Gallaty 2017:414). It is likely that the people presumptuously believed that the representation of God's presence ensured His presence and blessing. Consequently, when YHWH appears to the early Israelites (Jdg 2:1-4), Gideon (Jdg 6:11) and the parents of Samson (Jdg 13:3-20), God demonstrates that He is in 'sovereign control of creation and history and that 'He has the freedom and right to' (Gallaty 2017:414) act as He will. Thompson (2016:29) notes that the

understanding of Deuteronomy regarding the Ark of the Covenant was that it was a receptacle for the tablets of the law (Dt 10:1-4; see also above) more than it was a symbol of YHWH's presence. It is probably this muted viewpoint of Deuteronomy that the author/s of Judges wish to convey regarding the presence of YHWH (see also the discussion earlier in this segment). The Ark was powerful enough to kill individuals when they looked inside the chest and by its unauthorized handling (cf 1 Sm 6:19; 2 Sm 6:6-7; Porter 1996:70).

iii. Parallels

The positioning of mystical objects such as the Ark of the Covenant was certain to guarantee Israelite military victory (cf Jos 3; 4). But, as stated before, this is not the case in 1 Samuel 4. In 1 Samuel 4:3 the Israelites realize that they are losing the war against the Philistines and requested that the Ark of the Covenant be brought from Shiloh. The Israelites had suffered a heavy defeat at the hands of the Philistines and hoped that the Ark of the Covenant would win them the next battle (1 Sm 4:1-3). The Ark of the Covenant was accompanied by the priests, Phineas and Hophni, who brought it to the Israelite camp at Ebenezer (1 Sm 4:4-5).

When they heard that the Ark of the Covenant had come into the Israelites' camp, the Philistines greatly feared. They believed that a god had come into the camp. Despite their fear the Philistines fought hard and the Israelites lost the second battle as well. The Ark is captured by the Philistines, and Hophni and Phinehas who attended the Ark also died (1 Sm 4:10-11). By manipulating the Ark (1 Sm 4:5-9), the early Israelites show their lack of respect and care for the Ark of the Covenant (Arnold 2003:92) similar to the Israelites in Judges 20:27-28 (see above). Arnold remarks that the Israelites' manipulation of God causes problems for them. 'Because of the nations' sin and lack of righteous leadership, their action only results in more loss and humiliation (1 Sm 4:10-11; Arnold 2003:92).³³⁶

³³⁶ The role of a very distinct African cultural object has been compared to that of the Ark of the Covenant: a specific was 'magic' drum known as the *ngoma lungundu* of the Lemba people – the Black Jews – in Southern Africa. Le Roux (2009:104) 'draws parallels' 'between the story of the *ngoma lungundu* – a drum used in Venda and Lemba tradition – 'and that of the Ark of the Covenant.' The Lemba is described as a 'specific group in Southern Africa with distinctive traditions related to Israelite ancestry (Le Roux 2009:102, 104-105). According to Le Roux (2009:102), the oral history of the Lemba has important details about the prominent role their priestly family played when they travelled from the North into the Arabian Peninsula and ultimately into Africa. The *ngoma lungundu* ('the drum which thunders') played a function remarkably similar to that of the Ark of the Covenant when the Lemba forged their way into Africa as traders (Le Roux 2009:102). Le Roux (2009:105) describes the *ngoma lungundu*, a magic drum, as a 'sacred Venda object' which was carried for kings of the Lemba tribe 'by the priestly family of the Lemba.'

According to Le Roux (2009:116), the Ark similar to the *ngoma* was imbued with 'supernatural powers' and both were emblematic of the divine presence. The Ark was a symbol of victory that was carried into battle like the *ngoma* as a weapon (Le Roux 2009:116). Le Roux goes on to say that sacred objects of the Lemba were placed inside the *ngoma*. The Ark of the Covenant as previously discussed contained the tablets on which were inscribed the Ten Commandments. Another article, as mentioned above, which was placed inside the Ark of the Covenant also represented the Israelites' associations with the sacred, was Aaron's staff. The Ark of the Covenant was, protected and carried about by the Levites, throughout the wilderness wanderings until it was set up in the Holy of Holies in the

1 Samuel 4:1-3 is a probable parallel for a battle fought by the early Israelites in Judges 20:26-28. The tribes, however, are engaged in combat with their fellow tribesmen, the Benjamites (see above, 4.5.6.5bi), and have been defeated twice by them (Jdg 20:19-24). Previously, the Israelites had enquired of YHWH at Bethel on two occasions (Jdg 20:18, 23) and each time the war outcome was not what the Israelites expected: the Benjamites first ‘cut down’ twenty two thousand and then eighteen thousand Israelite men (Jdg 20:21, 25). Presumably after these massive defeats, and in the tradition of the Ark of the Covenant leading the Israelites (Nm 10:33; 22; Jos 3:6), the Israelites requested that the Ark of the Covenant be brought to Bethel (Jdg 20:27-28; cf 1 Sm 4:3-4; Van Der Toorn 2018:41; cf Schwartz 2019:506-514; Ulanowski 2016:75-75; see also 4.5.6.4a; 4.5.6.5bi).³³⁷

The Ark of the Covenant was accompanied by the direct blood descendants of the ‘head of the priesthood’ (cf Jdg 20:27-28; 1 Sm 4:3-4). It is probable that the Israelites perceived of it as a device with divine powers as a means of enquiring of YHWH (Jeffers 1996:61-62; cf 4.5.6.5i). According to Van Der Toorn (2018:41) the Ark of the Covenant temporarily left Shiloh for a specific purpose such as divination at Bethel (Jdg 20:27; cf M’Clintock and Strong 2020:829; see also 4.5.6.4a). As stated before, it is most likely that the Ark of the Covenant was accompanied by the priest, Phineas, who ministered before it and who would have enquired of the LORD about it on behalf of the Israelites (Jdg 20:28). Previously, the Israelites had enquired of YHWH at Bethel on two occasions (Jdg 20:18, 23) and each time the war outcome was not what the Israelites expected, the Benjamites first ‘cut down’ twenty two thousand and then eighteen thousand Israelite men (Jdg 20:21, 25). Upon receiving a third war outcome, the Israelites once again launch an attack on the Benjamites which as Judges 20:29-48 reveal is successful.

4.5.6.6 *The courtyard*

a. The altar of burnt offering

As discussed before in this chapter (see 4.3.1.1a), throughout the patriarch Abraham’s travels in Canaan, he built altars (at Shechem [Gn 12:7], on the hills between Bethel and Ai [Gn 12:8], at

Tabernacle at Shiloh (Le Roux 2009:117).

The ‘priestly clan of the Buba’ who led the Lemba out of Israel guarded and carried the *ngoma*. Similar to the Ark, the *ngoma* pointed them in the direction to go and signaled where to camp and when to break camp. Le Roux adds that if the functional parallels were notable the contrasts in form were important. The Ark appears to have been a type of ‘box, coffer, or chest’ while the *ngoma* was a drum even although it also contained things. It served as a musical instrument in addition to a ritual object (Kruger 1996:57; Le Roux 2009:117). That the Ark was a drum has never been suggested. Unlike the *ngoma*, which was only composed of wood, the Ark was (according to the description in Exodus) built of wood but covered in gold sheets (Le Roux 2009:117).

³³⁷ The Ark of the Covenant was eventually lost when the First Temple was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BC. Clues about the whereabouts of the Ark of the Covenant: According to the Book of Maccabees, the prophet Jeremiah hid the Ark of the Covenant in a cave on Mount Nebo. In modern times, Ethiopians Jews have claimed that the Ark of the Covenant is hidden in one of their sanctuaries (Leeming 2005). The Book of Revelation places the Ark of the Covenant in the Temple of God (Rv 11:19; see also Seow 1992:386-393).

Hebron [Gn 13:18) offering sacrifices, thereby displaying his devotion to YHWH (Millard 1992:35-41). Altars, thus, were holy places (see also 4.3.1.1b).

Rather than signifying places of death and destruction, altars were places that symbolized deliverance and restoration of life. Altars are sacred spaces or indicative of them in the ancient Near East (see Vivante 1994:163-168) and in early Israel. ‘They provide a place for the worshipper to make offerings to the deity and experience his presence’ (Jdg 2:5; 6:17-19; 13:19; 20:26; Miglio et al (eds) 2020; cf Hundley 2020:166). The kind of offering for which the altar was built determined the form of the altar (Miglio et al [eds] 2020).

The altar of burnt offering which stood in the courtyard of the Tabernacle, for example, was square with each corner shaped into a horn (Ex 40:29). The horns of the altar symbolized the divine power of YHWH (Gane 2019:8). Nash (1997:391) observes that in the Bible a horn is used symbolically to designate ‘some sense of power.’ ‘One’s power may be described as a horn’ (Dt 33:17), ‘or the one possessing the power may be called a horn’ (Nash 1997:391). YHWH may exalt or cut off ‘one’s horn’ (Ps 75:10; Nash 1997:391). YHWH may also cut off the horns of the altar which symbolized His rejection of His people’s ‘cultus’ and their loss of His divine protection (Nash 1997:391). The blood applied to horns of the altar of burnt offering was for the propitiation of the sins of the early Israelites (Ex 30:10; Lv 4:7, 18, 25). The hope of YHWH’s people rest in Him as their ‘horn of salvation’ (2 Sm 22:3; Ps 18:2, 3) or in YHWH’s raising up ‘a horn of salvation’ to deliver them (Ps 132:17; cf Lk 1:69; Nash 1997:391). Clinging to the horns of the altar might provide asylum and mercy from YHWH (1 Ki 2:28; Nash 1997:391).

In the ancient Near East, the horns of an altar are emblems of the gods (Gane 2019:9; cf Nash 1997:391). They are also found on top of shrines and the headdresses of the gods (Gane 2019:9). The horns of an altar represented a potent animal such as a bull or a ram and denoted power and force (Gane 2019:9; cf Nash 1997:391). Regardless of the type (Meyers [1996c:25-27] mentions stone, earthen and metal altars) altars served as a liminal space between the divine and human realms (Miglio et al [eds] 2020) and sacred places where contact with the deity may be established.

The altar of burnt offering that stood in the courtyard of the sacred sanctuary occupied a special ‘holy place’ similar to the ‘holiness’ in the Tabernacle that ‘could be approached only by priests’ although ‘non-priests could be present in the courtyard’ (Meyers 1996c:25-27). The Hebrew word for altar is *mizbēah* which is derived from the Hebrew root for ‘slaughter for the purpose of sacrifice’ (Haak 1992:161-167; Meyers 1996:c25-27) and denotes ‘a place of sacrifice’ (Meyers 1996c:25-27). Meyers (1996c:25-27) remarks that although the term ‘altar’ comes from the pre-biblical tradition of animal slaughter, by the time it was used in connection with biblical ritual, its early relationship with sacrifice had been extended. Thus, any surface used to make any type of offering to a deity might be referred to as an altar (Meyers 1996c:25-27; cf 4.3.1.1bi-iii). In the Old Testament, altars were used for a variety of oblations, including the burning of incense alone

as well as grains mixed with oil/and or salt and incense and wine, fruits, four-legged creatures and birds (Meyers 1996c:25-27). As mentioned before (see 4.3.1.1b), the Angel of YHWH appears to Gideon (3.2.2.1b; 3.3.4; 3.4.4.1b; 4.3.1.1bii; 5.3.2.2d;) and the parents of Samson (Jdg 6:11-26; 13:10-20; see 3.2.2.1.b; 3.3.4; 3.4.4.1c; 8.5.4.1). Both visitations involved a burnt offering of meat and grain (bread) sacrificed on a rock altar (Meyers 1996c:25-27; cf 4.3.1.1bii-iii). Haak (1992:162-167) is of the opinion that the altar in Judges 6:26 was on a rooftop. King and Stager (2001:35) observe that the roof (of dwellings such as the four-room house) could indeed serve as a place of worship (cf Jr 19:13; 32:29; 2 Ki 23:12).

The portable square-shaped altar of burnt offering was 4.5 feet high and 7.5 feet wide and long. The altar of burnt offering was made with acacia wood overlaid with bronze and each of its four corners was shaped into a horn (Ex 27:1-8). A grating was made for the altar, ‘a bronze network’ with a ring at each corner of the network. The bronze network was put under the ledge of the altar, half way up the altar. Poles of acacia wood covered with bronze were inserted in the rings to carry the altar about (Ex 27:1-8). Acacia was a hardy desert tree ‘found in the Sinai with extremely hard wood’ (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:105). The wood and bronze construction of the altar of burnt offering made it both fireproof and portable (Edwards 2010:79). During a burnt offering or sin offering the priest would dip his finger in blood of the bull or goat that was slaughtered and put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering (see above) while the rest of the blood was poured out at the base of the altar (Lv 4: 16-18, 25; Tsedaka and Sullivan 2013:235). Kellogg (2020:85) asserts that the blood for the sin offering is applied to the most conspicuous and sacred part of the altar of burnt offering, its horns (see above).

The utensils of the altar were also made of bronze (Ex 27:1-8). The altar was elevated and stood on a mound of earth or stones and reached by means of ramp (Ex 20:26). The large altar was the first of the sacred furnishings to be seen upon entering the courtyard. The altar of burnt offering that stood in the sacred courtyard was the culmination of a long tradition of building altars and making a sacrificial meat offering unto God (see Gn 4:4; 8:20). Although altars were primarily associated with temples, altars were constructed at many other sacred areas (see Haak 1992:162-167) such as at Bochim (Jdg 2:5), the altar/rock under the oak in Ophrah (Jdg 6:19), altar called ‘the LORD is Peace’ (Jdg 6:24), the *bamot* in Judges 6:26 and the altar/rock in Judges 13:19. Altars were discerned as physical points of contact with the unseeable divine realm (Haak 1992:162-167; cf Meyers 1996c:25-27).

The great importance placed on the altar and sacrificial offerings for contact with God and bringing forth His presence are made redundant in these narratives of Judges 6 and 13. YHWH did not need an altar to communicate with His people. Apparently, the sacrifices offered in Judges 6 and 13 were to confirm the identity of the Angel of the LORD (cf Jdg 6:11-25). Leviticus 1:17 narrates that only certain animals could be sacrificed as a burnt offering – those animals that were considered clean and lawful. Altars in the ancient Near East, such as incense altars, could be inscribed

(Nielsen 1986:112; Rollston 2010:62-63). The altar in the courtyard of the Tabernacle was unadorned and uninscribed (cf Ex 20:25).

The altar of burnt offering in the courtyard of the *Miskhan* has its parallel in the archaeological record: the four-horned altar discovered in the vicinity of Shiloh (see Figure 4:21) and the fragment of an altar found during excavations at Shiloh that corresponds to the sacrificial altar at the Tabernacle (Windle 2019; Borschel-Dan 2020; see Figure 4:21). Smaller four-horned incense stands, and the larger four-horned altar discovered at Beersheba also attest to the reality of the horned altar used in the sacrificial system (Haak 1992:162-167).³³⁸



Figure 4.21 Fragment of altar discovered at Shiloh (Borschel-Dan 2020)

Van Koppen and Van der Toorn (1999:23) mention that ‘the deification of cult objects in the ancient Near East was a common phenomenon.’ Altars were no exception since it was believed that objects in close proximity to the divine presence were imbued with mystical qualities themselves and could become items of worship. The deification of altars is hardly ever mentioned in the Old Testament (Van Koppen and Van der Toorn (1999:23). The altar of burnt offering as previously mentioned was a holy place but its numinous associations were attributed to YHWH who alone had to be worshipped.

b. The laver

The Hebrew word for laver – *kiyyôr* – was a purification ritual object filled with water for the priests to use to wash their hands and feet (Ex 30:18, 28; 31:9; 35:16; 38:8; 39:39; 40:7, 11, 30; Lev 8:11; see Meyers 1992c:241-242). There is no mention of this purification ritual in the Book of Judges, however, it most probably did take place since purification rituals were important rites of the Yahwistic religion as it was in the ancient Near East. The absence of any mention by the author/s regarding this matter could potentially suggest the Israelites’ inclination towards idolatry and the deviation from the expected covenantal norms at the Tabernacle.

³³⁸ Haak (1992:162-167) provides more details regarding the various construction materials used in making altars, activities associated with altars and archaeological evidence for altars (see also Meyers 1996c:27-28).

The large bronze laver or basin stood in the courtyard between the altar of the burnt offering and the Tabernacle proper (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:114). The laver was observable from the east entrance to the courtyard and its water used in the purification rite of the priesthood (Ex 30:17-21; Tigay 2004:180). This purification rite involved the washing of the hands and the feet of the priest (Ex 30:21; Tigay 2004:180).³³⁹ The cleansing of the feet symbolized the sacred ground of the Tabernacle complex and the cleansing of the hands symbolized the holiness of the ceremonial objects that were touched. In this way, the priests are consecrated and could fulfill their ceremonial duties. Washing the feet and hands also prevented the spread of street dust (from the feet) and bacteria (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:114). The tradition of the laver and associated rituals at the Tabernacle is also reflected in the Canaanite cult (as well as the Israelite rituals) that flourished at Arad. The complex consisted of twin temples, a stone altar, a laver and several other structures (Richard 1996:47).

The laver was made with the bronze from the mirrors of the women who served at the entrance to the Tabernacle (Ex 38:8; 1 Sm 2:22; Meyers 1992c:241-242). The mirrors were Egyptian in design and were made of a round golden-coloured metal and with a bronze handle (Patterson and Kelly [eds] 2011:202). Archaeologists have discovered many of these mirrors in Egypt (Patterson and Kelly [eds] 2011:202; see also Sha 2018:150). Metal lavers from Megiddo and Ras Shamra as well as some Cypriot bases may provide evidence of what lavers looked like (Meyers 1992c:241-242). The laver and all the other furnishings of the Tabernacle were anointed with a special oil that consecrated them setting them apart for use in the sacred ceremonies (Ex 30:22-29; 40:9-11). All who touched the furnishings were made holy by the sacred oil (Ex 30:29). The recipe for the anointing oil given in Exodus (Ex 30:23-24) was only allowed for sacral use.

According to Meyers (1992c:241-242) the laver may not have been a ritual object but they were essential for priestly purification and possibly also had 'symbolic value.' The Hebrew term *kiyyôr* for the laver has been associated with the Akkadian *kiuri* or *ki-ùr* with the meaning of 'copper caldron' (Meyers 1992c:241-242). This term may go back to a Sumerian word that means 'foundation of the earth' which denotes the laver as having been included in the use of the cosmic terminology in the ancient Near East regarding sacred places (Meyers 1992c:241-242).³⁴⁰

4.6 CONCLUSION

The information regarding sacred space discussed in this chapter is not extensively reflected in the Book of Judges. Nevertheless, it may be inferred that the many components of sacred space examined in this chapter were fundamental elements of the mindset informing the author/s of Judges as

³³⁹ Ritual purification practices in the ancient Near East find a parallel in the modern day the ceremonial ablution of Muslims before they say their prayers which include the washing of the hands and the feet.

³⁴⁰ Meyers (1992c:24-241) in particular mentions that if the Hebrew term for laver goes back to the Sumerian word that means 'foundation of the earth', the laver may have been part of the cosmic terminology that 'characterizes many aspects of the vocabulary used for the Jerusalem temple.'

they all encompassed their God, YHWH in one way or another. As a result, the concept of sacred space and its features can be seen as covenantal and monotheistic in nature (although not always in practice) which represent those predominant aspects that emphasize the worldview of the author/s of Judges as also explained below.

The selection of Shiloh as the primary religious centre of the Israelites took place in the setting of the polytheistic ancient Near East. There are numerous parallels between the Israelites' and ancient Near Eastern societies' understanding of sacred space as the domain of the divine, serving as a boundary between the sacred and mundane realms. The Tabernacle and the temple were regarded as the axis mundi of the world of the Israelites and the ancient Near East respectively. People lived their lives knowing that they are pleasing the divine by worshipping at the proper place where they offered their sacrifices preventing chaos and maintaining order by appeasing the divine. The early Israelite also worshipped YHWH in Bethel, Mizpah, Hebron and while sharing the cities with their Canaanite neighbours in Jerusalem and Shechem.

The temple, being sacred architecture, and the residence of the god, also was a very physical place primarily which existed for the benefit of the king and reinforcing his rule. The Temple served to uphold the established hierarchical systems prevalent in the ancient Near Eastern societies. It could function as place of commerce where the king and the elites could acquire wealth in the form of the people's sacrifices and offerings. Moreover, the temple was where the needs of the gods were met by their devotees who were mostly prevented from coming into contact with the divine image resident in the temple. The temple enabled a form of worship that emphasized the reciprocal receiving of material needs between the gods and people and the pervasive fertility rites that took place.

Deuteronomy 2:4, on the other hand, reads: 'You shall not worship your God in this way.' Consequently, mono-YHWH worship via the covenantal laws and stipulations define the most important difference between Israelite and ancient Near Eastern sacred space. The Israelites' lives were ideally fashioned by means of an inimitable religion and all the mystical elements associated with that both at their official sacred sites and other places (see 4.3.1.1-4.3.1.3a-c) which would have been the case during cyclical covenantal restoration (cf Jdg 2:10-19; 3:11, 30; 5:31, etcetera).

In the worldview of the author/s of Judges mono-YHWH worship and covenantal allegiance should have defined Israelite sacred space which beneficially influenced their worship and daily lives. The Tabernacle and the Ark of the Covenant were essential to the Israelite religion and mindset because they symbolized that YHWH dwelled among His people. YHWH's sacred space ideally were places of covenantal relationship building where He meets the needs of His people and sanctifies them. In the mindset informing the author/s of Judges, the Tabernacle would have represented a bastion for mono-YHWH worship which symbolized the identity of the Israelites as the covenant people of YHWH and authenticated their religion. It would have been a visible

representation of the polemical worldview of the author/s since it was a testament of the Israelites' dedication to a sole God. However, the author/s frequently describe YHWH's presence external to Shiloh in the Book of Judges which showcases the idolatry of the Israelites and their deconsecrating of Shiloh and their Tabernacle (Jdg 2:10). Consequently, the author/s show that YHWH may act outside the prevalent cultural ideology that attributes the divine presence with a holy sanctuary. Sacred space is wherever YHWH's presence is, and both ritual space and the divine presence are approachable and accessible to the Israelites, but the author/s show that these aspects of the divine primarily function within a cycle of idolatry.

Many parallels also exist between the Israelites and non-Israelite selection of a sacred city, the sacred elements involved in these choices and the construction, location, orientation (to the four compass points) of a sanctuary and its furniture (see Zevit 2002:74-75). However, it is worth noting that although the aforesaid factors play an important role in the selection of sacred space and the construction of a temple or the Tabernacle by people, both the biblical worldview and ancient Near Eastern perspective ascribe divine guidance and instruction for people's choice of sacred space and the construction of a sacred sanctuary. Moses, for example, was given the blueprint for the construction of the Tabernacle by YHWH (Ex 25:40) and the Israelites were led by YHWH to set up the Tabernacle in Shiloh (Dt 12:5; Jos 18:1; Jdg 18:21; 21:19).

The sacred elements attributed to the Tabernacle are intended to glorify YHWH and represent His preferences for the shape, size and materials of the Tabernacle that are holy and pleasing to Him. They are not to be tainted by rites and perceptions of the ancient Near Eastern nation regarding the divine and sacred space (cf Dt 12:4). Israelite perceptions of sacred space display their uniqueness at Shiloh, as well as their other ritual spaces, the sacred elements that gave rise to the Tabernacle and assisted in its function, which all converged to shape and define the sacred landscape in Canaan as intensely associated with mono-YHWH and the sacred covenant of YHWH during cycles of covenantal restoration in the Book of Judges. This is primarily also what influences the worldview of the author/s of Judges.

CHAPTER FIVE

DIVINE COMMUNICATION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The major argument of this chapter posits that the function of divine communication in the Book of Judges extends beyond its role as a mere conduit for relaying messages between YHWH and the early Israelites, or between the Canaanite gods and the idolatrous Israelites. Therefore, this chapter posits that the supernatural contact that occurred between the early Israelites and YHWH or the Canaanite gods served not only as a means of transmitting messages, but also as a comprehensive religious mindset that deeply regulated both religious and secular conduct. Given the aforementioned context, this chapter will undertake an examination of the worldview presented in Judges, specifically focusing on the concept of divine communication as depicted in the text and its implications for understanding the mindset of the author/s. The following discussions will serve as points of analyses and illumination:

An examination of the meaning of divine communication as a specific way of life (see 5.2.1). The sanctioned divinatory devices and practices of the Israelites formed part of the Yahwistic religious tradition. Given their allegiance to the Canaanite deities, it may be inferred that they likely embraced the divinatory customs prevalent among the Canaanite civilization as well. What were these anti-covenantal divination techniques?

Since the archaeological record is largely quiet on Israelite divinatory practices in the pre-monarchic period, in instances where it is feasible or practical, the ancient Near Eastern divinatory practices discussed in this chapter may provide probable analogues to the divination practices of the Canaanites and the idolatrous early Israelites.

This chapter will deal specifically with divine communication in terms of the approved divinatory methods; prophecy, dreams, etcetera and non-approved divinatory methods, celestial divination, extispicy, and so on. Chapter Six will delve into a more comprehensive analysis of the manner in which YHWH communicated with the Israelites through His direct appearances, also known as theophanies, as exemplified in the Book of Judges.

5.2 DIVINE CONTACT

5.2.1 The meaning of divine communication

The concept of divine communication in the Book of Judges can be understood as a covenantal mode of existence, which inherently adheres to monotheistic principles (see also Chapters Two and Three). This is made clear by the way the author/s of the Book of Judges criticize the Israelites

for entering into covenants with the Canaanites and, therefore, not adhering to their own covenant with YHWH and for their idolatry throughout the narrative. The expectations that the author/s of Judges may have had of the Israelites in light of their pledge of loyalty to YHWH through the Sinai Covenant become evident in the following segment:

In the context of the covenantal relationship YHWH assumed the role of the patron God and sovereign King of the early Israelites. YHWH had made a commitment to fight their battles (see Chapter Two) and provide them with an abundant and successful life. It was required of the Israelites to mirror the divine attributes of YHWH by adhering to the stipulations of the covenant and demonstrating this commitment via their conduct, commonly referred to as ‘walking with God.’ The Israelites were prohibited by their covenant from entering into any cultic, marriage, or trade relationships with the Canaanites (see Chapter Two). The Israelites, however, acted in opposition to their covenant which resulted in their engagement with the Canaanite deities and associated cultic practices that posed a threat to their covenantal relationship with YHWH and to their lifestyle (cf Jdg 3:5-6, etcetera; see also Chapters Two and Three).

5.2.1.1 ‘Walking’ with YHWH

Canaan is ‘the mountain’ of YHWH’s ‘inheritance’ and subsequently the land where YHWH, ‘plants’ His ‘image bearers’ – the Israelites. The religious mindset that informed the author/s of Judges, as it was expressed through the Sinai Covenant, advocated a continuous wholesome type of communication with YHWH. Judges 6:10 states that the Israelites dwelled in Canaan, the land of the Amorites. The word dwell יָשָׁבוּ – *yōšəḇîm* is derived from the Hebrew root verb יָשַׁב – *yashab* can also mean to endure.³⁴¹ The play on words is evident: the Israelites who dwell in the land would endure because YHWH is faithful to His promises even if the Israelites are not (cf 2.2.1.1; 2.2.2.1). Still YHWH wished that the Israelites ‘walked’ with Him which involved mirroring His image by being obedient to and following their covenant.³⁴² Considering the foregoing, the Israelites had no need to fear being surrounded by hostile nations who posed a threat to their existence, since YHWH would protect them (see Table 5.1) but they needed to continue to ‘walk’ with YHWH to maintain wholesome communication with Him.

Table 5.1: The Canaanite nations in Judges

Narrative	Nation/s
Judges 1:34-35	Amorites
Judges: 3:5 3:7 3:12	Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites Arameans (Cushan-Rishathaim, king of Aram-Naharaim) Moabites, Amalekites, Ammonites (Jdg 11:12-13)
Judges 6:1	Midianites
Judges 10:6; 13:5; 14-16	Philistines

³⁴¹ See Bible Hub 2023. *yashab*.

³⁴² As previously mentioned (see 2.2.5.8b) the early Israelites were the *tselem* (shades/shadows) of YHWH.

In light of the aforesaid ‘walking with YHWH,’ in a nutshell, involved the following aspects:

- Ruling as YHWH’s image bearers and establishing the covenantal lifestyle in Canaan.³⁴³ The Israelites were to carry out the command to ‘tread down’ the other gods by destroying their Canaanite high places (cf Jdg 2:2) and subsequently rule over Canaan, representing YHWH’s kingship in Canaan. The Hebrew word for ‘rule’ or ‘dominion’ – *rādāh* – in Genesis 1:28 (cf Lv 26:17; Nm 24:19; 1 Ki 4:24; Ps 68:27; Is 14:6; Ez 34:4) provides another aspect of the image of YHWH. *Rādāh* also means to prevail against or to tread down.³⁴⁴ Exactly what early humanity was to prevail against and tread down becomes clear in Judges when the Israelites were instructed to not serve the Canaanite gods and to utterly demolish the *bamot* of these gods (Ex 23; Jdg 2:1-3; cf Jdg 6:25-26). Genesis 3 makes it apparent that YHWH had foes, and the conflict between the early Israelites and the Canaanites (cf Jdg 11: 23-24) further symbolizes the struggle between YHWH and the gods of the Canaanites.
- Listen and obey to the (covenant) instructions given them. The Hebrew term *šāma*‘ (*shama/shema*) from which the verb ‘to hear’ is derived can also be interpreted as ‘to understand what one has heard’ (cf Gn 11:7, 42:23); that is, to listen to and understand (to an instruction given [Gn 2:16-17]) and by extension to heed or obey what has been said.³⁴⁵ The Israelites in Judges were similarly surrounded by the ‘voices’ of other peoples and the ‘voices’ of their gods (cf Jdg 2:1-3; 10-18; 3:5-7; 6:8-10; 8:33; 10:6-15).
- The Hebrew term *hāllak* – *hāllak* which is translated as ‘walking’ (Gn 3:8) is also used allegorically to described ‘one’s lifestyle’ (Ps 39:6; 119:45; Ez 18:9) ‘as well as a continued relationship with God.’³⁴⁶ Walking with YHWH, therefore, denotes a relationship between YHWH and the early Israelites but it is one that involves the rational mind (which includes the senses, affections and emotions) of the early Israelites (cf Gn 41:8; Jdg 8:3; Pr 16:32;

³⁴³ This was a radical concept in the ancient Near East since the mandate to rule over a nation belonged to the king. In Egypt, only the pharaohs had a divine mandate to rule and conquer since they originated from the gods themselves (Seevers 2013:111). Seevers remarks that the pharaoh was required to safeguard justice, truth, and the established order, including defending Egypt from invading barbarians with the country’s military. Early Israel and other countries to some extent shared these ideas (Seevers 2013:111). As king of the early Israelites, YHWH had appointed the early Israelites as His representatives to rule in the land (cf Dt 6:4-19; Jos 24:19-28).

³⁴⁴ See Bible Hub 2022. *radah*.

³⁴⁵ According to the Book of Genesis, YHWH announces His presence by means of a sound *qōwl* – sound or voice [*KJV*, *IVS* and *ASV*], that is, *‘ēlōhîm Yahweh* (אֱלֹהִים יְהוָה) calls out to Adam and Eve. Genesis 3:8 states that ‘the man and his wife’ heard (וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ) YHWH’s voice. Adam and Eve heard YHWH’s voice and understood His teachings (cf Gn 3:8-10; cf Gn 2:16-17). Similarly, YHWH apparently calls out the Israelites via Deuteronomy 6:4 which requires the early Israelites to hear (*shama*) and obey the ensuing instructions (Dt 6:5-19; see Chapter Three for a discussion of the *Shema*). See *šāma*‘ 1996. The Old Testament Lexical Aids, NIV, The Hebrew Key Word Study Bible. See also See Bible Hub 2022. *shama*. The abovementioned reading of *shama* and the identification of the *‘ēlōhîm*, who calls, as YHWH (Gn 3:8), might imply that there might have been other being(s) present in Eden who also had the ability to communicate with Adam and Eve (cf also Gn 3:1-5; see Bible Hub 2022. *arché*).

³⁴⁶ See *hāllak* 1996. The Old Testament Lexical Aids, NIV, The Hebrew Key Word Study Bible.

Ec 10:2; Dn 2:1).³⁴⁷ This is a relationship between YHWH and the Israelites that is unlike that between the people in the ancient Near East and their gods which over-emphasized the use of magic and divination that were also such overriding features of the Canaanite cults (Brenner 1997:84; cf Sperling 2020:444).

- The word יָדָע – *yāda* ‘(to know) in Judges 2:10 indicates possessing knowledge of YHWH; that is, understanding who He is, within an intimate relationship.³⁴⁸ The term *yāda* ‘ also means to understand right and wrong. The Hebrew word for knowledge used in Genesis 2 is דָּעָה – *da‘at*, which is derived from the root word *yāda*,³⁴⁹ relays the idea that people are to know that both good and evil exists but to choose that which is good. The early Israelites were to apply the same principle in their lives.

The aforementioned aspects signified a wholesome relationship with YHWH. In the place of the Canaanite statues the true *tselem* of YHWH infuses the land (cf 2.2.5.8b). But the human *tselem* are never to be worshipped or worship other gods, instead they make known the true God, His requirements for life and His sovereign rule. In addition to the previously discussed over-emphasis on sensual matters (see Chapter Three), the Canaanite cults also heavily emphasized magic practices and the attribution of ‘magic objects that were essential components of their divinatory techniques and which dominated people’s lives in the ancient Near East. Any kind of relationship that resembled the one the Israelites had with YHWH was obscured by these practices. Thus, it is feasible to comprehend the author/s of Judges’ harsh critique of the idolatrous Israelites in the narrative as a result of these practices, which were deemed unholy and acts of treachery in their worldview because they had nothing to do with YHWH or the required covenantal practices.

Political, social and economic endeavours in the ancient Near East were not accomplished without divination (Sweek 2002:41-56; Ristvet 2015:118; cf Ghormley 2022:20-21; Walton 2018) and it was considered so essential to life that it determined ‘the operation of kingship’ (Ristvet 2015:118). Conversely, the interaction between the early Israelites and YHWH was a lived reality, see above, focused on mono-YHWH and not meant to be too predicated on prophecy. Additionally, the ancient Near Eastern gods are deceivers (see 2.2.4.7), and therefore, it was dangerous to contact these gods via their divinatory methods (Lipton 1999:167; cf De Jong 2013:126).³⁵⁰ However, the Book

³⁴⁷ See *rūah* 1996. The Old Testament Lexical Aids, NIV, The Hebrew Key Word Study Bible.

³⁴⁸ See Bible Hub 2022. *yada*.

³⁴⁹ See Bible Hub 2022. *daath*.

³⁵⁰ The following description denotes the over-emphasis of magic and the ascription of ‘magic objects’ that dominated the lives of people in the ancient Near East (see also 3.3.5.1; see Footnote 36). The Egyptian god, Amon, was known as a healer and magician (Wilson 1969d:369). An Egyptian text describe the gods as ‘rich in magic spoke’ (Wilson 1969c:6).³⁵⁰ In an Ugaritic text, El declares: ‘I will work magic’ to fashion a female, Sha‘taqat, ‘the one he had molded out of the clay’ to cure king Keret of his illness (Ginsberg 1969a:148).³⁵⁰ Objects could also be imbued with magical properties. In the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, Inanna made a *pukku*, most probably a magic drum, from the base of a tree and from its crown a *mikkū*, a drumstick of similar magic potency and gave them to Gilgamesh (Speiser 1969:97). In an Akkadian letter the (ritual of the) burning of magical figurines is reported (Albright 1969b:482-483).

of Judges reveals the Israelites' propensity for 'loquacious interaction' with the gods of the Canaanites (see Tigay 1986:92; see Figure 5.1).



Figure 5.1 Ancient statuette of Asherah. Discovered at Tel Rehov in the Beit She'an Valley (TOI 2016)

It is plausible that the veneration of the Canaanite deities exerted an influence on the early Israelites, leading them to include divinatory practices that impeded their 'walk with YHWH,' hindering their covenantal relationship with Him.

5.3 COMMUNICATION METHODS

The Israelites engaged in active divine communication by seeking the divine will through the approved divinatory practices: casting lots, the *Urim* and *Thummim* attached to the breastpiece of the High Priest (Jdg 1:1-2; 20:1-2; 18; 23, 27-28; see also 8.4.3.3) prophecy (Jdg 2:3; 4:6-7, 9; 6:8-10; 14, 16; 10:10-14; 13:3-5) and dream messages (Jdg 7). In the tradition of the Old Testament, YHWH will sent a prophet (Jdg 6:8), reveal messages in dreams (cf Jdg 6:25) or appear Himself to deliver an instruction or a specific message (Jdg 2:1-3; 6:11; 3:3-20).

Israelite seekers of the divine will (cf Jdg 1:1-2; 6:38-40; 20:27-28) probably approached the priests and prophets of YHWH who were the approved specialists to enquire of YHWH by means of the abovementioned authorized divinatory methods. It is highly likely that either the (High) priest played a role in discerning YHWH's will in Judges 1:1-2, as he possessed the *Urim* and *Thummim* (see 5.3.1.1 and 8.4.3.3), or the casting of lots (see 5.3.1) was utilized. According to Deuteronomy, the priest was instructed to deliver a predetermined speech to the army, conveying a positive message that suggests a successful outcome of the war has been divined (Dt 20:2-4). Judges 1:1-2 and 6:7 also indicate that the people may have approached YHWH directly, perhaps through prayer. However, it is more likely that some approved divinatory method was involved.

5.3.1 Casting lots

The method of divination in Judges 1:1-2 is not stated but it can be imagined that it involved the casting of lots or perhaps the *Urim* and *Thummim* since these objects were part of the priestly vestments, the breastpiece which was attached to the ephod (cf 7.4.2.2-7.4.2.3). The casting of lots was a common practice among the early Israelites to determine the divine will in matters (see MacDonald 2003:114). MacDonald observes that evidence of casting of lots for the distribution of

the land of Canaan is found in Joshua (Jos 18:2). In Judges 1:1-2 the Israelites seek YHWH's guidance prior to engaging in warfare against the Canaanites: 'the Israelites asked the LORD, 'Who of us is to go up first to fight against the Canaanites?'' The LORD answered, "Judah shall go up; I have given the land into their hands." Walton, Matthews and Chavalas (2000:241) remark it was customary to seek divine aid before engaging in warfare in the ancient Near East (and among the early Israelites as Judges attests).³⁵¹

5.3.1.1 *Urim and Thummim/Ephod*

King and Stager (2001:325) believe that the *Urim* and *Thummim* were sacred lots stored in the ephod. The 'sacred lots' may have resembled the faience dices (found in the Tel Dan cultic complex) (cf Biran 1986:179, 181; Sha 2018:177n,183; see also 8.4.3.3). Only priests in their roles as oracles were allowed to use the *Urim* and *Thummim* as divination devices (Brenner-Idan 2014:59). The presence of the priest, Phineas, ministering before the ark of the covenant (Jdg 20:28) confirms the idea of the involvement of the *Urim* and *Thummim* in seeking military guidance and divining the war outcome against the Benjamites in Judges 20:18, 23, 28).

5.3.1.2 *Gideon's ephod*

The creation of an ephod by Gideon in Judges 8 might have been influenced by a Canaanite tradition: the belief that a god inhabited the cult image that represented the deity (Niehaus 2008:101; Baines 2013:50; Hundley 2013:146; Hoppe 2016:121; cf 3.3.2.1; 8.2.2.2a-b), while living among the Baal-Asherah worshippers in the household of his father and the larger Ophrah community (Jdg 6:25-32). The exact nature of the ephod is still up for debate, according to Oeste (2011:60). The narrator/s of Judges' claim that Israel prostituted (פָּדָה) themselves (before the) object and that it turned out to be a snare for Gideon and his family (Judges 8:27) is similar to terminology used to describe the worship of foreign gods in Judges 2:3, 17, which raises the possibility that the object had a cultic significance (Oeste 2011:60). Judges does not state why Gideon made the ephod and neither does it say it was an act of idolatry by Gideon. It is probable that he wished to replicate

³⁵¹ Subsequently, the Israelites capture various Canaanite cities including Jerusalem, Hebron and Bethel, Debir and Kiriath Sepher and Gibeon. Hebron and Bethel were sites where the patriarch Abraham had erected altars; Hebron (Jdg 1:10; Gn 13:19) and Bethel (Jdg 1:22-26; Gn 12:8; see also Chapter Two) later became important Israelite religious centres (Finkelstein and Silberman 2002:44). Debir which was earlier known as Kiriath Sepher (Jdg 1:11; Jos 10:39) was a royal city (Silver 2008:239; cf Finegan 2015:139) and for this reason may have been an affluent urban centre that was taken over by the early Israelites. The name of the city, Kiriath Sepher, which translates to 'city of the letter/document,' according to Block (1999), however, raises the possibility that the location once held a 'library or archive.' The precise location of Debir or Kiriath Sepher remains uncertain (Block 1999). Some have linked the site with Tel Beit Mirsim (Bodenheimer 1960:181; Kyle 2007:33; Finegan 2015:139) while others have associated Tel el-Rabad with ancient Kiriath Sepher (Block 1999; Silver 2008:239). Block (1999) suggests that another possible depiction of Kiriath Sepher describes it as a significant government or army post. Gibeon was described as an important and large city 'like one of the royal cities' (Jos 10:2) that was captured by the Israelites. Brooks (2017) reports that Gibeon may have been a flourishing city given that the flat land that surrounded it was suited for agriculture and the slopes beyond it were suited for vineyards.

the priestly ephod and most probably the *Urim* and *Thummim* attached to the ephod for divination purposes. The bronze serpent (Nm 21:4-9) erected in the wilderness for healing and which became an idolatrous object of worship in later generations and therefore destroyed by King Hezekiah (2 Ki 18:4) might provide a parallel for any noble reason that Gideon might have had to make the ephod which became an image of idolatry (cf Jdg 8:27).

Gideon may have made the ephod as a representation of YHWH ‘to help the people in their worship’ (Wiersbe 2007:450). ‘Gideon knew that it was wrong to make an idol’ (Ex 20:4-6; Wiersbe 2007:450) and the ephod had the opposite effect of what Gideon may have intended since Judges 8:27 relates that ‘all Israel prostituted themselves by worshipping it there ...’ Wiersbe remarks that it is unclear whether this ephod was an embroidered version of the (High) Priest’s robe (Ex 28:6-8) or a type of ‘standing idol’ (cf Jdg 17:5; 18:14, 17) but it was used in worship as indicated before and became ‘a snare to Gideon and his family’ (Ps 106:36). According to Wiersbe, it is possible that Gideon used it to help the people with their troubles and divine God’s will. Nevertheless, Gideon’s production and usage of the ephod was undoubtedly uncovenantal behaviour.

It is possible that Gideon had a priest installed in the household shrine where the ephod was placed which in Gideon’s mind would have given the ephod (an approved) status for cultic use. A parallel for the aforesaid can be found in Micah who installed in his household shrine an idolatrous ephod, idols and a Levite priest (cf Jdg 17:5; cf 5.3.2.2e). Wiersbe (2007:450) adds that if the ephod was a ‘standing idol,’ Gideon disobeyed YHWH’s order (Ex 20:4-6), and he also tarnished the people’s ‘walk’ – covenantal relationship – with YHWH. Wiersbe asserts that ‘it was just a short step from worshipping the ephod to worshipping Baal’ (Jdg 8:33). Wiersbe further remarks that Gideon lost a golden opportunity to bring reformation and possibly even bring about a revival. Following his impressive victory over the Midianites, Gideon had every right to ‘call the people back to the Lord and obedience to His law.’ However, he seized the opportunity for his own gain and the Israelites would finally return to their idolatrous ways again (Wiersbe 2007:450).

5.3.2 Prophecy

5.3.2.1 Introduction

The promotion of the covenant and monotheism is evident in the worldview presented by the author/s of Judges, as they consistently emphasize the role of prophets and the practice of prophecy as the legitimate means of establishing communication with YHWH. In Judges YHWH Himself in the persona of the Angel of YHWH will approach the Israelites (cf Jdg 2:1-5; 6:11-19; 13:3-20) or He will send a prophet (Jdg 4:6-7; 6:8-10; 10:10-14).

Nissinen (2003:1) defines prophecy as ‘the [direct] human transmission of divine messages’ (insertion mine, see also Stökl 2012a:8; cf Annus 2010:12-14). Nissinen views prophecy ‘as another, yet distinctive branch of the consultation of the divine (such as celestial divination and extispicy

as well as all other forms of communication with the gods to determine the divine will; see above) that is generally called divination' (Nissinen 2003:1; Stökl 2012b:19; cf Noll 2013).³⁵² On the level of the spiritual – the realm of YHWH where all true prophecy in the Bible springs from – prophetic messages reflect the striving of the Israelites with their God in a manner that is unparalleled in the ancient Near East. Equally incomparable is YHWH's redemption that He extends to His people by means of paradoxically some of the direst prophetic utterances in the Old Testament (cf Jdg 2:3). The role of the Biblical prophet, however, as described further below, also involved more than apocalyptic prognostications.

5.3.2.2 The origins and role of prophecy

It may be said that prophecy has its origins in the supernatural since YHWH is the first divine prophet (cf Gn 3:15; Walvoord 1999:20-22). YHWH directly calls Moses (Ex 3:10; Smith 2016:50; 3.4) who becomes the most important human prophet in Israelite history (cf Dt 34:10; Maimonides 2012:xi, 8, 33; cf Van Kooten and Van Ruiten [eds] 2009:xi).³⁵³ The human prophet is first and foremost YHWH's messenger who delivers the words of YHWH to the people (cf Jdg 2:1-3; 4:6-7, 9; 6:8-10; 10:11-14; 13:3-20; Lamb 2012:864; see also De Jong 2013:313). Lamb observes that the prophet in Judges reveals that YHWH's method of communication primarily involves words and thus YHWH's preferred means of communication is via the prophet. Wilson (1996:884) concurs that the prophet is a mediator of YHWH,³⁵⁴ a person who serves as a channel of communication between the human and the supernatural realms (Wilson 1996:884; Stackert 2014:39). Donahue (2000:24) confirms that in Judges, the prophet 'was God's spokesperson' 'pointing out national sins' – the sins of idolatry and covenant violations (cf Jdg 2:1-2; 6:8-10; 10:11-13; Donahue 2000:24; cf Pedersen 1981:14; Oosthuizen 1992:181).

In light of the aforesaid fact, the prophet in Judges can be considered as a reformer of society. The author/s of Judges demonstrate that YHWH will personally bring about a transformation within the idolatrous community of the Israelites. The divine appearances of YHWH in Judges will be discussed in detail in Chapter Six. Wilson (1996:885) remarks that prophets have been thought of

³⁵² In the ensuing segments (5.4.3; 5.4.4; 5.4.6), other methods of discerning the divine will such as celestial divination and extispicy will be discussed. Scholars classify celestial divination and extispicy as inductive divination methods; in other words, the specialists that operate in these types of divination utilize 'systematic observations and their scholarly interpretation' of phenomena such as the entrails of animals to predict the divine will of the gods. Prophecy is of the non-inductive type in which the gods directly transmit their messages to the prophet (Nissinen 2003:1; see also Stökl 2012a:9-10). Malamat (1998:59, 61) classifies the non-inductive prophecy also as 'intuitive prophecy' by which he means 'prophetic revelation without resort to mantic or oracular devices or techniques'.

³⁵³ Van Kooten and Van Ruiten 2008:xi remark that the main 'Israelite-Jewish prophets' are predated by the non-Israelite prophet, Balaam (Nm 22-24). He is, in fact, one of the earliest prophets to be referenced in the Old Testament, and almost ranks right up there with Moses himself, who is credited with writing about Balaam, after their meeting in the wilderness, following the exodus from Egypt (Van Kooten and van Ruiten 2008:xi).

³⁵⁴ Deuteronomy 5:23-27 narrates the Israelites' request for a mediator.

as ‘moral and ethical innovators, who brought Israelite religion to a higher level of development’ (cf Jdg 2; 4; 6; 10).

In Judges, through their roles as a divine seer and the deliverer of judgement (Jdg 2:1-3; 6:8-10; 10:11-14; cf Jdg 4:9) the prophets serve as restorers of the covenantal lifestyle.³⁵⁵ The stimulus behind the divine messages in Judges is always presented as initiated by the idolatry of the tribes (see below). Thus, the prophet’s apocalyptic message serves to bring about those transformations that will restore the covenantal way of life (cf Jdg 2; 6; 10; see Hibbard 2011:339; see also below).³⁵⁶ And yet, unlike divine messages in the ancient Near East which were greatly esteemed and feared at the same time for they expressed the gods’ spirit and requirements (see Meier 1999b:46), divine prognosticate message/s cannot deter the early Israelites from subsequent phases of idolatry even if it is YHWH Himself delivering the message (Jdg 2:1-3).

Judges 2:1-3; 6:8-10 and 10:11-13 also show that the prophet was ‘concerned with recording the past’ (Feldman, LH 2006:221). Apparently, amid the various functions of the prophets, they are also keepers of the oral traditions of the people and in the tradition of Judges 7:14 may have well been recorders of history – scribes.³⁵⁷ Certainly, a young initiate into the prophetic office needed training and education, such as probably Samuel received (see above), to impart their history to the community.³⁵⁸

³⁵⁵ More than mere prognosticators of the future (Neujahr 2012: 2-3), the prophets (in Judges) are soul winners in their attempts to restore the covenantal lifestyle (Dt 18:18-20). The words of YHWH (the covenantal stipulations) that restore order are juxtaposed with certain ancient Near Eastern diviners or soul hunters (Pedersen 1991:164; cf Ez 13:17-21) who attempt to bring about the same effects through their magic rituals, spells and incantations (Gilboa 2007:346). The prophets in Judges 2; 4; 6 and 10, in fact, encourage the Israelites to return to YHWH and obey their covenant (cf Jdg 10:16).

³⁵⁶ See also Malan and Meyer (2014:913-929) discussing the influence of the Book of Deuteronomy (Dt 13:1-5; 18:18-22 and I Kings 22:1-28, 37) Jeremiah (Jer 26-29). It does appear that Jeremiah 26-29 and 1 Kings 22:1-28 vary from the criteria that establish a true prophet of YHWH from a false one as determined in Deuteronomy 18:15-22. In the ancient Near Eastern divinatory outcomes could be established on the protasis-apodosis principle; that is, if the condition of y is met then z is the outcome (see Rochberg [2010:19-28] who discuss this regarding Babylonian divination). In Judges prophecy is of the protasis-apodosis type (cf Jdg 10:13-16) and definitive and unambiguous in the case of the people (cf Jdg 2:3;4;6-7, 9; Stökl 2012b:20).

³⁵⁷ See Cryer (1994:250-262) on the segment titled: ‘The Problem of the Historical Tradition’ in which he delineates the dilemma of the accuracy of Old Testament Israelite history as recorded by the prophets, Samuel for instance. Nissinen (2003:2) also mentions the problem of historicity and the authenticity of prophecy in the Old Testament because of the ‘heavily edited prophetic oracles and narratives of the Hebrew Bible...’ I have already mentioned the question of Biblical Historicity and that these ideas of Biblical historical inaccuracies are derived from the Documentary Hypothesis. Since the biblical history is in doubt so too the prophetic revelations of the prophets who wrote the history are considered doubtful as well. Cryer (1994:246-248, 252) describes ancient Israel as ‘a primitive agricultural society’ – a less stratified society in which there was little differentiation in the social status and roles of Israelites in the rural and urban areas compared to the highly developed urban dwelling Canaanites. Accordingly, numerous roles were ascribed to the same member in the community which negates the idea of societal inequality in Israel. Nevertheless, the idea of continuous equality in the early Israelite community is refuted by the archaeology and the Book of Judges as will be demonstrated further in this study.

³⁵⁸ See Milstein (2013:44-445) and her discussion of the issue of the authenticity of the words of the prophet. This is a debate that centres on the Documentary Hypothesis and affiliates. Naturally if the history in the Bible is corrupt and

According to Deuteronomy, the prophet is also a community leader, like Moses their predecessor, as well as a counsellor and teacher (of the law) in addition to being a diviner and a preacher (Dt 18:16-19; see Wilson 1996:885). The Book of Numbers specifies that prophecy held functional official status (cf Nm 11:25-26) within the Israelite leadership (cf Jdg 4:4) and community.³⁵⁹ The prophetic role was bequeathed to both men and women and this is an indication that both male and female prophets were part of the circle of the elders (see also Williamson 2010:65-76).

That women, such as Deborah, could hold the office of the prophet of YHWH has many important implications for women in an overarching patriarchal community. It demonstrates that women could hold equal status with men in all spheres of Israelite society within the covenantal culture that YHWH desired for His people and against the dominant cultural ideology of (harmful) patriarchy (see also Le Roux 2015a:503-521; 2016:501-526).³⁶⁰

Additionally, the text in Numbers shows that the office of the prophet was established to distribute leadership tasks evenly among the elders preventing them from being carried out by only one person ([Moses initially] Nm 11:16-17).³⁶¹ Judges 4:4 indicates that prophets, such as Deborah, shouldered other important tasks in the community such as educational and judiciary roles (see above). Scholars debate if the office of the prophet was a religious institutional office in Israel rather than a functional one (see Cryer 1994:243-250; cf Wolff 1987:18). There are no indications given in Deuteronomy as in the case of the religious office of priests which is also an inherited role. I believe that prophethood it is an uninherited religious function bestowed by YHWH on an elected person. Cryer (1994:246-248) (indirectly) ascribes a functional role rather than an institutional role to the office of prophet in early Israel based on his idea that the early Israelite community was a primitive society and not a stratified one with a highly developed social and religious organizational system. This is not how Deuteronomy portrays the early Israelite society. Although one individual could fulfill many roles this is not an indication of a so-called primitive and less developed socio-religious structure. The priest could perform the role of prophet at Shiloh. Other non-priestly individuals such as Deborah could also assume the role. Nissinen (2003:6) states that ‘there is no infallible definition of who should be called a prophet or what constitutes a prophet in

falsified, so too are the words uttered by the prophets. One cannot be true and the other not for they both cohere to each other. As pointed out before, there is no evidence that the oracles are not the authentic words of the prophets.

³⁵⁹ However, Parker (1993:50) questions what formal or official perspectives towards prophecy in the Old Testament were and whether the prophetic accounts in the texts are indicative of authentic accounts or fanciful productions for various purposes. In his article, Parker (1993:50-68) investigates if the official ideas regarding prophecy at Mari parallel that of the Biblical prophecy.

³⁶⁰ Later in the study I shall describe certain disparities in the socio-economic environment of pre-monarchic Israel. This is not to contradict my ideas about women’s equality in early Israel that are expressed in my master’s dissertation (Sha 2018). Women indeed were oppressed but this occurred primarily in times of idolatry and apostasy and Canaanite influences that have penetrated the early Israelite community as indicated in Judges (cf Jdg 19-21). Equality for all genders was covenantal and benign patriarchy allowed women their independence and authority (see Sha 2018).

³⁶¹ Matters not dealt with in the Sinai Covenant were left to the wisdom of the elders, and to the prophets such as Deborah (Jdg 4:4) who would settle quarrels and legal trials (cf Jdg 11:4-11; 20:2; 21:16-22; De Vaux 1997:152; Gousmett 2020:356; cf Campbell 2004:37).

each time, society and situation.’ Nevertheless, the Old Testament makes it clear that a prophet is a divine agent (following in the footsteps of Moses) who speaks the words of YHWH in order to lead, instruct, advise in the way of the covenant and defend said covenant (cf Malamet (1998:61). Neujahr (2012:3) comments that textual evidence shows that it is the behaviour of the *nābī* (prophet) ‘designated’ by the verb *hinnābē/hitnabbôt* (to act in the manner of a *nābī*)’ that typifies the biblical prophet.

YHWH desired to establish a new culture (a ‘new’ religion, strict mono-YHWH worship) for His covenantal people. However, the Israelites frequently resisted the divine will. Thus, prophecy, in the Book of Judges is more conspicuous during the cycles of idolatry addressing the sin of idolatry and the resultant oppression and decline of the community (Stökl 2012b:20).³⁶² Milstein (2013:432) comments on the hopeless tone in the prophetic messages that do not convey any means of redemption. However, Judges also shows that it is ultimately the love and compassion of YHWH that leads to the redemption of His people (Jdg 10:16; cf 2.2.3.1).

Beginning in Judges 2:1-3 with the Angel of YHWH in His role as divine messenger, the prophet of YHWH would consistently present a polemic against the polytheism and idolatry of the early Israelites. The content of the prophet’s proclamations in Judges is confrontational (Jdg 2:1-3; 6:8-10 and 10:11-14); they are protest messages against the prevailing idolatry of the Israelites. It is this character of biblical prophecy – a polemic against the dominant cultural ideology (of idolatry) – that distinguishes it from prophetic divination in the ancient Near East (Stökl 2012b:20).

It is a tragedy that the prophet who possessed the words of YHWH (see above) could not prevent the Israelites from becoming a fractured and anarchic society. There is no resolution at the end of the final chapter (O’Connell 1996:229:226);³⁶³ instead it describes the aftermath of intertribal conflict the result of cyclical apostasy and idolatry that imprinted an anti-covenantal mindset on the psyche of the Israelites.³⁶⁴ The subsequent sections will centre on the divine messages that depict YHWH’s reaction to the interaction (the role of prophecy) between the Israelites and the Canaanite gods, amidst their practice of idolatry. The theme of theophany will also be discussed in Chapter Six.

³⁶² Milstein (2013:432) comments on the hopeless tone in the prophetic messages that do not convey any means of redemption. However, Judges also shows that it is ultimately the compassion of YHWH that leads to deliverance (Jdg 10:16; cf 3.3.6.1).

³⁶³ See also O’Connell (1996:228-266) expanding on the theme of unresolved covenant infidelity in Judges. O’Connell (1996:231) opines that the incomplete land settlement promoted Israelite idolatry as predicted in Judges 2:3. Judges 2 and 3 should also be read in conjunction with Exodus 23:29. See also Manser (2009:216); Arnold and Beyer (2015); Beldman (2017); Radmacher [ed] (1999:305-306).

³⁶⁴ There are other significant motifs in Judges that are all subsets of the major motif of apostasy. See Niditch (1982:365-378); Webb (1987:32, 40); Heller (2011) and Serman (2011:15-24); cf Schneider (2000:xviii,35-271); Chisholm (2006:93-96).

a. Judges 2:1-3

The Angel of the LORD delivers a divine message in Judges 2:1-3 (see also 2.2.1.1; 2.2.2.1). As noted before, the broken covenant provides the background to the appearance of the Angel of YHWH, the Angel's pronouncement and the reaction of the early Israelites (Jdg 2:1-5; Lindsey 1983:375, 381; see also Harris, Brown and Moore 2000; LaHaye and Hindson 2011:68; Mackintosh 2020:114). The Angel of the LORD 'went up' from Gilgal to address the disobedience of the Israelites. The Hebrew root for 'went up' is derived from נָלַח – *'ālāh* – which can also mean 'to cause to burn' as in the making of an offering (Jdg 2:1; see also 2.2.1.1b; 2.2.2.1).³⁶⁵ It also has the meaning of 'recover, restore.'³⁶⁶ Le Roux (2015b:np) describes this act of YHWH as a possible indication of the movement of the presence of the LORD by means of the Ark of the Covenant. Gilgal was where the early Israelites had set up camp upon their entry into Canaan and where the Ark of the Covenant was initially located (Miller 1997:332; De Troyer 2003:44-45). Gilgal also was the place where a twelve stone memorial was set up (see also 2.3.4.1d; 5.3.2.2a) and where the Israelites 'who had not received the sign of circumcision in the wilderness' were circumcised (Jos 5:1; Miller 1997:332; cf Lindsey 1983:381; Mather 2010:20).

Lindsey (1983:381) describes the Angel of the LORD as 'Deity for He was called Yahweh' and 'yet He was distinct from Yahweh.'³⁶⁷ Lindsey goes on to say that 'The Angel of the Lord, obviously spoke as Yahweh Himself, for He used the covenantal formula to refer to His redemptive mercies in the Exodus and the gracious establishment of the Mosaic Covenant' (cf Ex 19:4; 20:2; Jos 24:2-13; cf 3.4.4.1a-c). The Angel reminded the Israelites of YHWH's prohibition against making alliances with the Canaanites ('you shall not make covenants with the people of this land') and idolatry ('you shall break down their altars'; cf Ex 23:32-33; 34:12-16; Nm 33:55; Dt 7:2, 5, 16; 12:3; Lindsey 1983:381; see also 4.5.5.3). Webb and Oeste (2019:175) remark that 'the command not to make a covenant likely refers to peace treaties made with the Canaanites' (see also 2.2.1.1b;

³⁶⁵ The *NIV* reads: 'Now the Angel of the LORD went up from Gilgal to Bochim...' The Hebrew translation of the word *alah* means to rise up/ascend as in a movement from one place to another.

³⁶⁶ See Bible Hub 2022. *alah*.

³⁶⁷ Scholars disagree about the identity of the Angel of the LORD. Lopez (2010:1-18) argues for the Angel of the LORD as a human prophet and Malone (2011:297:314) representing the scholarly argument for the Angel of the LORD as being YHWH (see also 3.3.5). This study leans towards Malone's argument and in addition bases this understanding on Exodus 23:20-23 and Judges 6; 13 in which the supernatural aspects of the Angel of the LORD are revealed as aspects that only YHWH possess and in which the narrative in Judges identify Him as YHWH (cf Jdg 6:14, 18, 23).

In Judges 2:1-3 the Angel of the LORD, the captain of YHWH's army, assumes the role of a (divine) prophet and delivers a foreboding message to the Israelites. Martin (2009:333) about the identity of the Angel of YHWH, concludes Him to be the same personage as the captain of YHWH's army (see 6.3.4). See also a description of identity of the Angel of YHWH by Von Heijne (2010:103-106); cf Meier (1999:53-59); White (1999:299-305); VanderKam (2000:378-393). Martin (2009:333) points out that some believe it is a prophet or priest delivering the message to the Israelites in Judges 2:1 since the term angel can be translated as messenger as well. Phinehas the priest has been presented as the messenger in rabbinical literature. However, the Angel's role in Israelite history in the Bible, as warrior-prophet (or messenger) is clearly stated in Exodus 23:20-27.

2.2.2.1; 7.2.2.1c) and ‘thus the subsequent you have disobeyed me statement casts a negative light on Israel’s permitting various Canaanite groups to stay as forced labour within the land’ (Jdg 1:28, 30, 33, 35). Yet, the ban in Judges 2:1-3 against forming covenants is immediately linked to the much more serious issue of Israel failing to destroy Canaanite altars (Webb and Oeste 2019:175). The wording ‘you shall not do this...but do this’ is closely related, suggesting that when the early Israelites made these covenants with the Canaanites who were still residing in the land, they erroneously allowed them to keep their public and communal places of worship dedicated to their gods. The problem would not have existed if the Israelites had destroyed the altars of the remnant subservient Canaanite populations and included a prohibition on Canaanite altars in their agreement (Webb and Oeste 2019:175-176; cf Lindsey 1983:381-382).

Lindsey (1983:381) comments that the divine assistance (in the form of the terror of the LORD [Ex 23:27-28]) that would have allowed the early Israelites to drive out the Canaanites was withheld (by means of the punishment described below) as a result of their disobedience. Then, as the form of punishment, the Canaanites would turn into a snare for the Israelites (see also 4.3.1.4), foreshadowing the cycles in the days of the judges (Lindsey 1983:381; see also Harris 2004:412-413; Gorospe and Ringma 2016:22-25; Kuruvilla 2017:41-43; cf 2.2.1.1b; 2.2.2.1). In the Hebrew, the phrase יָהִי לְכֶם לְצִדִּים – *lašiddîm, lākem wəhāyū* (they shall be [thorns] in your side) that details the punishment for the Israelites’ sin of idolatry in Judges 2:2 is also a withdrawal of the (conditional) promise in Exodus 23:31.³⁶⁸ The Hebrew text does not contain the word that is translated as ‘thorn’ in Judges 2:3, which may have been omitted accidentally, instead as indicated above, it uses *šiddîm*.³⁶⁹ Since the Hebrew term for ‘sides’ – *šiddîm* – may be a play on the Hebrew word for demon, *šēdîm*, which is what the gods of the ancient Near East were according to the biblical worldview (see 2.2.5.8), this exclusion may not be unintentional. Upon hearing the prophetic judgment of the Angel, Judges 2:4 states that ‘the people wept aloud.’ The Israelites called the place Bochim (‘weepers’) and there they offered sacrifices to YHWH (see also Jdg 21:2).

Kuruvilla (2017:43) comments that after their repentance and sacrifice (Jdg 2:4-5), one anticipates reading about the Israelites revoking their treaties with the Canaanites and waging a war of conquest against the idolatrous altars and worshippers (see also 2.2.2.1b). ‘But the text is silent.’ The next chapter and the rest of the book will illustrate that their change of heart is only temporary and that the early Israelites’ apostasy and disobedience only gets worse (Kuruvilla 2017:43; cf 2.2.2.1). It was the duty of the priesthood at Shiloh to teach the people (see 2.2.2.1; 4.3.2). Judges 2:10 states that a new generation grew up ‘who neither knew the LORD nor what he had done for Israel’ (see also Chapter Two). Perhaps the priests were derelict in performing their teaching duties (see 2.2.2.1; 4.3.2)? As indicated before (see 4.3.2), the priest in Judges are for the most part rarely mentioned, and when they are, it is usually in connection with idolatrous practices in Judges 17 -

³⁶⁸ See Bible Hub 2022. Judges 2:3.

³⁶⁹ See Bible Hub 2022. Judges 2:3.

18 and injudicious decisions and actions in Judges 19-20. Nevertheless, it is the Angel of the LORD who sets the tone for the nature of the prophets' message in Judges. The Angel of the YHWH alludes to the idea that prophets will operate in a predominantly idolatrous society (Hill and Walton 2010).

b. Judges 4

The events of Judges 4 occur inside an additional cycle of idolatry among the Israelites (Jdg 4:1). Jabin, the king of Hazor, and Sisera, the leader of His army, persecute the Israelites (see 3.2.3.3b). The Israelites cry out to YHWH for help. The prophetess Deborah, the leader of the Israelites, is said to hold court under the Palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim (Jdg 4:4-5).

Deborah, being a prophetess of YHWH, possessed the ability to comprehend and convey YHWH's divine will and intentions. This granted her the power to advocate for social and cosmic stability and unity (refer to De Jong 2013:313). Considering the oppressive conditions faced by the Israelites, Deborah's exceptional attributes were crucial. The absence of strong male leaders (Jdg 5:6-8) led YHWH to raise up Deborah, showcasing that He does not discriminate between genders and acknowledges women as capable leaders and prophets.

Acting upon a message from YHWH, Deborah sent for Barak and instructed him to take 10,000 troops from Naphtali and Zebulun and bring them to Mount Tabor so they could fight Sisera and his army there (Jdg 4:6-7; see also; 3.2.2.1b; 3.2.3.3b; 6.4.1). Barak, however, is not convinced that it is YHWH who had commissioned him and demands that Deborah accompanies him to the battlefield. Deborah agrees but prophesies that because of Barak's demand, the war honour will not be his, 'for the LORD will deliver Sisera into the hands of a woman' (Jdg 4:9). Both prophecies were fulfilled (Walvoord 1999:45).

Deborah is agreeable and courageous as she submits to Barak's request to accompany him to the battlefield. At the same time, she is determined to chastise Barak for issuing the request (cf Jdg 4:9). Deborah is the only named human prophet in the Book of Judges. Within her roles in the community, she is the only judge that follows in the footsteps of her predecessor, Moses, a leader, judicial figure and educator of the law (see below). The *nāḇī'āh* represents the multifaceted character of the Old Testament prophet (Jdg 4:4; see Cryer 1994:248; see also 5.3.2.4). The narrative also reveals Deborah to be the *nāḇī* in Judges that functions specifically as a prognosticator (Jdg 4:6-7, 9) and delivers a prophecy in its main operative forms: forecast of a war outcome (Jdg 4:6-

7; cf Jdg 4:9; 6:14), prediction of the future for a collective and individuals (Jdg 2:1-3; 4:6-7; 4:9; 13:5), deliver messages of judgment and instruction (Jdg 6:8-10; 4:9).³⁷⁰

c. Judges 6:8-10

Not much is known about the prophets in Judges 6:8-10 and 10:10-14. They do not display the charismatic persona of the prophets in later eras. Their personal lives, thoughts and experiences with YHWH, and how these elements shaped the distinctive tone of the communiqués of the prophets who succeeded them, remain unknown. This situation changes with prophets in the succeeding Books in the Old Testament in which the individualism and eccentricities of the prophets (and as indicated before their socio-political positions in the community) play a part in the execution of their prophetic duties (see Robson 2006:20-67; Jensen 2006:67-143; De Jong 2007:53-283; cf Wolff 1987:17-19).

The idolatry and oppression by the Midianites form the background to the appearance of the prophet in Judges 6:8-10. In contrast to the first few cycles (Jdg 3; 4), YHWH responds differently to the early Israelites' cries for assistance in Judges 6, states Younger (2020:223). This time YHWH sends a prophet 'to confront the people and indict them of their covenant unfaithfulness' (Younger 2020:223). In keeping with the custom of the ancient Near East, where diviners were occasionally used to bless ally armies and curse rival ones, it is plausible that the idolatrous Israelites would have anticipated that the prophet in Judges 6:8-10 would curse the enemy rather than deliver a message of reproof (Nm 22:1-38; Riley 2017:451).

The unnamed prophet reminds the people of their covenantal commitments to the LORD, who had rescued them from Egypt (cf Ex 34:10-16; Dt 7; Jdg 3:5-6), and not to worship the gods of the Amorites (Jdg 6:10; Lindsey 1983:391). The prophet criticized the Israelites for their persistent disobedience (Lindsey 1983:391). According to Lindsey this message resembles that from the Angel of YHWH at Bochim (Jdg 2:1-3). However, YHWH does not hasten to rescue the Israelites but sends instead a prophet to reprimand them for breaking the covenant. 'Clearly Yahweh implies that there comes a time when his patience turns to judgement' (Younger 2020:223). Younger further observes that the theme of manipulation that had begun in the previous cycle is likewise continued in this passage. YHWH will not instantly and mechanically reply to the cry of His people. This is particularly true if the 'cry' lacks sincerity, YHWH's people continue to practise idolatry, or it has

³⁷⁰ In Judges, prophecy is a rather simplistic affair without the intense rites associated with ancient Near Eastern prophetic divination. All that was required was for the prophet to deliver the communiqué in person to the recipient(s). In the ancient Near East, prophetic oracles could be delivered indirectly as in the case of the 18th century Mari letters written to the king by numerous officials (see Parker 1993:50). The Nur-Sin to Zimri-Lim letter presents an oracle message to the King of Mari in which the prophecy is delivered with the addition of the following: This is what the prophet said to me. No[w I have sent the hair of the prophet] and a fri[nge of his garment to my lord] (Nissinen 2003:22). These personal articles belonging to the prophet were sent to the king to authenticate the message as well as presumably for their apotropaic worth or for their usage in some type of magic ritual; customs that would definitely have been outlawed in the religion of YHWH.

manipulative intentions (Younger 2020:223; see also Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:253; cf Niditch 2001:183; Edelman 2013:63). However, YHWH relents and commissions Gideon to deliver His people from the Midianites.

d. Judges 6:11-20

In the midst of yet another cycle of idolatry, the Angel of YHWH appears to Gideon (see also 3.4.4.1b; 4.3.1.1bii) with the greeting: ‘The LORD is with you mighty warrior.’ The phrase mighty warrior (Hebrew: גִּבּוֹר חַיִּל – *hayil gibbōr*), was likely was a commonly used expression to describe a man of great physical strength or a formidable and courageous soldier during the pre-monarchic period (see also Jdg 5:13, 2; 11:1; 1 Sm 9:1; 16:18; cf 1 Ki 11:28; 2 Ki 5:1). It is possible that Gideon may have had great physical strength or was a brave fighter.

If Gideon is a mighty warrior, it is conceivable that this esteem was earned through his confrontations with the invading Midianites. However, according to Judges 6:1-6, the Israelites did not achieve significant victories in their wars against their adversaries. The author/s of Judges also describe Gideon’s apprehension regarding the townspeople’s reaction upon discovering the destroyed altar of Baal and the Asherah pole. Furthermore, it is Joash, not Gideon, who confronts the enraged and vengeful townspeople. Therefore, it is highly likely that the author/s of Judges are referring to Gideon as a man of immense physical strength (which may also be emphasized in Judges 6:14), who will later be aided by the LORD to become a mighty warrior. The Angel’s greeting may be conceived as a veiled prophecy. The Angel of YHWH’s initial words in Judges 6:12 as well as throughout the narrative indicate that Gideon’s forthcoming military campaign, to which the Angel is calling him, will undoubtedly achieve victory.

Gideon might be a man of great strength but he doubts his own ability to fight against the Midianites and if YHWH will indeed be with him to fight against the Midianites (Jdg 6:15, 17). The narrative in Judges (6:14-16) evokes Moses’ call by YHWH to deliver the Israelites from their Egyptian slavery, Moses doubting his own ability and YHWH assuring Him of His presence (Ex 3:10-12; also Jos 1:5). Unlike Moses and Joshua, Gideon lacks the faith that YHWH Himself will accompany him in battle (Jdg 6:15). Gideon is granted confirmation about his divine mission and the assurance that it is YHWH Himself who will be with him through the fire that consumes the meal offering in Judges 6:21-22. Once again the author/s of Judges bring to mind the fire in the burning bush in which YHWH appeared to Moses.

Through this narrative, it is likely that the author/s aim to convey the extent to which the idolatry of the Israelites has influenced individuals like Gideon, who was a believer in YHWH. However, there is hope for the Israelites to be restored to YHWH. Gideon is indwelt with the Spirit of YHWH and assembles his army to fight against the Midianites. In addition, he is given a favourable war outcome (Jdg 6:34-40) which is realised in Judges 7.

e. Judges 10:10-14

Judges 10:6 reads: ‘Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD. They served the Baals and the Ashtoreths, and the gods of Aram, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the Ammonites and the gods of the Philistines.’ The Israelites had abandoned their faith in YHWH. The LORD ‘became angry with them’ and handed them over to Ammonite and Philistine oppression (Jdg 10:7). The Israelites cried out to the LORD and confessed their sin of forsaking the LORD and serving the Baals.

Although they have cried out to the LORD on various occasions (Jdg 3:9, 15; 4:3, etcetera) the Israelites only ever confess their sin once (Jdg 10:10; Way 2016). Klein (1989:85) notes that YHWH immediately informs His people that they have abandoned Him despite all the times He has saved them from their enemies (cf Jdg 10:11-12). The LORD is no longer willing to save them (Jdg 10:13) and says: ‘Go and cry out to the gods you have chosen. Let them save you when you are in trouble!’ (Jdg 10:14).

The future of the early Israelites look hopeless after YHWH’s rejection of their plea for help (Klein 1989:85; Ryan 2007:80). Way (2016) asserts that the LORD’s rejection of the confession proves it to be an empty admission of guilt (Jdg 10:13-14). Lindsey (1983:400), on the other hand, maintains that the early Israelites exhibited sincere remorse: first they admitted their sin and then after the LORD reproached them, they remained resolute in their profession of sin and took measures to get rid of the foreign gods and worship the LORD (Jdg 10:15-16). In the end, YHWH, because He is a compassionate God, demonstrates His mercy towards His people by raising up Jephthah to deliver them from the enemy (Lindsey 1983:400; Klein 1989:85-86; see also Wong 2006:126).

The response of Elisha to the request of three of kings in 2 Kings 3:13: ‘Why do you want to involve me? Go to the prophets of your father and the prophets of your mother,’ is reminiscent of the reply of YHWH in Judges 10:14: ‘Go and cry out to the gods you have chosen.’ The similarity of these messages may indicate that prophets are trained to respond in a certain manner to some requests as the upholders of the covenant (Petersen 1991:193).

f. Judges 13:3-20

In Judges 13, despite his wife’s recognition of the Angel of YHWH, Manoah remains uncertain about the true identity of the divine visitor (see also 3.4.4.1c; 4.3.1.1iii). This uncertainty is highlighted in the context of the Israelites’ idolatry and their enduring oppression by the Philistines. It is worth noting that even then, the prophetic judgement of the Angel of YHWH in Judges 2:3 continues to hold significance. It is during this period that the Angel of YHWH appears to Manoah and his wife (Jdg 13:1) presenting them with hope by informing them of the imminent birth of a son who will deliver the Israelites (Jdg 13:5).

The acceptance of the Angel's prophecy and obedience of the wife in the Angel of YHWH whom she understands to be YHWH is immediate, while it takes her husband more time to embrace a similar attitude (Jdg 13:3-20). Once more, the presence of fire assumes a crucial role in the narrative, just as it did in Judges 6:11. The authors skilfully employ this element not only to validate the Angel's identity but also to establish a profound connection between the Angel, Moses, and his divine calling and thus alludes to the covenant (Ex 3).

5.3.2.3 The structure of the prophetic messages

The manner in which the author/s of the Book of Judges establish a connection between the prophecy and the covenant is seen in the following descriptions and in particular the historical prologue: The divine messages found Judges 2:1-3; 6:6-10 and 10:10-15 bear striking similarities to the form of the covenant in their compositional form of a three-tier statement structure: a historical prologue, an indictment and a judgement (see Table 5.2). The messages in Judges 4:6 and 6:14 have a similar form beginning with the instruction 'Go' In this segment the structure of the messages in Judges 2:1-3; 6:6-10 and 10:10-15 solely will be discussed.

Table 5.2: Structure of the messages in Judges 2; 6 and 10

	Judges 2:1-3	Judges 6:6-10	Judges 10:10-15
Messenger	Angel of YHWH	Prophet	Unknown: possibly prophet or Angel of YHWH
Preamble and Historical Prologue	Jdg 2:1: 'I brought you up out of Egypt and led you into the land I swore to give to your ancestors. I said, 'I will never break my covenant with you,'	6:10: I am the LORD, your God. Jdg 6:8-9: 'I brought you up out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. I rescued you from the hand of the Egyptians. And I delivered you from the hand of all your oppressors; I drove them out before you and gave you their land'.	Jdg 10:11-12: 'When the Egyptians, the Amorites, the Ammonites, the Philistines, the Sidonians, the Amalekites and the Maonites oppressed you and you cried to me for help, did I not save you from their hands?'
Indictment	Jdg 2:2: 'and you shall not make a covenant with the people of this land, but you shall break down their altars.' Yet you have disobeyed me. Why have you done this?'	Jdg 6:10: 'I said to you, 'I am the Lord your God; do not worship the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you live.' But you have not listened to me.'	Jdg 10:13: 'But you have forsaken me and served other gods,'
Judgement	Form: prediction Jdg 2:3: 'And I have also said, I will not drive them out before you; they will become traps for you, and their gods will become snares to you' (cf Ex 34:12, 15)	Unspoken	Form: directive Jdg 10:13-14: '...so, I will no longer save you. Go and cry out to the gods you have chosen. Let them save you when you are in trouble!'

a. The preamble and historical prologue

The historical prologue of the messages in Judges (see Table 5.2) takes on the form of the historical preamble of the Sinai Covenant (Jos 24:5-13; see 2.2.4.5b) which in turn follows the structural design of ancient Near Eastern treaties.³⁷¹ The author/s of Judges reinforce the Israelites' bond with YHWH by referencing the covenantal history and YHWH's interactions with His people in the

³⁷¹ See also Sailhamer (1998:44); Hoffner (2003:102-103); Weeks (2004:67); Goetze (2011:205) and Burney (2018:175-176).

narration of the historical prologue in Judges 2:1; 6:8-10 and 10:11-12 (see Table 5.2; see Ex 20:2; cf Dt 11:2-7; see also Mendenhall 1954:58-60; Hayes 1997:179; 2013:271-272; Bandy 2010:11-12; Lundbom 2013:20-21; cf Weeks 2004:65-67; Morrow 2017:61-62).

As a preamble and historical prologue to the Sinai covenant, Exodus 20:2 reads (cf Table 5.2): I am the LORD your God who brought you out of Egypt out of the land of slavery. Joshua also shares a similar introduction to his renewal of the covenant (Jos 24:2-12). Likewise, Judges 6:10 reads: 'I am the LORD your God...' The historical prologue in Judges 2; 6 and 10³⁷² describe the early Israelites deliverance from Egyptian slavery (Jdg 2:1; 6:8; cf 2.2.1.1b; 2.2.2.1). Similar to Joshua (24:2-12), Judges also record in the divine messages the Israelites' battles with other foreign nations (see Jdg 6:9). Judges 10:11-12 enumerates these nations: '... the Egyptians, Amorites, Ammonites, Philistines, Sidonians, Amalekites and Moanites.'

The messages sent by Jephthah to the Ammonite king also follow the pattern of containing a historical prologue (Jdg 11:14-22). Jephthah describes the route that the early Israelites took from Egypt 'when they came out of Egypt, Israel went through the wilderness to the Red Sea and on to Kadesh.' Judges 2; 6 and 10 serve to: 'review the relationship between' YHWH and the Israelites accentuating the beneficence of YHWH towards the Israelites copying this formulaic part of the Sinai Covenant (see Walton 1990:102). They also served as a reminder of YHWH's unwavering faithfulness versus the Israelites' disloyalty.

In reference to the Sinai covenant, Harner (1966:236) concludes that in common with the Exodus tradition, the Sinai covenant demonstrates the interactions of YHWH with the Israelites that definitively shaped Israelite history (cf Hayes 1997:179).³⁷³ The author/s of Judges strategically employs a narrative technique in the historical preamble of the messages found in Judges 2; 6 and 10 to reaffirm that the Israelites' historical trajectory was entirely guided by YHWH. The purpose of this narrative ploy is to serve as a reminder to the Israelites of their covenantal commitment and loyalty to YHWH. By invoking the preceding historical events as well as alluding to the covenant, it is probable that the author/s of Judges' intention is to guide the Israelites' history and covenantal relationship. This was done to align their path with the divine will and plan of YHWH for His people. As elucidated in Chapter Two (see also Chapter Three), the paramount objective for the Israelites was to demonstrate unwavering commitment to their patron God and King and to their covenantal way of life with the purpose of disseminating the benefits of a profound connection with YHWH and His redemption to all nations. (cf Gn 12:1-3).

³⁷² See Oeste (2011:61); Krisel 2022:166; cf Arnold and Williamson [eds] (2005:702) for information regarding the places where the messages were delivered. See Morrow (2017:62) for a description of the indictment and judgment phases of the messages.

³⁷³ For the specific elements of the Sinai covenant that are analogous to the ancient Near Eastern treaties particularly the Hittite agreements see Hayes (1997:179).

b. The indictment and judgement

Analogous to the historical prologue, the indictment and judgement of the messages in Judges (2:1-3; 6:8-10; 10:10-14) are intended to remind the early Israelites of their disobedience to their God and covenant and serve as an inducement for a return to the covenantal lifestyle. YHWH does not incur the full range of the covenant curses upon the Israelites (cf Dt 28:15-68). Instead, the early Israelites are subjected to Canaanite tyranny (Jdg 2:3, 20-23). Ironically, these judgements indicated YHWH's unmerited mercy and compassion (cf Jdg 2:18; 10:16) as He refrains from inflicting upon His people the complete consequences of their covenantal disloyalty as outlined in Deuteronomy (28:14-68).

5.3.2.4 *The prophet and prophecy in Judges and the ancient Near East*

Studies conducted on the prophetic tradition in the Old Testament in order to augment the understanding of the prophetic office in early Israel have led to its comparative value and function in the various cultures of the ancient Near East (Nissinen 2003:2, 4; Stökl 2012a:7-8; cf Parker 1993:50; Cryer 1994:243-262; Malamat 1998:68).³⁷⁴ From an academic perspective, the Old Testament prophet, for example in Judges, is understood to emerge from a collective religious expression found within several ancient Near Eastern nations. This perspective is commonly attributed to the subset of Old Testament prophets referred to as pre-classical prophets. The characterization of this prophetic category primarily draws from the Mari archives of the second millennium BC (Hill and Walton 2010) as well as the Old Babylonian/Neo-Assyrian texts (Nissinen 2003:3-5). Philological investigation of the Mari texts have encountered an Akkadian cognate for the Hebrew designation נָבִי (nābî – prophet; see Jdg 6:8)³⁷⁵ (and its female form נְבִיאָה nəbî'āh – prophetess that is applied as a title to Deborah in Judges 4:4; see 5.3.2.2b) that means 'to call,' or 'called one' (see Van Dam 1997:112; Fleming 2004:52; cf Neujahr 2012:3).³⁷⁶ Furthermore, scholars believe

³⁷⁴ These studies incorporate the literary sources of the ancient Near East such as the *Mari Letters* and *Old Babylonian/Neo-Assyrian texts* (see Huffmon 1968:101:124; Parker 1993:50-68; Nissinen 2003:13-94; Fleming 2004:44-64). Some scholars based on the Mari sources place origins for the Biblical prophetic tradition within the sphere of the ancient Near East while others have questioned this point of view (see Craghan 1975:32). While extra-biblical sources are valuable in understanding the prophetic tradition in the ancient Near East the uniqueness of the prophet in the Book of Judges is introduced in Judges 2:1-3 and the important role that the prophet will play in the history of the Israelites (see below). This introduction also delineates prophecy within the singular covenantal relationship. Hill and Walton (2010) places this uniqueness only with one group of prophets known as the classical prophets (dated to 8th to 6th centuries). The nature of pre-classical prophets (dated to 10-9th centuries) and earlier prophets (that form a second category of prophets) is held to have functioned similarly to their ancient Near Eastern counterparts. These two categorizations of Old Testament prophets are based on apparent differences in the nature (and chronology as well as socio-political contextual variances) of the pre-classical and classical scholars (see also Petersen 1991:193-203; Wolff 1987:15-16; Jensen 2006:61-66; cf De Jong 2007:36-37).

³⁷⁵ Sweek (2002:43 ff) remarks that he considers it more appropriate to use the word *nā-bî* than to use the Greek label of prophet for an activity or behaviour arising within the socio-political locale of the ancient Near East. According to Sweek the traditional Christian and Jewish view of the term prophet that sees it as a 'passive label for one called by the deity' has become problematic.

³⁷⁶ Nissinen (2003:6) presents more designations such as *muhhû/mahhû* (pl) associated with prophets at Mari (cf Rabe 1976:126; Stökl 2012b:20-21).

that the Mari archives provide illumination into the nature of Old Testament prophecy based on the following features (Malamat 1998:61):³⁷⁷ the expression of spontaneous or instinctive prophecy initiated by divine inspiration (compared to inductive divination prompted by the request of the king). The prophet is purposed by divine authority to deliver a message to the leaders/kings (see also 4.5.5.3). There is also an ecstatic element attributed to prophecy in the ancient Near East and among the Israelites (cf 1 Sm 10:5-6; see below 5.3.2.4a).³⁷⁸ Rabe (1976:126); Stökl (2010:47-64); cf Hamori (2012:1-22); Milstein (2013:230) believes that it appears there are no difference in the method of prophetic divination between the two genders at Mari and in the Bible.

a. The nature of prophecy

In light of the aforesaid information, YHWH may speak to the prophet in dreams and visions (cf Nm 12:6; possibly also in Judges 4:6-7) that included symbolic messages and images (cf Nm 12:7; Jdg 6:36-40; Rütterswörden, Simian-Yofre and Ringgren 1999:394). Prophets also prophesied in groups when the spirit of YHWH came on them (Nm 12:26; cf 1 Sm 10:5; see above). A third form of prophecy was the result of face-to-face communication with YHWH (Nm 12:7-8; Jdg 6:11; 7; 13; Yoreh 2010: 256; cf 3.5.3.1a-c). Judges suggests that there may exist a distinction in the manner in which prophetic messages are sent based on gender. Male prophets are usually sent by YHWH to the Israelites (cf Jdg 2:1; 6:11; 13 in which narratives the Angel of YHWH appears to the Israelites and the individuals involved) while Deborah does not go to Barak, rather she sends for the Israelite military commander to come to her (Jdg 4:6; cf 7.2.1). Additionally, in 2 Chronicles 34:22, it is recorded that Hilkiah, the priest, together with his entourage sought an audience with the prophetess Huldah. Furthermore, it is important to note that the Israelite prophet and prophecy exhibit other significant distinctions that deviate from the established norms within the ancient Near East:

- One of these deviations manifest in the form of divine standards that emphasize a strong monotheistic orientation and which are depicted in the prophetic narratives in Judges

³⁷⁷ Malamat (1998:61) points out that certain scholars preclude these features as typical of prophetic expressions at Mari and subsequently any connection with prophecy in the Bible. The supporter of this viewpoint, Noort (1977:24) has been criticized by Nakata (1982:166-168) for ‘... brush(ing) aside so easily... all the criteria ... for recognizing prophetic reports’ in the Mari texts.

³⁷⁸ Malamat (1998:61) asserts that frenzied behaviour and or deprivation of cognition associated with this characteristic is rare (cf 5.3.2.4a). He avers that this feature of prophetic expression should incorporate ‘a liberal definition’ that includes broad spectrum ‘of phenomena from autosuggestion to the divinely infused dream.’ Malamat goes on to say that prophetic ecstasy did only sometimes appear as frenzy. The ecstatic state of the prophet was the way they spoke at times with song or music (cf Nm 11:25; 1 Sm 10:11; 19:20; 1 Chr 25:11). Judges does not indicate this type of behaviour in the prophet. Apparently, the frenzy of the prophet also had to do with the display of peculiar behaviour (see the behaviour of the prophets of YHWH in 1 Samuel 10:5-6; the prophets Baal in 1 Kings 18:19 and the text in 1 Samuel 19:23-24 that describes in addition the trance-like immobilization of King Saul – in the biblical worldview, the king was also possessed by an unclean spirit. The irrational behaviour that was characteristic of the prophets of Mari is not usually found among the prophets of YHWH who appear calm, sober of thought and rational of speech in the Book of Judges, for example (see Malamat 1998:61; cf Malamat 1971:129-162).

referred to above. The criterion for prophetic authenticity in Judges was established in Deuteronomy 18:21-22. In addition to the outcome of the prophecy (cf Dt 18:21-22), the purity of the message was validated by the holiness and integrity of the prophet (see Smith, MS 2020). An authentic prophetic message that contends for the covenantal lifestyle may be discerned from one that supports an idolatrous society (Stökl 2012b:16-23; cf Dt 18:21-22; see also Otto 2001:219) and that grants biblical prophecy its uniqueness.³⁷⁹ These biblical requirements for prophecy distinguish it from its ancient Near Eastern counterpart which lacked comparable standards and hence was susceptible to manipulation and exploitation (see also below). With no discernible devices of validation in place,³⁸⁰ Mari prophets could predict that which were favorable to the recipient (the kings') ears unrestricted.³⁸¹

- Malamat (1998:59, 63) observes that the prominence of Israelite prophecy and the role of the prophet in the community and in the religious sphere far exceeds that of the marginal role discernible at Mari. Predominant socio-religious themes form the basis of the prophetic message in the Old Testament in various historical settings which consistently allude to the state of the Israelites in relation to covenant (cf Jdg 2:1-3; 6:8-10, 11-20; 10:10-14; 13:3-20). Malamat notes that: 'The prophetic utterances at Mari have almost nothing comparable to the socio-ethical or religious ideology of biblical prophecy...' Generally, the Mari oracles are limited to a very mundane plane, placing before the king or delegates demands of a most material nature and reflecting a clear *Lokalpatriotism*, centred solely around the kings' personal well-being³⁸² and his political and military endeavors ((Malamat 1998:59, 63; see also Parker 1993:50-51). Hence, in light of the nature of the prophetic

³⁷⁹ Fleming (2004:45) remarks that any description of uniqueness ascribed to Biblical prophets must be weighed against the evidence for it in the ancient Near East external to the Bible. However, it is the uniqueness of the Sinai covenant that makes the Israelite prophets (in Judges for example) inimitable.

³⁸⁰ This was not the same for diviners in other categories such as celestial divination and extispicy (see above) who had a compendium (respectively) for interpreting signs (Sweek 2002:42). Hamori (2012:1-22) purports that personal articles of the prophets at Mari such as their hair and clothes that was sent with the oracle to the king served to identify the prophets and thus the authenticity of the prophecy (Nissinen 2003:22).

³⁸¹ Sweek (2002:43) mentions the freedom of the prophet (in the absence of a corpus of guidelines) to prognosticate. The liberty and authority held by the prophet open up avenues for personal gain and corruption. On the other hand, the power of prophets did not necessarily make them self-serving individuals (see Fleming 2004:46). The integrity and altruism of the diviner which are derived from the deity he serves are needed in order to make society, in collaboration with the deity, functionable (see Sweek 2002:44-45). Malamat (1998:63) also mentions the social conscience of the prophet at Mari in a prophetic message for justice that has an analogue in Jeremiah's homily to kings (Jr 21:12; cf Jr 22:3). Milstein (2013:431) remarks that when on the rare occasion a prophecy criticized the king, the oracle was beneficial and not a reproof.

³⁸² As a result prophecy at Mari could also involve mundane activities that had to be executed by the king. Malamat (1998:64) mentions a letter written to the king Zimri-Lim at Mari by a woman whose female companion was abducted while they were travelling (see also Milstein 2013:430). The woman had a (prophetic) dream in which the god Dagan appeared and announced that only Zimri-Lim could rescue the girl (see also Nissinen 2001:194). Milstein (2013:430) also remarks that at Mari prophecies were considered as single occurrences related to a specific historical context (see also Malamat 1998:64; Stökl 2012b:20). Given their predominantly mundane role in ancient Near Eastern society, these oracles albeit significant, were surpassed in importance by the Old Testament prophecies for their remarkable transformative power and prognostications.

phenomena at Mari, oracles could be easily controlled by the unscrupulous prophet as also indicated before.

- The narratives of Judges 6; 7 and 13 reveal that prophecy occurred outside the Tabernacle, at Bochim possibly Bethel, Ophrah and Zorah (see also 4.3.1.1a-b). In contrast many prophecies related to ancient Near Eastern kings transpire at the temple (Stökl 2012b:20-21; Milstein 2013:429).³⁸³ Judges shows the omnipresence of YHWH who may appear wherever He chooses (Jdg 2:1-3; 6:11; 13:3-20; cf Jdg 7:22; see also 3.3.5; 6.3.4-6.3.5) to communicate with all His people. This Judges' narrative exemplifies how the author/s of the book convey the concept of the polemical nature of Israelite prophecy. They challenge the prevailing cultural ideology that restricts prophecy to specific locations, such as the temple, and specific individuals, such as the king. The author/s present the notion that YHWH can manifest to anyone, anywhere. The author/s of Judges asserts that it is YHWH Himself who is the creator and bestower of prophecy (Jdg 2:1-3; 6:11-20; 13:3-20). Therefore, it is YHWH who may decide to communicate with ordinary individuals within the everyday environment.

i. Music and 'prophetic' ecstasy

Music could be utilized as a medium to induce an ecstatic state for prophets to commune with the divine (Burgh 2006:119). 1 Samuel 10:5 mentions several musical instruments: harps, tambourines, flutes and lyres playing while the prophets prophesied. In 2 Kings 3:15, the prophet Elisha requests a harpist to prophesy to King Jehoshaphat (see also Stökl (2012b:2). Burgh (2006:119) comments that these instruments, generally used by neighbouring ancient Near Eastern prophets as well, are attested by those found in the archaeological record (see Figure 5.2). One of the *Ishtar ritual texts* at Mari from the Old Babylonian period records that if the *muhhû* falls into a trance, the musicians will perform a particular melody (Stökl (2012b:21).³⁸⁴



Figure 5.2 Ancient Egyptian music makers. ca 1400-1390 BC (Wilkinson 2020)

³⁸³ Stökl (2012b:21) observes that although many prophecies took place in temples, substantiation for specialized prophecy in the cult in the ancient Near East is very thin and based on the rather vague Old Babylonian Ishtar ritual texts at Mari (see also Nissinen 2003:16).

³⁸⁴ However, Stökl (2012b:21) points out that at Mari it is not certain if music induced the prophetic trance (there is no confirmation for it) or if it is played only when the prophets fall into the trance.

The altered states of conscience initiated and sustained by music apparently served to facilitate divine communication. Williamson (2010:73) observes that the prophetess in the Old Testament is unfailingly depicted as an enthused songster whose singing is accompanied by musical instruments and dancing.³⁸⁵ The song of the prophetess Deborah may have been accompanied by instruments and dancing in the style of the tradition of celebrating military victory in the Old Testament. However, it is not known if rhythmic music and dancing formed a part of Deborah's actual prophecy (Jdg 4; cf Ex 15) and the other prophets in Judges (cf Jdg 2; 6 and 10) as it did in the ancient Near East (cf 1 Ki 18:26).

Based on the archaeological finds of plant remains, it has been proposed that ancient Near Eastern (divination) ritual included the use of psychedelic drugs. The *barû* (see 5.4.6.4), for example, supervised the purification rites that involved the use of drugs (Stein 2014; see Figure 5.3). Stein specifics the discovery of a storage jar that held ten litres of Viper's Bugloss (*Echium Linné*) which stood in the courtyard of a Late Bronze Age temple at Kamid el-Loz in Lebanon as an example of a powerful hallucinogenic drug that was used in rituals.³⁸⁶

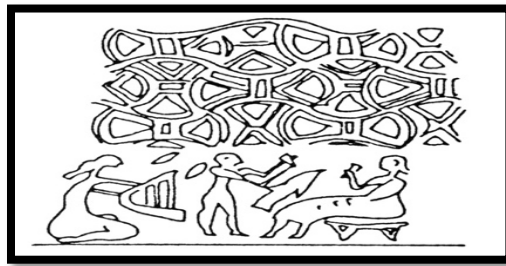


Figure 5.3 Seal imprint. From Uruk dated to 3000 BC (Stein 2014)³⁸⁷

³⁸⁵ Williamson (2010:73) states that this type of activity on the part of the prophetess implies a state of excitement and (prophetic) ecstasy that is usually associated with the prophetic persona. The author uses the word 'feverish' to describe the singing and dancing of the prophetess and draws association between this and similar religious activities in charismatic movements throughout the history of religion. I have had the opportunity to personally attend modern charismatic religious services connected to the Christian Pentecostal/Charismatic movement where I witnessed frenzied behaviour and ecstatic utterances (the so-called speaking in tongues; when possessed with what these churchgoers perceive to be the 'Holy Spirit').

³⁸⁶ Stein (2014) mentions that residue of plant-based drugs (for medicine/ritual purposes) was discovered in Syria at Tel Abu Hureyra that dates to 10 000 BC. Medical recipes made with plants date to 3 000 BC Ebla in Syria. Textual data regarding plant names, their preparation, use and application dates to 2000-1000 BC Mesopotamia. Naturally, given the unique abilities of the plant-based hallucinogenic identified in the ancient Near East as well as their location (in temples for example) they would have been used for ritualistic and burial purposes. Stein cites as an example the discovery of the remnants of the plant drug, the Blue Water Lily (*Nymphaea caerulea*) found in the annex of 14th century tomb of Tutankhamun. Evidence for hemp used in burial rites has also come to light; the oldest discovery was made in Çatalhöyük in Turkey where a 7000 BC skeleton was found wrapped in a hemp – weaved material (Stein 2014). For more details regarding the use of psychoactive plants in the ancient Near East see Lawler (2018:249-250); cf Merlin (2003:295-223). See also Sayin (2014:276-296) discussing the idea that the common symbols and mythic figures in ancient religions across the world are the results of the ingesting of psychoactive drugs during rituals.

³⁸⁷ The entopic, abstract geometric pattern, motif (above) is a universally common image that is created from a hallucinatory vision.

Considering this setting it may be deduced that the prophet's ecstasy, visions and frenzied behaviour of dancing and singing in the ancient Near East could also have been the result of the consumption of plant-based hallucinogens.

Recently, archaeologists have identified the residues of burnt cannabis and frankincense discovered on a couple of limestone altars in an Israelite temple in Tel Arad dated to 760 -715 BC (Fox 2020; see Figure 5.4). The burnt remnants of cannabis are on the right altar and the frankincense on the left altar).³⁸⁸



Figure 5.4 Limestone altars (Fox 2020)

The Old Testament indicates that it is the Spirit of YHWH (see 3.3.4) that creates the state of ecstasy in the prophet. Accordingly, the use of musical instruments, chanting and dancing may have served mainly to create a state of mind in the prophet conducive to receiving the messages. The Spirit of YHWH also came upon Gideon who blew the shofar/the ram's horn summoning the Abiezrites to follow him into battle (Jdg 6:34-35; cf 3.3.4; 6.4.3).

ii. The prophet, leaders and the king

Apparently early prophets, although confrontational (Jdg 4:9; 6:8-10; 10:10-14; cf Jdg 2:1-5) might not have posed a threat to the Israelite leadership (the elders) that would lead to the persecution and death of the later prophets under the various idolatrous kings. Judges 6:7 recounts that when the Israelites cried to the LORD for help, He sent a prophet to them. The prophet probably travelled with a company of seers (cf 1 Sm 10:5, 10; 19:20; 1 Ki 18:4; 2 Ki 4:38) and if they came from afar, they might have been accompanied by armed escorts for protection considering the perils of the times. Upon reaching their destiny, it would have been the leader of the company of prophets, perhaps a more renowned figure among the Israelites, who, unhindered, stepped forward to address his audience.

³⁸⁸ Considering these discoveries and the archaeological evidence for the use of psychoactive plants in the ancient Near East could it be possible that the unauthorized fire offered by Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron (Lv 10:1; cf Nm 3:4; 26:61) involved some type of plant-based hallucinogenic mixed with the approved incense? On the other hand, according to Rosen (2023), the psychedelic power of honey is alluded to in 1 Samuel 14 and honey was not allowed to be placed on the altar.

The Israelites' deliverance from Canaanite oppression after the prophetic address, did not eliminate anti-covenantal practices and a relapse into idolatry. The prognostications of Deborah (Jdg 4:6-7, 9)³⁸⁹ may have promised rescue from the tyranny of the Canaanites but provided only a temporary remedy to the spiritual ailment of the Israelites: their perennial covenantal unfaithfulness to YHWH.

The Old Testament indicates that prophets could refuse to employ their prophetic skills when they were entreated to do so if the king was an idolatrous ruler. Stökl (2012b:20) observes that prophecy in the Old Testament is characterized by 'the radical critical encounter of prophecy and king that is unparalleled in the ancient Near East.' Stökl opines that although prophecy against the king was delivered, they were not generally preserved in the ancient Near Eastern Royal archives.³⁹⁰ Whenever prophets did appear before an unfaithful king and people they inexorably delivered a diatribe or an apocalyptic prognostication that could intimidate the bravest of persons (cf Jdg 2:1-5; 6:8-10; 10:10-16). Apparently, the *bamot* were included among the cultic sites where prophets performed their multiple duties (cf 1 Sm 10:5). The Book of 1 Samuel suggests that prophets were trained at the *Miskhan*, where, also the high priest and possibly other *kohanim* served as prophets.

Deuteronomy 18:20 (see also Numbers 22-24) implies the existence of prophets of the Canaanite gods. Although it is not indicated in Judges, from Deuteronomy, ancient Near Eastern analogues and 1 Kings 18:18-22, it can be concluded that the prophets of other gods were present in the period of Judges in particular the prophets of Baal and Asherah (cf Jdg 2:11-13, etcetera). 1 Kings 18:19, 22 records the hundreds of prophets of Baal, and as the Israelites worshipped Baal and Asherah (Jdg 2:11-13) they would have followed the prophets of these deities early in their settlement days and thereafter (Dt 18:20). The punishment for a false prophet, speaking as if he has received YHWH's words, was death (Dt 18:20).

5.3.3 Dream messages

5.3.3.1 An auspicious time and place for divine revelation

³⁸⁹ Another singular characteristic of the prophet of YHWH was the rule of accuracy that confirmed the authenticity of the prophecy. Some scholars attempt to validate prognosticative prophecy by means of a 'hermeneutical device' called 'prophetic perspective' (Otto 2001:219). Accordingly, time as it relates to events in the near or distant future is not important and prophets can condense important events in a single timespan. The ideas surrounding this methodology of prophetic investigation in the Bible are questioned by Otto (2001:220) who maintains that the time factor in which future events were to occur was extremely important to Biblical prophets. For a detailed discussion of this topic see Otto (2001:219-240).

³⁹⁰ See Milstein (2013:431) recounting examples of criticism made against the king Zimri-Lim including: 'Once, twice even five times have I written to my lord about the deli[very] of the *zukurum* to Adad and about the estate that Adad, lord of Kallassu, demands [from of] us' (Nissinen 2003:18). In another example Šibtu to Zimri-Lim states: 'Even though you are neglectful about me, I will massacre on your behalf' (Nissinen 2003:48). Lanasûm to Zimri-Lim complains: 'How much longer will I not drink pure water? Write to your lord that he may provide me with pure water!' (Nissinen 2003:49).

The messages in Judges 2; 4; 6; 10; and 13, delivered by the Angel of YHWH or a prophet sent by YHWH, are presumably delivered during the day. This could potentially serve as another illustration of the typical approach taken by the author of Judges, who presents their perspective as a critique of the prevailing ideologies of their time since night time was considered as the most auspicious time to receive divine messages in the ancient Near East (Johnston ([ed] 2004:377; see also Jdg 6:25; 7:9).³⁹¹ In Judges 2:1-3, the Angel of the LORD is depicted as conveying divine instructions to the Israelites during daylight hours, perhaps due to the community's practice of offering sacrifices to YHWH when there is sufficient illumination to carry out these rituals. Likewise, the prophets in Judges 6 and 10 delivered their messages to the early Israelite community in the day since it would have been more convenient to make their sacrifices of atonement then. Deborah sent for Barak (Jdg 4:6) during the day to relay her message from YHWH since it would have been easier for her messenger to reach Barak. The message may have been received from YHWH at the request of the receiver perhaps during a daily prayer (cf Jdg 13:8) or a dream message at night.

As indicated before, Judges 7:1-2 reveals that a message from YHWH came to Gideon 'early in the morning.' Johnston ([ed] 2004:377) relates that the incubation ritual required practitioners to sleep 'in the presence of deities e.g., in their temples' to hear their divine revelations. In an Ugaritic folktale, a childless man called Daniel practises the incubation ritual for seven days in order to appeal to the Ugaritic deities for a son. Daniel eventually in a dream (at night) receives word from the god El that he will be blessed with a son³⁹² (see Gibson 2004:24; cf Johnston [ed] 2004:377). The *inscriptions of Deir Alla* reveal Balaam to have received communication from his gods at night (cf Nm 22:8, 13, 19, 21) and similarly in the *Ugaritic Tale of Kirta*, the god El delivers a message to Kirta in a dream at night (Johnstone [ed] 2004:377).³⁹³ In the customary manner of the author/s of Judges, to present their worldview as a polemic against the traditions of the dominant ideologies of the day, the divine messages in Judges 2; 6; 10, for example, are presumably delivered in the day.

As previously mentioned, many of the ancient Near Eastern rituals seems to have taken place at night, for instance, astral auguries and rituals occurred at night and rituals pertaining to the moon deities would also occur during the night (James 1963:300). Dream messages did not require

³⁹¹ In the Old Testament, YHWH too may speak or appear in dreams at night. YHWH delivers a response to the patriarch Abraham's request in a dream (cf Gn 15:9-21). YHWH appears to the patriarch Jacob in a dream (cf Gn 28:10-15). One wonders if the occasion of Jacob lying his head down to sleep on a (sacred) stone in a sacred region (which he later names Bethel) might not have been a deliberate act to hear from YHWH instead of what James (1963:260) ascribes to be an 'accidental incubation.'

³⁹² This Ugaritic tale is recorded in the *Ugaritic Tale of Aqhat* (Ginsberg [1969a:149-158]; Gibson [2004:23-27] for the full story.

³⁹³ Harrisson (2015:89) references 'message dreams' as a primary form of divine communication in the ancient Near East that had strong political overtones intended to reinforce the power of the ruler (see also Oppenheim 1956:185; cf DeJong Ellis 1989:126-186).

animal sacrifice as did celestial divination (see 5.4.4) and extispicy (see 5.4.6). Presumably the interpretation of a dream communiqué in symbolic language may have involved a divination specialist trained to assign the correct reading of the sign (cf 5.4.2; 5.4.4.3).³⁹⁴ However, among the Israelites, YHWH Himself gave people dream messages as well as their interpretations.

YHWH may even give divine dreams and the interpretations thereof to the enemies of the Israelites (Jdg 7:12-14; cf Nm 22-24; Amos 2020:313). In the ancient Near East dreams were thought of as significant (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:255; see also Niditch 2001:182-183). In Judges 7:12-14 ‘the Midianite soldiers take it as an omen’ and ‘so did the eavesdropping Gideon’ (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:255; cf Murphy 2014: 66). Flannery (2016:274) remarks that (in the ancient Near East) symbolic dreams consisting of shadowy symbols required interpretation by a priest, priestess or other expert dream interpreters ‘who used traditional dream symbol lists.’ In the Old Testament divinely inspired prophets or angels functioned as dream interpreters (Flannery 2016:274). In the ancient Near East dreamers were usually important people such as kings, priests and officials, and the messenger a dream being such as a deity (see above), angel, demon or a deceased person (Flannery 2016:274).

The Israelites believed that ‘some dreams sent by God were true warning signs, but everyone could interpret them’ (Koch, PR 2016:263). Accordingly, Walton, Matthews and Chavalas (2000:255) report that although the symbolism in dreams is frequently obscure and is best left to an expert, some dreams were fairly straightforward. It is obvious to anybody that the barley bread represented, Gideon, the farmer, and the tent, the Midianites, the nomads (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:255; see also Lindsey 1983:394).

5.3.3.2 *The messages in Judges 7*

Gideon musters the Israelite soldiers and builds a military camp at the spring of Harod (Jdg 7:1). The Midianite army was itself encamped in the valley (of Jezreel, Jdg 6:34) near the Hill of Moreh³⁹⁵ (see Figure 5:5; Jdg 7:1, 13-17; Lindsey 1983:393; Cline 2003:60; Faley 2011:83).

³⁹⁴ In Genesis 15:9-21 after enquiring of God, Abraham is commanded to cut in two a heifer, a goat and a ram as well as a dove and a pigeon. The animal parts were arranged in a particular pattern which for some reason played an important part in the ritual. As night dawned and Abraham fell into a deep sleep, and in a dream, YHWH supplied Abraham with a response. The cutting up of the Levite’s concubine into twelve parts may be a corruption of the divinatory event in Genesis 15 in order to provoke a divine response.

³⁹⁵ Ewing (2020) understands the Hill of Moreh to mean ‘hill of the teacher’ based on the derivation of the word מורה – *mōwreh* (Moreh) (see also McCann 2011). The term is derived from the Hebrew word ירה – *yārāh* meaning to teach or to direct, indicating ‘one who directs or gives oracular answers’ (cf Ex 4:12; 15:4; 24:12; 35:34; Lv 10:11; 14:57; Dt 17:10-11, etcetera). The Hebrew word *yarah* or *yara* can also be interpreted as *inter alia*: ‘archers’, cast them down,’ ‘points,’ ‘to shoot,’ ‘to instruct’ (see Biblehub 2020. *Yarah* or *Yara*). Accordingly, Ewing (2020) interprets the Hill of Moreh to be connected to a seer who resided in the area. The Canaanite village, Endor, where the medium consulted by King Saul lived (1 Sm 28:4-25), was presumably located in the area (cf Jos 17:11; Ps 83:9-10; see also Cline 2003:60). However, the geographical references in Judges 7:1-2 are difficult and cannot be identified with assurance (Evans 2017).

Previously, Gideon had a personal visitation by the Angel of the LORD and possibly in dreams received instructions from YHWH (cf Jdg 6:25-26).³⁹⁶ Judges is silent on the mode of divine communication in Judges 7:2-8. As indicated above (see 5.3.3.1) dream divination was an approved Israelite divinatory method. Despite Gideon's interactions with YHWH, he still lacks faith and his courage would be sorely tested by the divine whittling down of the size of his army from twenty-two thousand to three hundred men (cf Jdg 7:10-11; Niditch 2001:182; Cline 2003:60; Wiersbe 2007:444-445). Lindsey (1983:394) remarks that although Gideon had received a lot of support and assurances, the LORD was aware that he was hesitant to launch an attack on the Midianites. YHWH thus provided two additional means of reassurance: 'a direct divine word' (which may have come in a dream message) (Jdg 7:9) and 'a providentially planned dream narrated by a Midianite and overheard by Gideon' (Jdg 7:13-14; Lindsey 1983:394).

Cryer (1994:268) considers the overarching similarity between the 'Hebrew and Akkadian dream literatures' as obtaining divine support for an 'important activity' by means of an 'intelligible message dream;' that is, a message that did not necessitate an interpretation to be understood (see also 5.3.3.1). Although it is not certain, Gideon could have received a non-figurative message dream from YHWH (Jdg 7:9) that legitimized his attack on the enemy.³⁹⁷ By contrast the possible symbolic dream message of the man in Judges 7:13-14 required an interpretation. Cryer (1994:268) mentions that both Hebrew and Akkadian traditions recognized the 'symbolic' dream that needed clarification (see also 5.3.3.1). The two categories of message dreams, symbolic and non-figurative, appear as common displays of prognosticative communiqué in the Old Testament (see also 5.3.3.1; see Cryer 1994:268). In Judges 7 both types of dream messages (see above) appear conceivable to illustrate that this was one of the approved means to receive messages from YHWH.

³⁹⁶ Apparently, research has been conducted into the probable use of remote viewing (as type of extra-sensory perception ability), to gather military intelligence for certain military agencies of the United States. In the master's thesis of Captain Michael E. Zarbo of the United States Army, Zarbo details his research into the application of remote viewing to gather military intelligence (Zarbo 1992:1-92). Taking this into consideration, is it therefore so improbable that Gideon could receive information from a supernatural source?

³⁹⁷ Similarly, Cryer (1994:268) recounts the dream of the Mesopotamian Gudea of Lagaš 'legitimizes temple construction whilst 'in Genesis 28 the dream of Jacob legitimizes the cult site at Bethel'. For more examples of divine approval of activities by means of dreams see Cryer (1994:268). The idea that divine communication via dreams for example were utilized by ancient Near Eastern kings to sanction activities related to state is plausible (Cryer 1994:268). The idea that divine message dreams were used to legitimize cult sites in the Old Testament (see above), however, seems to indicate events were solely created by humans without the overarching supernatural component that ultimately directed Israelite history in the Old Testament. It implies a self-seeking use of religion to endorse the interests of one group of people over another that in antiquity of the Old Testament usually involved rights to land and resources. Jacob's actions in Genesis 28 for example gave the Israelites an additional right to establish Bethel as their territory.



Figure 5.5 The Hill of Moreh. (The Israel Bible 2022)

In the ancient Near East, army outposts or military stations consisted of a series of watchtowers and soldiers standing guard against enemy incursions and sudden attacks.³⁹⁸ Presumably the Midianite camp was organized in a similar manner with possible (makeshift) watchtowers. Gideon and Purah would have lingered on the periphery of the camp when they overheard the Midianite soldiers talk about the dream and its interpretation (see 5.3.3.1). Upon hearing the dream and its interpretation, Gideon, now convinced, ‘bowed down and worshipped’ (Jdg 7:15; Klein 1989:57). He returns to the camp and ‘apparently devises the trumpet-torch-and-pitcher tactic’ (Klein 1989:57; cf Ryan 2007:64). That night Gideon and his 300 soldiers ‘achieve almost impossible military objectives’ (Ryan 2007:64). However, it is the LORD who routes the army of the Midianites and their allies and who ultimately won the battle (Jdg 7:22). Gideon refuses leadership of the Israelites and instead opts to make an ephod that would eventually assist in leading the Israelites into another cycle of idolatry.

5.4 OTHER FORMS OF DIVINE COMMUNICATION

5.4.1 Introduction

The author/s of Judges do not raise any objections against determining the will of YHWH as long as they take place by means of the approved divinatory methods (see 5.3.1; 5.3.2; 5.3.3) (cf Jdg 2:1-3; 4:7-8, 9; 6:8-10; 6:11-40; 7; 10:10-14; 13; 20:27-28). Prophecy and other forms of divine revelation are, after all, one of YHWH’s important signature marks. In the biblical worldview YHWH’s omniscience serves to confirm His identity as the one true God. The covenant acted as a kind of prophetic ‘document’ regarding the future of the early Israelites via the blessings and curses codicils. It was, therefore, unnecessary for the early Israelites to accord divination the same status as that of the ancient Near Easterners. The covenant provided the structure for government, religion, economics, society and law in the early Israelite society as indicated before (see also 2.3.3). As a prophetic ‘document’ the Sinai Covenant therefore served as the agent of the divine

³⁹⁸ See NIV Archaeological Study Bible (2005:695); cf Cooper (2010); Earley-Spadoni (2022:58); Willems (2022:692-693).

will in the religious, socio-economic and political spheres. All Israelites had access to the Sinai Covenant or had knowledge of it and thus were cognizant of the divine will for their lives.

There was nothing comparable to the Sinai Covenant in terms of its prophetic function among the ancient Near Eastern peoples and thus gaining an understanding of the divine will by means of divination was considered vital to the lives and prosperity of people in the ancient Near East (see Sweek 2002:41-56). The ancient Near Eastern king was the agent of the divine will (Sazonov 2016:39) and had to seek divine guidance before major political decisions (Boadt 2008:160). Walton (2018) remarks that Mesopotamian intense concern with ascertaining the divine will regarding life led to the eminence of divination in the royal court. Divination would also have played a significant role in the lives of the common people. To obtain the divine will, the ancient Near Eastern priests performed a variety of rituals of inducement and prognosticative rites (Boadt 2008:160). Deuteronomy 18:9-12 lists some of these practices that were forbidden to the early Israelites.

It was forbidden for the early Israelites to consult Canaanite occult specialists for any matter regarding the future (cf Dt 18:10-14). A reason for this probably was that in the biblical worldview the *shedim*/other gods were deceivers of people who therefore may provide the Israelites with deceptive information (see 2.2.5.8). In the Yahwistic religion the divine will could be ascertained with certainty and inquirers may be assured of a legitimate response from YHWH if they seek out YHWH's approved officials who use the appropriate divinatory methods, such as the priests using the *Urim* and *Thummim* (see 5.3.1.1; cf 8.4.3.2-8.4.3.3). Nevertheless, the aforementioned method/s and authenticity assurance in ascertaining the divine will did not prevent the Israelites from adopting the Canaanite cults. As a result the early Israelites most likely engaged in the Canaanite blood rituals and illegal divination practices, described below, which would have reinforced the messages of condemnation seen in Judges 2; 6, and 10 (see above). The archaeological record reveals very little of the divination rituals practised by the highland populations. There are no Iron Age I city centres (Golden 2004:187), for example, that can provide clues. The Book of Judges and parallel ancient Near Eastern literature, however, can grant revelations into the divinatory cultic practices and lifestyle of the idolatrous early Israelites.

5.4.2 Forbidden occult specialists and divinatory rites

The use of blood and body parts (of unclean and dead animals and humans) to execute the divination rituals defiled all the participants involved in these acts (Lv 18:30; 19:26). Deuteronomy 18:11 also mentions specific diviners forbidden to the Israelites: *וְהוֹבֵב* (*wəḥōbēb* – one who casts spells or a conjurer), *וְאֹבֵד* (*'ōwēb* – a medium), *וְיִדְעֵי* (*wəyiddə'ōnī* – a spiritist and *וְדוֹרְשֵׁי* (*wəḏōrēš* – one who

calls up the dead or necromancer).³⁹⁹ King Saul would seek out one of these divination specialists since he did not receive word from YHWH via dreams, prophets or the *Urim* (1 Sm 28:6-9).

The ritualistic slaughter of animals, the examination of birth anomalies as well as planetary configuration were mostly how the occult specialists, who presided over divination ceremonies, received the messages from the gods (Dolansky 2013:62; see also Pongratz-Leisten 2013:37; see also below). Ancient Near Eastern prophets and diviners were also needed to answer prayers to the gods; to incur the gods' favor upon individuals, their families and households which included blessings for fertility, protection from the evil doings of demons and to curse others (see Dolansky 2013:62-63).⁴⁰⁰ Judges 8:27 and Judges 17:3-13 may indicate that the respective ephod (see 4.3.1.1d) and the idols involved in the narratives were related to divinatory practices to procure knowledge about the future. Syncretic Israelite divinatory techniques (cf Jdg 18:5-6) may have involved the abovementioned rituals. The author/s of Judges would have severely condemned these anti-covenantal practises.

5.4.2.1 Defilement

Prohibitions on consulting the (Canaanite) occult specialist in Deuteronomy (18:10-14) occur in the context of Israelite ritual purity as prescribed by the covenant. In the Yahwistic religion, ritual sacrifices involving the blood of animals was deeply spiritual and centred on removing the sins of the Israelites. In the ancient Near East, however, the blood of the sacrificial animal usually involved divination, seeking the will of the gods regarding the future. In the biblical worldview, the Canaanite magic and blood rituals defiled the land and its people.

Israelites laws that mandated spiritual cleanliness encouraged hygienic living conditions. The early Israelites were to bury their dead and leave them undisturbed. A sanitary environment protected the Israelites from infectious diseases caused by the handling of corpses and tainted blood. The

³⁹⁹ The mediums, spiritists, and those calling up the dead particularly consult the dead, on behalf of the living. In Deuteronomy 18:11 it appears that they have definite differences although unstated. Their methods and use of magic paraphernalia varied. According to Rashi a medieval Rabbi (1040-1105 AD), the *זוֹב* utilizes a raised corpse under their armpit from where through sorcery it speaks (Sifrei Devarim 172:2); the *ידדעני* places an animal bone in his mouth and in this way the bone will speak by means of sorcery (Samhedrin 65a); the *שדד* raises a dead body and positions it on his genitals or the necromancer will consult a skull (Sifrei Devarim 172:4; cf Sanhedrin 65b) (Sefaria 2020, Rashi on Deuteronomy 18:11).

⁴⁰⁰ Dolansky (2013:62) relates that an inscription from the Aramean King Zakkur reveals that 'Baal-Shamayn [Lord of the Heavens] answered his prayers through seers and diviners with an oracle of salvation.' Although the *Stele of Zakkur* is dated to a later period (790-780 BC) I believe that the seers and diviners mentioned in the inscription were traditions that started very early in the history of the ancient Near East if not the world. The idea that prophecy develops from within a less developed socio-religious context to a more developed one (see Cryer 1994:243-250) is based on modern evolutionary theorems. Shamans are probably one of the most ancient versions of trying to understand the will of the gods, spirits or ancestors and the need to make contact with the realm of the gods or spirits. For more information on the inscription of King Zakkur see Guzzo (2014:54-57). The word dead as applied to the Canaanite gods is meant in terms of their separation from the life of YHWH (cf Dt 32:16, 21). Without the life of YHWH all breathing entities in heaven and earth were considered to be spiritually dead in the Old Testament. By the term other gods, I mean all ancient Near Eastern gods and goddesses including the deities worshipped by the Canaanites.

prohibitions against the divination blood rituals also kept the ground and the environment free from contaminated elements. According to McCarthy (1969:166), inasmuch as life was in the blood, blood could also be ‘a sign of illness and death.’ The ritual shedding of human blood was therefore absolutely forbidden (cf Dt 32:15-21).

The worship of Baal demanded, apart from animal blood, the shedding of human blood to entreat and perhaps also summon the spirit of the god (Akintola 2011). *Ugaritic texts* reveal that the gods were keen on bloody combat (see Coogan and Smith [eds] 2012:43, 45-46, 117, 124, etcetera). Archaeological findings attest to the fact that the gods were (ordinately) attracted to the blood of both animals and humans. McCarthy (1969:166) posits that ‘blood rites were so common’ because ‘a special power’ was ascribed to them: ‘It is a divine sanguinary substance which revivifies the divinity and so gives force to rites.’ It is possible that the sacrifices at the altar of Baal (Jdg 6:25-26) at Orah involved idolatrous blood rites.

According to McCarthy human blood would have been envisaged as divine in nature in Mesopotamia since humans were created from blood and clay (cf Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:29).⁴⁰¹ Consequently Cabal [eds] (2003) notes that the blood of the sacrificed individual offered on the altar represents the life of the victim given unto death (see also MacArthur 2005:215). Because life was embodied by blood it was thought of as supremely valuable and thus mostly desired by the devotees and their gods (see Cabal [eds] 2003). The discovery of children’s bones at Canaanite sanctuaries have shown that one of the rituals of bloodshed involved the sacrifice of children to the gods (cf Ps 106:37-38; Akintola 2011). The Old Testament child sacrifice to Molech is particularly mentioned (Lv 20:2-5; Dt 12:5; 18:10; 2 Ki 23:10; Jr 32:35; Cabal [eds] 2003).⁴⁰² Self-disfigurement and ritual sex were also commonplace rites forbidden by the Sinai covenant (Akintola 2011). Israelite laws considered all bestiality and homosexuality (which were also related to the ancient Near Eastern cults) as capital offences (Lv 18:22-23; 20:13; cf Dt 23:18).⁴⁰³

⁴⁰¹ In the Babylonian *Enūma Eliš* the gods (Marduk) create humans from clay animated by the blood of a slain god (Qingu, the cohort of Tiamat) (McCarthy 1969:166; see also Dalley 2000:261). Similarly recounted in Akkadian, the mother goddess, Mami, creates man from a combination of flesh, clay and the blood of a vanquished deity (see Dalley 2000). Interestingly, the Quran also reports Allah as creating humans from a clot of blood (Quran.com 2022. Surah Al-‘Alaq 96:2).

⁴⁰² Cabal [eds] (2003) records that the vestiges of child sacrifices to Molech discovered in North Africa may have roots in Phoenicia. In addition, he mentions that in the Book of Jubilees intermarriage particularly marrying Israelite children to heathens was considered to be similar to sacrificing children to Molech.

⁴⁰³ Cabal [eds] (2003) comments that homosexuality is referenced in the Old Testament (Gn19:5-11; Jdg 19) as typical customs in the Canaanite culture, and in Mesopotamia these practices are also confirmed. Cabal furthermore states that Hittite, Canaanite and Egyptian texts confirm bestiality. Among the Hittites intercourse with some animals was prohibited although sex with mules and donkeys did not carry the death penalty and cohabitation with certain animals was permitted (see Cabal [eds] 2003; MacArthur 2005:117). For societies intently preoccupied with procreation and continuance these practices are antithetical to their desire for longevity. Despite the threat of genetic abnormalities, another unsound practice allowed was that of sexual relations between blood relatives. Hittite codes of law and the laws of Hammurabi forbid only some of the incest laws in Leviticus 18:6-18. Cabal [eds] 2003 remarks that the

MacArthur (2005:1038) relates that the worship of Molech (who may also be Milcolm, an Ammonite god in 1 Ki 11:5, 33) in addition to child sacrifice included astrology and temple prostitution. The prophets of Baal ritualistically slashed themselves with daggers in order to release their blood that would invoke the powers of Baal (Akintola 2011). The Baalistic rituals to invoke the power of the god recorded in 1 Kings 18:22-39 presumably remained unchanged when first transferred from the Iron Age I at the time when the Israelites first settled the land. It is not difficult to imagine the ritual that involved cutting up a bull and sacrificing it on an altar taking place on an Israelite idolatrous *bamah*; for example, on the altar of Baal at the high place in Ophrah, as indicated before.⁴⁰⁴ The similarity of an animal sacrifice, prayer offerings, and so on between Israelite and Canaanite religions might have brought the Israelites to the presupposition that assimilation of the two religions is in order (cf Jdg 2:1-2; see also Chapter Two). A ritual that involved animal sacrifice would eventually involve a divinatory occurrence as well since the signs of the gods were everywhere and continuously sought.

5.4.3 Necromancy

In the ancient Near East, cultic performances included the veneration of deceased ancestors and kings (Wallenfels and Sasson 2000:6; Snell 2010:301; cf Johnston [ed] 2004:477-480; Nielson 2020:120; see also Coogan (ed) 1978:48).⁴⁰⁵ Worshipping dead kings and ancestors created a continuity between the living and the dead that was antithetical to the covenant since YHWH was the God of the living and not the dead (Dt 18:9-11; 26:14; see Lewis 1992:240-242; King and Stager 2001:376).

The involvement of the Israelites in practices of necromancy is not mentioned in Judges. They probably worshipped the gods of the death and the underworld given that they were worshipping the gods of the inhabitants of Canaan. Despite being explicitly warned against worshipping the gods of the Amorites (cf Jdg 1:34-36), the Israelites chose to disregard this warning, just as they did with all other warnings from YHWH (Jdg 6:10; cf Jos 24:14-15). It is, therefore, likely that

Canaanite priests often practised homosexuality. The incident in Judges 19 was probably an adopted Canaanite practice.

⁴⁰⁴ This was a ceremony to demonstrate that YHWH was the true God who alone was omnipotent and thereby display Baal's lack of any power to enact upon the environment and set fire to the wood on the altar of the Baal prophets (1 Ki 18:22-39).

⁴⁰⁵ There is a clear difference between polytheism and ancestor cults: communities may worship deceased people who are deified. The worship patterns of ancestors are similar to that of the veneration of gods. Ancestor cults may also exist within polytheistic societies such as the ancient Near Eastern nations in which deceased persons were worshipped alongside a multitude of deities (Dhavamony [1973:64-65]; the author makes a further distinction between the deep respect 'paid to ancestors and the worship of ancestors as though they were deities. Hackett (2001:156) makes a similar contrast. See also Snell (2010:301) who states that at times the divinized deceased heroes worshipped in polytheistic societies (as well as dead kings who retained their royal stature in the afterlife) may arise from their veneration in ancestor cults (Shipp 2002:85; Holland 2009:262; cf Van Der Toorn 1996:373-374; Ziffer 2010:207; Day 2013b:82; Stiebing 2016:132).

the Israelites venerated the Amorites' gods associated with death and the underworld. Kamiš and Rašapum are Amorite gods of the underworld (see also Leick 2003:102, 143).⁴⁰⁶

The Canaanites believed the netherworld to be a domain of darkness and imprisonment and the members of the cult of the dead venerated the deceased for the same reason as they did their deities, to obtain security from misfortune (Scurlock 1997:78, 80; Lewis 1999:225; Crenshaw 2001:339; Collins 2004:357-358; Walton 2006:318-319; cf Footnote 52). If the Israelites in the Book of Judges held comparable beliefs and engaged in the same religious practices, they would have been denounced by the author/s of Judges (cf Dt 30:19; Jos 24:14-15). In addition, the Israelites in joining the cults of the dead violated their laws of purity, for any contact with a dead body rendered them impure. Apparently, the fears and the traditions of the surrounding nations about the underworld and its inhabitants had overtaken the Israelites as well.⁴⁰⁷ Wallenfels and Sasson (2000:6) describe the Canaanites as living 'alongside or over the tombs of ancestors.' Brody (2014:127) reports on the likelihood of 'intramural tombs from Ashkelon' and in other regions of Canaan positioned in the courtyards of affluent households.⁴⁰⁸ Offerings of food indicated by the food remnants at Iron Age 1 tomb in Gezer, for example, and libations to the dead kept the connection between the living and the dead ongoing (see Bloch-Smith 1992:218a; cf Lewis 1999:230; Trumbower 2001:17).⁴⁰⁹ In the ancient Near East, grave sites were equipped with libation pipes through which the dead were nourished with water, blood and probably wine as a substitute for blood offerings as well as oil (Schmidt 1996:53-54; Brandon et al 2014:119; cf Lewis 1992:240-242; Biale 2008:23; Steinberg 2009:99). The belief in the netherworld was also popularized among ancient Near Eastern nations by the descent or banishment of certain gods into the dark abode of the dead (see Dalley 2000:154-162; Leick 2003:35-36; Baker 2016:86).

The Israelites like the Canaanites believed that Sheol (the abode of the dead) was eternal, a place of bodily corruption and a place where there is no remembrance of God or wisdom or knowledge

⁴⁰⁶ Leick (2003:102) remarks that Kamiš was also the national god of the Moabites on the stele of Mesha during the first millennium.

⁴⁰⁷ There is no textual or archaeological evidence for this statement. However, in submitting this idea, I draw from certain traditions held by people in the mixed religious environment that was indigenous to a now defunct community, District Six, South Africa in which Muslims and Christians, living side by side, would both partake in the religious ceremonies of each other; in particular, the Christmas and New Year's ceremonies were shared by both communities. In the early Israelite history, YHWH warned the Israelites against such syncretism for all the dangers it posed to Israelite faith in YHWH alone as the One True God.

⁴⁰⁸ However, Brody (2014:126) notes that intramural interments that began in the Middle Bronze Age and ended in the Late Bronze Age were a 'Canaanite urban tradition.' See Brody (2014:126) for a description of the functions served by intramural burials.

⁴⁰⁹ Although Lewis (1999:230) points out that food and libation offerings to the dead are demonstrated in the material culture, it is not certain whether these cultic rites occurred only at the time of burial or if they were continuing rituals that belonged to the cult of the dead. The Old Testament indicates that food and libations may have been part of the usual practices of the commemorative act for dead at interment (cf Dt 26:14; Is 56:6-8; Ps 106:28). Trumbower (2001:18) comments that 'the other sacrifices in Deuteronomy 12:27' is generally understood 'to mean private family funereal sacrifices or sacrifices to the dead.'

(cf Ecc 9:10; Ps 6:5; Job 7:9). The latter indicates that the dead do not have any experience of YHWH's goodness or life, thus Sheol was also the place reserved in the afterlife for evil people (Nm 16:33; Is 14:9; Ps 9:17; 31:17). But the Israelites also held beliefs regarding Sheol that differed from their ancient Near Eastern neighbours. Thus, the Israelites believed that the righteous who died were to be at rest in Sheol (Job 21:13) where they were offered safety (cf Job 14:13) and where they are reunited with deceased loved ones (Gn 37:35). Apparently Sheol contained two distinct regions: one for the sinful and the other for the righteous. Job 19:26-27, Psalm 23:4, 6 (cf Ps 16:9,11; 17:15) also reveal that the Israelites believed in living in the eternal presence of YHWH which could indicate that the divine presence is to be enjoyed in Sheol or that Sheol, in the Old Testament, is an intermediary abode from where believers will move on to their ultimate destination to be with YHWH in an earthly and heavenly kingdom. It is very likely that the author/s of Judges held the same beliefs regarding Sheol, YHWH and their ultimate destiny (cf Footnotes 52, 76, 148).

In the Ugaritic *Baal Cycle*, Mot is the god of the underworld and in Mesopotamian folklore, Nergal and his consort Ereshkigal are the rulers of the abode of the dead. To appease the anger of these gods, who had the power to raise the dead in order to consume the living, people made offerings to appease them (see Dalley 2000:173; cf Holland 2009:161). The gods and dead kings who ruled in the netherworld were thought to possess supernatural powers that could beneficially affect the lives of the living (Schmidt 1996:138).⁴¹⁰ If communication from the netherworld was sought, necromancers would be the ideal occult specialists to contact.⁴¹¹ According to 1st millennium BC Babylonian texts, necromancers after reiterating a prescribed incantation three times, were then able to see and speak with ghosts of the dead (Baker 2016:87). However, an earlier Akkadian text indicates that they were not always able to inform an enquirer (see Pfeiffer 1969:434).

⁴¹⁰ Despite the scholarly belief in an ancestor cult rites among the Israelites (cf Dt 26:14) and the biblical attribution of the Canaanite origins of practices such as mourning rites (Dt 14:1); necromancy (Dt 18:11), Schmidt (1996:138), however, has disputed these Israelite rites as being Canaanite in origin since Syro-Palestinian texts, such as the *Ugaritic texts* 'do not document the observance of ancestor cult rites or necromancy by the regional populations of the late second to mid-first millennium.'

⁴¹¹ Adam and Groves (2007:21) report that in the very earliest neolithic communities in the ancient Near East, such as Göbekli Tepe, shamans as intermediaries and mediators between people and the gods or spirits were powerful and authoritative figures (cf Ataç 2019:512). Ataç (2019:512) states that shamans and shamanic symbolism in the monumental art of the Neolithic period are best represented by the images preserved at Göbekli Tepe, Nevalı Çori and Çatalhöyük. Shamans are thought to have been extraordinary human beings with specialised technical-spiritual abilities who experienced ecstatic states and the realm beyond the physical senses. These individuals then played a critical role in enabling the connection between the divine and social spheres (Ataç 2019:512). This early type of occult office, as it were, was assumed by other divinatory specialists in subsequent ages: the elite classes of cult officials: priests, prophets, necromancer, sorcerer, diviner of omens, etcetera (Sweeney 2005:23-27; Stöckl 2012:59-61; Nissinen 2017:337-338; Ataç 2019:512). As was previously indicated, divination experts were essential to the maintenance of religious, economic, political, social, and educational institutions in the ancient Near East (McNutt 1999:177).

The witch of Endor called up by king Saul (1 Sm 28:7-4) might have been a Canaanite or Israelite diviner. She could also have been a priestess/prophetess and thus it is possible that her houses served either as a shrine or were attached to one. Her action of baking bread and killing a calf, fulfilled one of the duties of a priest/ess: the presentation of an animal sacrifice and a meal offering (Grenn 2008:4; cf Jr 7:18; 44:17-19) to the king whom she recognized as the representative of YHWH or another powerful deity (cf Sha 2018:224). The witch of Endor apparently held a position of importance, as the men serving under King Saul were familiar with her skills. Additionally, she appeared to have been prosperous, owning a house and furniture,⁴¹² and even being able to provide king Saul with a sacrificial meal. It is likely that her elevated status and wealth were a result of her services being sought after by paying individuals in search of the divine will (Sha 2018:224-225).

Nevertheless, as mentioned before any contact with the dead was strictly forbidden for the Israelites. According to the worldview of the author/s of Judges, the belief that the deceased possessed the ability to communicate and predict the future, or exert any influence on the lives of the Israelites, was anathema to the Yahwistic religion. This notion undermined the Israelites' faith in YHWH, who is a God of life, and instead placed their trust in shadowy ethereal and deceptive entities known as the *shedim* (see 2.2.5.8).

5.4.4 Celestial divination

The Canaanite gods lived in the heavenly abodes or on remote mountains such as Mount Saphon in the *Ugaritic Baal Cycle* (Hundley 2015:203; cf Boyd 1997:74). In Canaan the gods inhabited the *bamot* (Jdg 3:19; 6:25-26) and the temples (Jdg 9:27; 16:23), household shrines (Jdg 17:5) and other sacred areas like special trees (Jdg 9:37). Judges 5:4-5, 20 suggests that elements of nature and the celestial could be imbued with the supernatural. In the idolatrous Israelite community that emulated the Canaanites, it is likely that the celestial entities were revered. As a result, they might have offered worship to the Amorite moon deity Sîn or Yaraḥum, who is also recognized as Yarikh. (see Leick 2003:166). If this were the case, like the civilizations of the ancient Near East, the Israelites who engaged in idolatry would have viewed the heavens and celestial bodies as possessing the divine essence (and language) of the gods. They would have seen these celestial entities as deities with the power to influence human life on Earth.

⁴¹² The writer of the book of Samuel does not condemn the witch of Endor; instead, it is Saul who is destined to meet his demise. It is worth noting that the mention of a couch (see 1 Sm 28:23), a symbol of wealth and privilege, adds credibility to the idea that the house is a shrine and the woman is a priestess. Colledge (1986:21) discusses the presence of sacred couches dedicated to Astarte, Bel, and priests on Palmyrene mosaics. Similarly, sacred couches of the Good Goddess were discovered in ancient Rome (Langlands 2006:301) and in the ancient Near East, dedicated to various deities. Frankfort (1978:297) explains that a king could be deified by a goddess (represented by her high priestess – which assumably the witch of Endor is) through an invitation to ‘share her couch.’ The act of offering a sacrificial meal to the king and seating him on the, presumably, sacred couch reveals much about the identity of the ‘witch of Endor,’ who, in her fear of the king, honored Saul as a god (Sha 2018:n258).

People believed that the stars are either the gods themselves or representative of the gods (Dalley 2000:255, 272) and thus they were worthy of ritualistic worship (Fletcher 2006). The celestial or astral deities were believed to possess concealed knowledge about the future within the vast expanse of the night sky. This knowledge was encoded in various signs and symbols, manifested through the motion of planets and stars. Consequently, these celestial gods communicated enigmatic messages pertaining to human existence, which required careful observation and interpretation by earthly observers and worshippers. Deciphering the position and movements of celestial objects across the nocturnal heavens was essential for ensuring the successful continuation of life (Reiner and Pingree 1975:7-19, 61-62).⁴¹³ Consequently, it was, the king's duty to direct daily prayers and sacrifices to these gods with the intention of appeasing them and gaining their knowledge regarding the future (see Goetze 1969b:397).⁴¹⁴

There is a hierarchical structure to the order in which the celestial god's messages are received. It is believed that the supreme (star) gods communicated the divine will to the lesser (star) gods, known as the Babylonian *igigi*, as described in the *Enūma Eliš*. These *igigi* gods were in turn invoked by human kings and the elites to seek divine revelation (see Dalley 2000:258-264). In light of the aforesaid it is probable that the ordinary and lower classes did not have access to all of this knowledge. In contrast to the Israelites in Judges (cf Jdg 3, 4, 6, 10), ordinary individuals in the ancient Near East did not receive transformative divine revelations that would significantly impact society (Hundley 2015:203).

And yet, the king, the elites and their low-born subjects were bound by the common belief that they were duty-bound to determine the divine will for, as stated before, a successful everyday living (see Goetze 1969b:397). Walton and Hill (2013:112) remark that the divine will of the capricious gods held a firm grip on the existence and destiny of the ancient Near Eastern people, as well as their land and animals. Deciphering the enigmatic messages of the star gods, however, proved to be a daunting task, as they were often indecipherable and required intricate rituals to unravel as also stated above. Consequently, the people of the ancient Near East found themselves excessively reliant on unraveling these complex 'star' messages in order to navigate their lives. The early Israelites did not require the practice of celestial divination and its intricate rituals which, in any case, would have been considered an abomination by the author/s of Judges. As previously

⁴¹³ Likewise the ancient Near Eastern peoples believed that the gods had hidden their will and knowledge regarding the future in the natural environment, in rivers and mountains, the trees and the rocks also in the form of signs which needed decoding (Reiner and Pingree 1975:7-19, 61-62).

⁴¹⁴ The daily prayer and offerings of the Hittite king, Muršili to the god of agriculture, Telepinus, may provide parallel rituals to appease the star gods and procure their favour. The daily prayer of the Hittite king, Muršili was read by the scribe addressing the deity Telepinus and together with the sacrifices of 'loaves and libations' mentioned in the prayer was intended to protect and bring abundance to 'Hatti land' (Goetze 1969b:396-397). In the prayer Telepinus is entreated to grant the king and queen 'enduring life, health and long years,' 'drive forth the evil fever, plague, famine and misery,' 'everlasting fertility to the crops,' the animals as well as the people (Goetze 1969b:397).

mentioned (see 5.5.1), the covenant served as a prophetic ‘document’ outlining the destiny of the early Israelites through the inclusion of blessings and curses. The covenant established a ‘simplified’ form of religion for them, and the divinatory techniques that were approved were clear and reliable, as they originated from a trusted ‘source,’ YHWH (cf 5.5.1).

In a fragile world filled with random fate, powerful ill-willed forces and war that had the potential to extinguish human existence (cf Jdg 6:1-6), understanding the clandestine language of the star gods was imperative as previously mentioned (Dolansky 2013:57; cf Hundley 2015:203). Knowing what lay ahead and knowing the outcomes of events and decisions in the future granted people the ability to avert any negative results. In this manner order is created from the possible chaos of an unsuccessful future as people now could control their own destinies.

Perhaps this could explain why the early Israelites worshipped so many different Canaanite gods in Judges – an attempt to acquire the knowledge of every god to maintain some sense of control over their lives in a chaotic and unpredictable world.⁴¹⁵ However, the author/s of Judges consistently attribute the responsibility for this situation solely to the Israelites and their failure to uphold their covenant. Considering the challenges they faced, it is conceivable that the early Israelites may have questioned their belief in a sole God whose power they thought was inferior to that of a pantheon of gods. Additionally, their faith may have wavered due to the covenant’s promise of a peaceful existence, which was frequently unattained during the era of Judges (cf Jdg 2:3, 10-19; 3:7-8, etcetera).

However, according to the perspective of the Judges’ narrator/s, the Israelites were expected to understand the divine will and live a successful life by faithfully and consistently following the covenantal laws and decrees. This meant that the author/s believed, the Israelites had no justification for engaging in celestial divination or any other form of Canaanite divination. The author/s narrate that the Israelites faced severe consequences for violating their covenant. Even their practices of astral divination would have resulted in divine judgment and punishment. If it was not astral divination, it would have been some other form of divination. References in Judges 8:27, 17:5, and 18:31 suggest that an ephod was used in a syncretic cult, possibly for the purpose of

⁴¹⁵ As a subsistence agrarian society, the Israelites had this background in common with their Canaanite neighbours. The worldview of the ancient Near Eastern people emerged from their primarily rural, agrarian society (Simkins 2022:270) in which a plethora of nature deities were thought to control the forces of nature and were thus worshipped (cf 3.4.4.2; 3.6.1.1; 8.2.2.2a-b). The ancient Near Easterners thought that their lives were strongly influenced by the actions of the spirits that resided throughout all of nature and would worship these gods in order to make sense of their own world (Boyd 1997:74; cf Podany and McGee 2005:66; see Footnotes 138 and 141). People thought that when things were going well in their own world, it meant that things were also going well in the world beyond. However, when things were bad and there was a lot of sickness, disease, and tragedy, it was obvious that evil spirits were winning (Boyd 1997:74). In an Akkadian text a shepherd speaks of his sacrifices made in honour of the gods and in reverence of the spirits (Speiser 1969:117). The text is called the *Etana* and is centred on a mythical ruler of Kish, a shepherd who ascended to heaven (Speiser 1969:114-118). Old Akkadian cylinder seals show a shepherd ascending to the heavens on an eagle’s wings (Speiser 1969:114). During the aforesaid times people probably tried to seek the god’s favour in order to alleviate calamitous circumstances.

divination. Apparently, the Israelites were unable to rid themselves of the anti-covenantal cultic influences of the Canaanites.

5.4.4.1 The star gods, economics and control

By incorporating divination and personnel systems into the organisational structures of the elites, the temples, and the royal court, celestial divination, along with other forms of divination, supported the highly ranked socio-economic and political structures of the ancient Near East (Hundley 2015:203; see Chapter Seven). The elites were able to control the flow of the gods' information and preserve their authority over the lower classes, whose interaction with the gods was already limited and their ability to access the divine will consequently curtailed (see Hundley 2015:203).

The procurement of divine knowledge depended on the status of the enquirer: those with enough money, usually the noble and other elite classes, could afford to the services of the best divination specialists (see Cryer 1994:214). In modern times this situation is analogous to the exclusion of the poor and worker classes from having access to the same educational and medical systems as the wealthy. Celestial divination was just one type of divination that served as a method for the elites to maintain power and control over their world. Being able to discern the will of the gods most likely brought financial advantages as well as associated authority and power to those Israelites who perhaps occupied roles as astral occultic professionals (cf 1 Sm 28; see the discussion of the Witch of Endor in 5.4.3).

The belief that in a subsistence lifestyle, communication with as many gods as possible was a vital necessity, as previously stated, in order to appease the gods and secure the fertility of the land; thus, it is likely that this factor played a role in the early Israelites' adoption of the Canaanite divination practices (see Hundley 2015:203). As mentioned previously (see also 5.4.1), the ancient Israelites could consistently rely on the authenticity of receiving YHWH's divine will through divination. Nevertheless, in Judges 20:18 and 20:2, there are two distinct incidents where the Israelites seek guidance from YHWH regarding the outcome of their war against the Benjamites. Surprisingly, the anticipated favorable outcome did not align with reality, resulting in the defeat of the Israelites by the Benjamites. What factors could possibly explain this unexpected turn of events? It is possible that the Israelites approached YHWH by means of unapproved divinatory mechanisms and specialists or attempted to manipulate Him (by means of sacrifices) in order to elicit a response. As a result, YHWH grants them the response they desired, but it turns out to be unfavorable. It is only when they employ the *Urim* and *Thummim* (cf Jdg 20:28) that they are able to achieve the desired outcome in war. Nonetheless, the narrative remains enigmatic, and there are likely additional factors at play that elude one's comprehension in the present day.

5.4.4.2 Manipulating the star gods

Ancient Near Eastern texts reveal that offerings and sacrifices made to the star gods served to manipulate the gods to reveal their secret knowledge in order to bring about success in the future for the enquirer. One such ancient Near Eastern text reads: ‘Etana the ‘shepherd king’ has brought to the ‘oracle priestess’ of the sun god Shamash the necessary offerings. The ‘oracle priestess’ has done the ‘needful’ to the sacrificed lambs; that is, the priestess had removed the entrails of the lambs possible the liver and inspected them for signs or messages from Shamash’ (Speiser 1969:117). By offering the lambs, it is Etana’s hope to induce Shamash to bring about a favourable future outcome of a situation.

This malleability of the divine nature was probably very seductive to the early Israelites since YHWH could not be manipulated. However, it may be probable that the early Israelites did try to control YHWH by making sacrifices to Him after receiving the apocalyptic prophecy from the Angel of the LORD (Jdg 2:1-5). ‘Ritual bribes’ in the form of gift offerings and sacrifices of their best livestock as well as ‘prayer praises’⁴¹⁶ in which the gods were greatly extolled were believed to induce the gods to bless the worshippers and decree a favourable future for them. Ugaritic texts mention offerings of incense and sacrifices made to the star or astral deities (Cooley 2011:282). Jeremiah 7:9, 18 references offerings of incense, cakes and drink libations. Devotees also used spells, incantations and magic to bring about a favourable destiny mimicking the behaviour of the gods in the *Enūma Eliš* and the Ugaritic *Baal Cycle*. It is conceivable that these Canaanite customs were adopted by the idolatrous early Israelites in their syncretic religion (cf Jdg 17:5; 18:31). To emphasize once again, the descriptions regarding the ancient Near Eastern astral divination and beliefs in this chapter likely draw comparisons to parallel divination practices among the Israelites in the Book of Judges. It is highly probable that these practices were prevalent among the syncretic cults (as seen in Jdg 6:25-26; 8:27; 17) and shed light on the reasons behind their condemnation by the author/s of Judges.

5.4.4.3 Celestial divination specialists

As indicated before (see 5.5.4.2), celestial diviners held the conviction that the stars represented gods who possessed the power to determine the future and to decree prosperous destinies (see Pryke 2017:89). In the ancient Near East, the astral divination (astrology)⁴¹⁷ was a well-liked and highly developed method of divination among royalty and elite groups (cf 5.5.4.1) and the diviners associated with the royal courts and temples would have been sought-after specialists.

Those Israelites faithful to YHWH naturally would not have dabbled in celestial divination or any of the other forms of divination that were forbidden. Judges (5:4-5, 20) suggests YHWH, the

⁴¹⁶ Ritual bribes and prayer praises are my phrases. Ritual bribes refer to offerings and sacrifices made to the gods to manipulate the gods. Prayer praises refer to effusive exhortation of the gods in prayer in order to influence the gods to answer prayer requests.

⁴¹⁷ Astral divination (astrology) is also a term that will be used interchangeably with celestial divination.

creator of the cosmos, controlled the stars since He is omnipotent to favorably affect the world of the Israelites. As stated before, it is their obedience and loyalty to YHWH and His covenant that secured their daily and future success (see also 5.5.1). By means of Judges 5:20, the author/s of Judges indicate that the stars (and other celestial bodies) were not gods but merely served as signs of YHWH's invisible protective presence (cf 5.4.5.1; 5.4.5.3).

Babylonian celestial or astral diviners were highly trained scribes or astrologers who were stationed at the royal court. Celestial or astral divination required a thorough understanding of the trajectories of the stars and planets as well as the positions of fixed stars, similar to modern day astronomers and astrophysicists. Thus, in order to map the skies and determine the arrangement of celestial bodies, which was necessary for reading the gods' signs and making precise forecasts based on them, the astral specialists who served the king and elites had to be adept mathematicians, Babylonian texts reveal (cf Stephenson 1982:478-481; Ossendrijver 2012:3-5; Pearson 2020:35). In addition, technical knowledge of inter alia planetary, stellar and lunar transits and occultations, eclipses and lunar cycles (Stephenson 1982:478-481) possibly intermingled with the knowledge of magic and ritual were all required of trained astrologers in order to predict the future. Upon their shoulders rests the weighty responsibility of reading the gods' signs precisely to ensure that the divine will was accurately applied to important decision-makings, political and warfare ventures of the king. It is not very likely that the ordinary Israelites who were essentially part of a subsistence community had the aforesaid knowledge. However, Judges describes the wealth of the judges Tola (Jdg 10:4) and Ibzan and Abdon (Jdg 12:9, 14) in terms of their large numbers of children and donkeys (Tola and Abdon). Given the aforesaid, it is possible that those Israelites who were wealthy could acquire certain knowledge and skills (see also below).

Astrology in the ancient Near East that stemmed from ethnic customs was a curious amalgam of religion, cosmology and mythology (Taylor 2006:2). The prophet Isaiah alludes to the practices of magic spells and sorcery practised by a group of specialist Israelite astrologers: 'stargazers who make predictions month by month' (Is 47:13). It is possible that the aforesaid tradition may have existed among the early Israelites in the pre-monarchic period. Presumably early Israelite astrologers parallel to their Canaanite counterparts would look at the celestial sky and scrutinize it for signs from the gods. Judges 5:20 indicates that the early Israelites had some knowledge of the stars and their trajectories across the night sky (cf 4.5.4).

5.4.4.4 Star/astral deities

Perusing the cosmic dome where the gods also happened to reside for divine portents from the star/astral deities probably was one of the earliest methods of divination in the ancient Near East.⁴¹⁸

⁴¹⁸ Lesses (2006:1-2) remarks that the people of the young Genesis society first learned inter alia the arts of magic and astrology from the insubordinate sons of God (cf Gn 6:1-4). It is particularly women to whom the forbidden knowledge was given and who later became experts at foretelling the future. Pursuant to Genesis, the celestial beings had intruded

As indicated before, the ancient Near Easterners believed that the stars were actual and specific gods, for example, the Babylonian gods, Anu, Marduk; the Canaanite sun god, Shamash and the moon god (see 5.4.5.4). In the astral religion of Ugarit certain deities also were recognized to be stars or planets, Athtar, for instance was documented in the Ugaritic texts as the planet Venus and overall, the Ugaritic gods, the *ilm* are associated with stars (Cooley 2011:282; cf Fisher 2006).

Likewise, in the *Enūma Eliš* the gods are coupled with stars. Marduk creates the constellations in which he sets up shrines for the gods (Dalley 2000:255). He fashions fixed stations or positions for these star gods in the celestial sky and to decree destinies. Marduk thus reveals his awesome might and power to control the future of the pantheon of gods. He also casts the fate of the gods by speaking it into being (see Dalley 2000:246). Marduk states: ‘my own utterance shall fix fate instead of you. Whatever I create shall never be altered! The decree of my lips shall never be revoked!’ (Dalley 2000:246). In the Book of Judges (cf Jdg 2:18; 10:13-16) it is clear that no fate of man is fixed for YHWH’s compassion and love, mercy and grace could undo the Israelites’ sin of disobedience and forge them a destiny of redemption and covenant restoration. Marduk endeavored to shape the fate of both the gods and humanity according to his own design (see Dalley 2000:256). In the Book of Judges, the author/s would have condemned the Israelites for worshipping the Canaanite gods who sought to disrupt the ordained order of creation and impose their will over that of YHWH. (cf Jdg 2:1-3; 6:8-10; cf Lm 3:37; Ps 82; Is 45:5).

The *Enūma Eliš* texts show the gods to be the first divination specialists; their divination methods included magic spells and incantations to alter the outcome of the fate decreed to them in the tablets of destiny (see Dalley 2000:240; 250-252; cf 2.3.2.1a; 2.2.5.8). Albeit an unapproved divinatory method, in the worldview expressed in Judges, it is possible that the tablets of destiny may have served as a means of divination analogues to the mysterious *Urim and Thummim* of the Old Testament (cf 2.3.2.1a; 5.3.1.1)⁴¹⁹ (See McLaughlin 2012:5-6 describing the *Urim and Thummim*).

The Babylonian star deities also included the planet Venus which was identified with Astarte; the planet Mars identified with the Babylonian god of the dead, Nergal; and Chevan, the Babylonian designation for Saturn (Am 5:26; Fletcher 2006). The Canaanites like their Mesopotamian counterparts presumably worshipped a deity or deities who embodied the sky and who were believed

upon the early population groups, interbreeding with humans, and assisted in diverting the course of human history away from the knowledge of YHWH. These sinister beings through their seductive ways tempted the women into the acceptance of knowledge forbidden to mankind. According to the Book of the Watchers and the Book of Jubilees, the sons of God also known as עִירִין (Watchers) taught women in particularly the celestial arts of ‘sorcery and spells among them methods of divination by observance of heavenly and earthly phenomena’ (Lesses 2006:1). Lesses (2006:1) continues with the following observation: ‘These, however, are not the true secrets of heaven – they are the “rejected mysteries,” which the Watchers ought not to have taught human beings.’

⁴¹⁹ See also Chapter Two in which I have discussed the tablets of destiny as a form of an ancient Near Eastern covenant (see 2.3.2.1a).

to possess the supreme power (or the Babylonian anu power desired by, for example, the god Marduk and mentioned in the *Enūma Eliš*) (James 1963:22; Dalley 2000:253).

As previously stated, the Babylonians determined astrological omens based on the appearance of fixed stars (Rochberg 1998:31). Astral divination entailed the following: the division of the celestial sky into sections and predicting the future by analyzing divine signs from celestial groupings of stars (the zodiac see Figure 5.6) and the appearance of the new moon (Fletcher 2006). Three sectors of the sky were assigned to a triad of gods: Anu, Ellil (Enki) and Ea. Accordingly the Babylonians ascribed special powers and significance to each of these celestial divisions (James 1963:22; Fletcher 2006; cf Rochberg 1998:29; Beck 2007:12; Campion 2014; Popovic 2014:153-194). An 8th century BC Babylonian text states: ‘The god Enlil holds the rule over the 33 stars of the northern sky, the god Anu over the 23 stars to the side of the equator, and the god Ea commands the stars of the southern sky’ (see Fletcher 2006).



Figure 5.6 Ancient Assyrian constellation (Fletcher 2006)

There is no evidence for a well-developed omen astrological system among the Israelites in the Iron Age I. However, there are indications in the Book of Judges that pre-monarchic Israelites looked at the skies for divine signs from YHWH (see Jdg 5:20;). The rituals at the stone idols, (probably standing stones) mentioned in Jdg 3:19, 26 could have involved forbidden astral worship and divination (see 2.3.4.3b).

The significance of celestial bodies was contingent upon which the region of the celestial sky they happened to occupy, and their signs were interpreted accordingly (Fletcher 2006). On earth the equivalent of the celestial cult centre of Anu was the Eanna temple or House of Heaven (see Fischer 2008:53). Fischer states that the Eanna temple was the oldest persevered temple near Uruk, and supposedly the dwelling place of the goddess Inanna, the Akkadian Ishtar. Prior to her occupation, the temple Eanna was the dwelling place of the god Anu. He was virtually ‘God’ to the Akkadians on par with Ea and Enlil (Fischer 2008:53). The Ugaritic gods travelling to the ‘temple

of the star gods' to worship the heavenly bodies (see above, Cooley 2011:282-283) possibly present a parallel of astral worshippers visiting the House of Heaven to offer gifts and make sacrifices to the star gods or celestial bodies. It is clear that the gods of the ancient Near Eastern pantheons display a great interest in the alignments of the stars and planets and their implications for events in the future. As indicated in Chapter Two (see 2.3.4.3b), a textual reference to certain Syro-Canaanite gods (probably lesser deities) describes them journeying to specific places on earth where they scanned the heavens for signs from the (supreme) astral gods. At these hallowed sites the gods displayed ritualistic veneration of the celestial bodies in order to exert influence upon them for an auspicious fate (see Cooley 2011:282).

It can be imagined that on the *bamot* where Baal and Asherah were venerated by the Israelites (cf Jdg 2:11; 3:7; 6:25-26; 8:27) similar cultic activities occurred since both deities were associated with star worship (Mulder 1999:141-144; Dömeris 2018:129-130). On their elevated perches, the shrines and sanctuaries of the *bamot* presumably functioned as sacred houses of heaven (see above) where astral divination could be performed. The most conspicuous celestial bodies in the sky, the sun and the moon, would have been worshipped and perhaps even the abovementioned Babylonian triune of gods. It is likely that the Canaanites venerated a triune of astral deities such as Shamash (the sun god), Sîn (the moon god) (see also 5.4.5.4) and Ishtar (represented by an eight-pointed star and who is also known as Ashtoreth in the Old Testament) (cf Jdg 2:13; 10:6; Hinke 2009:237-238).⁴²⁰ The worship of Baal and Ashtoreth/Asherah were condemned by the author/s of Judges for the worship of these deities immersed the Israelites in periodic cycles of idolatry and subsequent oppression (cf Jdg 10:6-7).

5.4.5 Israelite astral cult

Presumably, the Canaanites engaged in celestial divination as a component of an astral cult (Cooley 2011:281). Modern scholars find in the ancient Near Eastern celestial worship and astral divination the precursors for a similar Israelite celestial cult and astral divination (Cooley 2011:282). Unfortunately, there is no evidence of an astral cult in Judges, although Baal was associated with the moon goddess Nanna (Mark 2021). Cooley is of the opinion that despite the academic inclination to connect astral divination to an astral cult among the Israelites, astral divination does not constitute a major part of the Israelite religion prior to the exile. Cooley (2011:282) further states that although the Israelites indulged in astral religious practices at both the 'state and domestic levels' celestial divination was not a well-developed method of divination among the Israelites. As agriculturists the Israelites were familiar with particular groupings of stars and their

⁴²⁰ The three deities Shamash, Sîn and Ishtar symbolized by the sun disk, the lunar crescent and eight-pointed star respectively are frequently mentioned together in inscriptions such as the boundary stone of Amran (that is 'Tell 'Amran ibn-'Ali at Babylon' (see King 1912:37-338 and other inscriptions on Babylonian *kedurrus* or boundary stones indicating their probable worship in a triune partnership). Anu, Ellil and Ea are also grouped together in the invocation of curses inscribed on the *kudurru* (see Hinke 2009:237-238).

configurations in the celestial sky during certain times of the year (cf Gn 1:14-18; cf 5.5.4.3). Job 38:32 mentions one מַזְרָוֹת *mazzārōwt* (constellation), that is, the Great Bear also known as Ursa Major in modernity, a constellation with a lingering mythological history dated to ancient eras as Job indicates. Fletcher (2006) comments that adoration of the celestial bodies (and the derivative astral rituals and divination) counted amongst the iniquities of the Israelites that originated from the foreign religions, for example, worshipping of the Baal and the Ashtoreths (Jdg 2:10-13; cf Jdg 8:33).

Cooley (2011:283) records the findings of Late Bronze Age astral icons such as gold jewelry in the shape of stars from Tell el-Ajjul and Lachish and from Hazor, the stele with the moon crescent that reveal the early Syro-Palestine preoccupation with the worship of the heavens. Celestial bodies imprinted on seals from the Iron Age that indicate the veneration of sacred cosmic elements also feature among the iconography of Syro-Palestine (Cooley 2011:283). Cooley states that to a certain degree the iconography of early Syro-Palestine demonstrates a continuation of the astral cult between the Late Bronze Age and the Iron Ages. However, as indicated previously he does not believe that they reveal an astral divination practice among the Israelites as a prominent part of the Israelite cultus (Cooley 2011:282). The crescent ornaments confiscated from the defeated Midianites (Jdg 8:26) and those from around the necks of their camels as well as the pendants mentioned are indicative of astral symbols related to Midianite worship of the moon god (Sîn) and which were appropriated by the Israelites in Judges 8 (see 5.4.5.4a). These articles were part of the gold that was used to make Gideon's ephod (Jdg 8:27).

5.4.5.1 Astral deities and the agricultural calendar

In the ancient Near East, the heavens were also scanned for astral omens regarding land and farming. Since the earliest times the celestial sphere was utilized by agricultural communities as a calendar to plan sowing and harvests seasons (Lefebvre 2019:26-27). In mid-July, for example, the ancient Egyptians regarded the rising of Sirius, the Dog Star, as a signal for the approaching yearly flooding of the Nile (see Beck 2007:11). On the *Babylonian Venus Tablet of Ammisaduqa*⁴²¹ the appearance of the planet Venus in the west was recorded as a sign for a prosperous harvest. In Genesis (Gn 1:14-17) the stars, the sun and the moon are created as signs to mark sacred times and days and year (calendar). Later the Old Testament reveals that these celestial bodies served to mark the beginning of the sowing and the end of the harvest seasons of the early Israelites. For example, the wheat harvest (cf Jdg 6:11) and the annual festival to the LORD mentioned in Judges 21:19.

⁴²¹ The *Venus Tablet of Ammisaduqa* (1000 BC) is the 63rd Tablet of the (Babylonian) Planetary or Astronomical Omen series *Enūma Anu Enlil*. The clay tablets written in cuneiform document the heliacal risings and settings of the planet Venus over a period of 21 years (Reiner and Pingree 1975:7-29, 60-61). This tablet shows that omen astrology involved a highly developed knowledge of mathematics and astronomy (Popovic 2014:160).

5.4.5.2 *Family life*

It was crucial for the ordinary ancient Near Eastern and idolatrous Israelite people to meticulously make observations of the celestial skies for omens regarding the future of their households. Similar to many modern families, knowledge about planetary alignments at the birth of children in order to ascertain the future of the newborn was of great importance for the continuity and prosperity of the family and presumably their peace of mind about the child's life in general. It can be imagined that affluent (Jdg 10:1-4; 12:8-14) and idolatrous Israelite families (cf Jdg 6:25-26; 8:27; 17) hired astrologers to design horoscope for their children, in particular firstborn sons (heirs) and other family members to divine their future (Beck 2007:9-10; cf Rochberg 1998:15-27). In the Old Testament firstborn sons had a special status as the recipient of a double inheritance who would also, in time, become the head of the family (Dt 21:15-17; cf Jdg 11:1-2; 13:24).⁴²² The firstborn sons of the Israelites were consecrated unto YHWH who determined the course of their lives. In light of the above Manoah requires guidance and rules from the Angel of the LORD regarding the life and work of the son promised to him and his wife. It is likely that this account suggests a customary practice of predicting the future of children born into a family. If this is the case, according to the perspective of the author/s of Judges, Manoah approached it correctly by directly seeking guidance from YHWH Himself, rather than resorting to forbidden divination methods and experts.

5.4.5.3 *Celestial signs from the perspective of the author/s of Judges*

The belief in the divine powers of the heavens and the ability to predict the future gained from the planets and stars and all cultic activity surrounding these convictions would have been condemned by the author/s of Judges. YHWH Himself appears to the people in Judges (Jdg 2:1-3; 6:11; 13:3-20) to deliver certain prophecies as stated before (see 5.3.2.2).

The biblical worldview perceives that the heavens and celestial objects were created by YHWH (cf Gn 1:14-18; Ex 20:8-11). As part of YHWH's creation, celestial bodies served a twofold purpose (cf 5.4.5.1):

- They provide light at night and as a calendar for agrarian activities. They were 'signs' to indicate the diurnal and nocturnal cycles and naturally all manner of activities related to these cycles including the sacred times of harvest and sowing and associated religious rites (Gn 1:14-18).
- They declare YHWH as the Creator of the universe and served as signs of creative powers (Ps 8:1; 19:1-6; 50:6).

⁴²² Although in Genesis 25:21-26 with the birth of the twin sons, Esau and Jacob, and in Genesis 48:13-22 with Manasseh and Ephraim the order was inverted. In addition, the rights of the firstborn of Jacob, Reuben, was removed from him in Genesis 35:22; 49:3-4. For more information see Bible.org 2020. What is the significance of 'first born' in the Bible.

Mesopotamian texts and the Old Testament shared a mutual understanding of the celestial sphere as a created environ. In the Old Testament the heavens displayed or ‘spoke’ about the splendour of its omnipotent creator, YHWH (cf Ps 19:1). This was the message of the stars in the heavens: to elicit the type of awe that would draw people to YHWH and worship Him. It is therefore understandable that the Israelites, similar to their ancient Near Eastern neighbours, may have looked at the celestial sky for signs of the divine presence. However, the Canaanite interpretation of the signs were vastly different: As indicated previously, the Canaanites viewed the stars as the gods themselves who left encrypted messages in the sky to their human observers (see 5.4.4). Cooley (2011:281) describes the celestial bodies that were ‘visible to all’ as regarded by the Canaanites as ‘deliberate divine messages.’ Therefore, celestial bodies such as the stars had to be worshipped as divine to gain access to the knowledge they possessed (see 5.4.4). About this Deuteronomy 4:19 states: ‘And when you look up to the sky and see the sun, the moon and the stars – all the heavenly array – do not be enticed into bowing down to them and worshipping things the Lord your God has apportioned to all the nations under heaven.’ The same mindset would have been held by the author/s of Judges since they derived their worldview based on the one expressed in Deuteronomy.

a. From the heavens the stars fought

In Judges 5:20 reads: ‘From the heavens הַקִּיבִים (*hakkōwḱāḅîm* – the stars) fought, from their courses they fought against Sisera.’ (see also 6.3.3.3). Previously, Deborah, had prophesied the successful war outcome against the Canaanites (Jdg 4:6-7). Judges does not indicate the manner in which the prophetic message was received. However, Deborah would have received her information in one of the approved divinatory mechanisms; a dream or perhaps a word of knowledge that came directly to her from YHWH. Judges 5:20 may indicate that the Israelites might have looked at the stars in the night sky for a favorable sign to begin their battle, just as they did to mark the beginning of the sowing or harvest seasons.⁴²³ The only supernatural quality to the stars is not that they are gods or possessed any special divine abilities but rather that YHWH will use them to benefit the early Israelites (see also Jos 10:12); that is, to reveal His presence in the battle against the Canaanites (cf Jdg 5:4-5) which signals victory for the Israelites. In the worldview informing the author/s of Judges YHWH is the Lord of the heavenly army and His angels fight in unison with the Israelites against Sisera and his soldiers (cf Jdg 7:22). Previously, the prophetess had described YHWH’s powerful (theophanic) presence in the earthly sky – the clouds, the rain (accompanied

⁴²³ Agricultural seasons were usually introduced by religious festivals which sheds light on the function of stars and their actual and metaphorical role in the religion of Israelites (cf Gn 1:14-18; see also Chapter Eight). The Hebrew word *hakkōwḱāḅîm* contains the root word for stars: *kōwḱḅē* that is also found in Genesis 1:14-18; Job 3:9, 38:7; Ps 148:3, etcetera. Subsequently, stars could have served as divine signs to initiate warfare since Deborah refers to their courses (or positions) in the heavens in Judges 5:20. The Old Testament also mentions special signs appearing in the heavens as the signal of an event in the past, present or future that had the ability to terrify (cf Jr 10:3). The rainbow for example in the atmospheric heaven was a consolation sign of YHWH’s goodwill towards mankind (Gn 9:12). The fearful signs of Jeremiah 10:2 had to do with the sinful behaviour of people and thus negative signs in heaven also were closely associated with human sins. In the Old Testament a special star heralds the birth of Christ and its changing position in the sky is used to navigate to His parental home.

by thunder and lightning) and earthquakes (Jdg 5:4-5; cf Jr 10:13). Accordingly, Judges 5:20 might be a theophany similar to Judges 5:4-5.

5.4.5.4 *The importance of the moon*

a. The moon and moon rituals

The seals from the Iron Age Levant, one *seal from Acco* and two others in particular depict scenes of worshippers venerating the celestial bodies (Cooley 2011:283). Together with the Books of Zephaniah and Jeremiah these seals provide imageries of celestial rituals that might have taken place also in earlier eras, for example, in the period of the judges. Accordingly, an idolatrous Israelite might have worshipped the moon or the stars on the roofs of his house or on a *bamah*. The ancient Near Eastern people were terrified by the signs in the celestial sky including possibly solar and lunar eclipses (Beck 2007:10-11). The Israelites were to fear the LORD and keep His commands (Dt 5:29; cf Dt 8:6; Job 28:28; Jr 10:2; Jdg 5:5).

Pearce (1996:701) describes the moon as a ‘symbol permanence’ (Ps 72:5; 89:38, 121:6). The moon, due to its proximity to the earth, was the most visible marker of time in the night sky. The lunar cycles set the agricultural rhythms by which people lived and so viewed lunar cycles as divine. Nations in the ancient Near East suffered the fierce heat of the desert sun and the moon would have been welcomed at night, offering respite from the unremitting heat of the sun.⁴²⁴ Images of the waxing moon were associated with the reproductive cycles of the land, animals, and people. A *Babylonian omen text* entreats the crescent moon to grow and give birth to the month (Lambert 2013:176).⁴²⁵ In an Akkadian hymn, the moon god is described as ‘[a] womb that gives birth to everything’ (Stephens 1969:385).⁴²⁶

The lunar cycles were also thought of as mysterious occurrences of demise and rebirth and the moon was worshipped to ensure its rejuvenation. To maintain the moon’s permanence in the sky, its beneficence as a god of ‘abundance, prosperity and in certain places even of healing’ (Harmanşah 2019:8), early societies, such as the Sumerians and Akkadians developed a worship system based upon veneration of the moon (Klein 2001:279-280; Harmanşah 2019:8).⁴²⁷ They worshipped

⁴²⁴ Living in the Middle Eastern region with blistering temperatures during the day, I have been a witness to a lifestyle in which the majority of social activities are performed at night, which, in most cases, will continue until the very early morning hours. During holiday seasons, the day-night cycle is mostly inverted. Nights are very hot during summer months as well but bearable. People, however, will avoid the fiercest day temperatures at all cost.

⁴²⁵ Lambert, however, cautions that this text should be read with caution since the grammar of the Sumerian is degraded, and the Akkadian is very unclear.

⁴²⁶ The text may be dated to the rule of the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal, 668-663 BC. The tablet states that it is a copy of a previous, older tablet. However, the date of the older composition remains undetermined (Stephens 1969:385).

⁴²⁷ Religious events could be commenced at the sighting of the moon when people were also psychologically more fit to perform their religious duties than during the heat of the day. In present times many (Jews and particularly) Muslims still regard the actual sighting of the new moon as a sign to the start and end of the month of Ramadan – a month of religious fasting which is a requirement in the religion of Islam.

a moon deity (known as Nanna, Suen or Sîn [Akkadian]/Nannar [Sumerian]) an important deity amid a myriad of gods, including the sun god Shamash, in the city of Ur (Asher-Greve and West-enthalz 2013:67; cf Lambert 2013:262).⁴²⁸ The worship of the moon god, already an ancient cultic practice at the time of the pre-monarchy, experienced its peak during the Third Dynasty of Ur (2044-2007 BC; Klein 2001:279-280; Harmanşah 2019:8).⁴²⁹ The crescent of the moon was thought to have horns and thus the moon god was represented as a bull (Harmanşah 2019:8).⁴³⁰ The apparent resemblance between the bull horns and the crescent moon explains the moon god's close association with cattle and may account for the people's perception of him as a fertility deity (see Harmanşah 2019:8; cf Veldhuis 1991:7-14; Lambert 2013:262).⁴³¹ In Judges 6-8, the Midianites who were worshippers of the moon, is described as a dire adversary of the Israelites.

In addition to the deity's function as a fertility god, Harmanşah (2019:9) comments that in hymns and astrological literature, the moon god is perceived to be a (divine) shepherd thus connecting him with images of the benign 'pastoral power' held by kings who preserved the abundance of the animal herds (cf Green 1992:25; Lambert 2013:525). It is interesting to note that Numbers depicts YHWH as the Shepherd of His people (Nm 27:17; Ps 23).

Yarikh (*yrh*) was the name of the moon god in the Ugaritic pantheon (Wyatt 1998:336). The fertility aspect of the moon god Yarikh' is implied in a text that includes a myth of the wedding of Yarikh and the fertility goddess Nikkal and a hymn that tributes the marriage of the moon god and Nikkal (Wyatt 1998:336; Leick 2003:130; cf Day 1992d:831-837).⁴³² The consummation of the marriage between Nikkal and the Yarikh described in the hymn was probably reenacted at the festivals of the moon god. In Judges 10:6, the early Israelites served the gods of the nations around them, including the moon god, of Aram (Greenstein 2015:31), Ammonites (Tyson 2019:1-34) (see Figure 5:7).

⁴²⁸ Cf Ancient Mesopotamian Gods and Goddesses 2022. Nanna/Suen/Sin (god).

⁴²⁹ The Akkadian moon god Sîn was the father of the sun god, Shamash [Utu in Sumerian] and according to some myths the father of Ishtar, the goddess of the planet Venus. Together Sin, Shamash and Ishtar were worshipped as a triad of astral deities (Encyclopedia Britannica 2022. Sin: Mesopotamian God).

⁴³⁰ Could this be a reason why some ancient Near Eastern altars had horns?

⁴³¹ The moon god was regarded as a principal deity also in Haran (Lambert 2013:262; Harmanşah 2019:10). In the Iron Age, Sîn was worshipped at his sanctuary in Haran, and numerous *stone cenotaphs* dedicated to the moon god were erected during this period (Harmanşah 2019:10).

⁴³² The function of Yarikh as a fertility god is derived from his provision of the nightly dew further alluded to in the hymn by his connection to the *Kotharat*, Canaanite goddesses of pregnancy, childbirth and fertility who are also named as 'daughters of the New Moon (*bnt hll snnt*) a reference to their association with childbirth and fertility (Leick 2003:105). According to Wyatt (1998:336), the myth and the hymn were possibly recounted at weddings. The short hymn is quite detailed in the description of the desire of Nikkal and the moon god. Wyatt (1998:336-337) provides a translation of the hymn.



Figure 5.7 Ancient Near Eastern nations (Rainey 1996b)

The pantheon of the Arameans, for example, comprised shared Semitic deities who were also revered by other Semitic peoples (including the early Israelites) (Akopian 2017:51).⁴³³ Judges mentions the worship of Baal and Asherah or Ashtoreth, a shared cult among the Canaanites and the early idolatrous Israelites (cf Jdg 2:11-13; 3:7; 6:25; 8:33; 10:6). The moon god, one of the many other shared Canaanite deities, was one of the gods forbidden to the Israelites in Deuteronomy (Dt 4:19; 17:3; cf 2 Ki 23:5; Job 31:26; Jr 8:2). The name Jericho may literally be translated as ‘moon city’ (Schreiber 2011).⁴³⁴ Jericho was a primary centre of veneration for the moon god Yarikh. While it is not possible to know the precise manner in which the idolatrous Israelites may have worshipped the moon deities Yarikh or Sîn, textual evidence may provide clues.

The Ugaritic *Ras Shamra* and neighboring *Minet el-Beida clay tablets* are used as comparative sources to describe the religious activities of the early Israelites (Marsman 2003:39; Stuckey 1997:8; cf Hyatt 1942:67; Key 1965:20-26).⁴³⁵ It is also possible to extract a picture of early Israelite worship of the moon god and festival rites from other ancient Near Eastern texts (see also 4.5.3.5). What is known, directly is that cultic festivities in honour of the moon god were held to ensure the fertility of the land and abundance (Harmanşah 2019:8; see Figures 5.8-5.10 that depict the enduring and worship of the moon god Sîn in the ancient Near East and Canaan throughout the eras).

⁴³³ The Philistines, one of the Sea Peoples, however, were considered ‘different’ from the Semitic tribes in Canaan. Groundbreaking DNA studies done on the skeletal remains from an ancient Philistine cemetery discovered in 2016 in Ashkelon suggest probable origins pointing towards Greece, Sardinia, Crete, and the Iberian Peninsula (Romey 2019). Stern (2000:197-212) provides information about the settlement of the Sea Peoples in Northern Israel.

⁴³⁴ Alternative possible translations of Jericho include fragrant (Schreiber 2011) or *yareach* (month) (King James Bible 2022. Strong’s Hebrew Dictionary).

⁴³⁵ The clay tablets were discovered in 1928 in Ugarit, Syria (Hyatt 1942:67). It is believed that the *Ras Shamra* and *Minet el-Beida tablets* reveal the religious undertakings of the ancient Israelites since the two societies shared many common elements (Marsman 2003:39; Stuckey 1997:8). Albright (1941:179) references the *Marseilles Tariffs* as sources that show significant similarities between Israelite and Canaanite temple service and sacrificial rituals, and which are validated for the Late Bronze Age by the rites described in the Ugaritic texts. The *Marseilles Tariffs* are Punic language inscriptions (circa 300-250 BC) that were found on two fragments of stone in Marseilles. It is believed that the texts were carried from France to Marseilles. For a translation of the texts see Attalus 2022. Tariff or Fees for Temple of Ba’al, Found at Marseilles. Hyatt (1942:67, 70) provides a detailed discussion of the Ras Shamra Texts and the Ugaritic religion as they relate to the Old Testament.



Figure 5.8 Cylinder seal of Hash-hamer (The British Museum)⁴³⁶



Figure 5.9 Shrine of the Stelae. Discovered at Hazor. The Israel Museum.⁴³⁷



Figure 5.10 Moon god stele. Found at Bethsaida (Schuster 2020b).⁴³⁸

An Assyrian text, *'Prayer to the Moon-God'* describes a prayer that accompanied an offering at a festival of the moon god Sîn (Stephens 1969:386).⁴³⁹ The festival to Sîn was held on the 30th day of the month (at the time of the new moon, probably to bring about the rebirth of the moon as described above) (Stephens 1969:386). Offerings of drink and incense were made to Sîn. The prayer was used with the ritual *šu il-la* (raising of the hand) (Stephens 1969:386) and is reminiscent of the raised hands of worshippers of the moon god in Figure 5.8 (an indication that the ritual of

⁴³⁶ The impression depicts a crescent-shaped moon, the sign of the moon god Sîn. The cylinder depicts a worshipping man, possibly Hash-hamer governor of the third dynasty of Ur and owner of the seal, being led by a goddess to a seated deified king, possibly Ur-Nammu, who is sitting under the crescent moon symbolizing the moon god Sîn (Nannar). The seal is dated to 2100 BC.

⁴³⁷ The cultic objects from the Shrine of the Stelae discovered at Hazor date to the 15th-13th century BC. The crescent on the breast of the worshipper is a symbol of the moon god Sin. For a short description of the stelae see the Israel Museum.

⁴³⁸ Discovered in Bethsaida the stele of the moon god dates to the 11th-10th century BC. For the full article see Schuster (2020b).

⁴³⁹ This text is also dated to the reign of king Ashurbanipal (668-663 BC) and the tablet on which the text is based was found in the library of Ashurbanipal. As indicated above the text describes the ritual of *šu il-la* that is an old ritual performed by worshippers of Sîn (Nannar) in previous centuries (Stephens 1969:386).

šu il-la is a much older ritual that dates to a much earlier period).⁴⁴⁰ The symbol of the moon god Sîn was the bull, as stated before (Harmanşah 2019:9). The early Israelites were aware of the image of a bull calf⁴⁴¹ as a cult image which they incorrectly associated with (the presence of) YHWH in Exodus 32 (Ex 32:5). De Vaux (1997:333) remarks that in the ancient Near East, including Mesopotamia and Egypt ‘the sacred animal is not the god... it merely embodies his attributes’ (see 2.3.2.1c; cf 2.3.4.3b). De Vaux (1997:333) adds that the bull calf ‘is an ornament of his (the god’s) throne or a support for it, or a footstool [a pedestal] for his use.’⁴⁴² The *Ras Shamra texts* also reveal that the Ugaritic storm god, Baal, was represented by the bull (De Vaux 1997:334; see 2.3.2.1c; cf 2.3.4.3b).

It was inevitable that the early Israelites came to confuse ‘the bull of YHWH’; that is, ‘they would confuse Yahweh with the cultic statue which symbolized His presence and the bull of Baal’ (De Vaux 1997:334; see also 2.3.2.1c; cf 2.3.4.3b). In light of the aforesaid the people would then easily confuse the bull as representing the presence of YHWH with the bull that represented Baal. Once the Israelites confused Yahweh with the cult object that symbolized his presence – the bull (or bull calf) – the door to syncretism and idolatry was opened (De Vaux 1997:334; cf 2.3.2.1c). As stated before, Baal, (*Baal-berith*), a covenant god, was also a fertility deity (DeVries 1997a:79; King and Stager 2001:349; cf Perry 1999:14), the Israelites, like, their ancient Near Eastern neighbours connected the moon god with fertility (of the cattle; see above). The early Israelites were accustomed with these sacred imageries: a deity that brings about fertility (Nm 25:3) and the bull (Ex 32:4) and this familiarity may have facilitated their adherence to the Canaanite cults (De Vaux 1997:334; Munnich 2008:39-56; cf Fant and Reddish 2008:83).

In the *seal from Acco*, Cooley (2011:283) describes a worshipper before an altar (or possibly ‘a fenestrated terracotta cult stand’) venerating a crescent moon and star. In the other two seals devotees are standing opposite stars and crescent moons and a type of tree (Cooley 2011:283). Considering the above, I shall provide a ‘(re)construction’ of a moon ritual taking place at night in an Israelite household. It is not known if the early Israelites had such a ritual, however, the (re)construction will illustrate how the many anti-covenantal divinatory techniques that the early Israelites most likely inherited from the Canaanites and their interaction with the Canaanite gods became a way of life and why it would have been condemned by the author/s of Judges.

⁴⁴⁰ In the text the supplicant prays for his overall welfare and the forgiveness of his sin (Stephens 1969:386). The raising of hands in prayer (or bestowing a blessing) was a common ritual practice among the Israelites (cf Lv 9:22)

⁴⁴¹ According to De Vaux (1997:333) the (Hebrew) word *egel* does mean calf but it can also mean a young bull (or a bullock) (see Ex 32:4).

⁴⁴² Two golden calves made by king Jeroboam (1 Ki 12:28-33), a narrative that parallels Exodus 32 (Ex 32:4-6), one which Jeroboam set up in Bethel and the other in Dan (1 K 12:29). Regarding the Bull Calf statue (in the Northern Kingdom), Middlemas (2014:65) wonders if the object represented YHWH or ‘was it only a pedestal upon which the invisible presence of the deity was thought to stand..?’ Middlemas cites archaeological evidence that confirm ‘the idea that the Bull Calf statue in the Northern Kingdom was a pedestal on which the invisible presence of YHWH stood’ (cf Middlemas 2014:59-80, also De Vaux 1997:333-334).

b. '(Re)construction' of a moon ritual

At dusk an Israelite family would have ascended to the roof, the highest point of their four-room house, to catch sight of the new moon crescent.⁴⁴³ At Ophrah, the household of Joash and probably the entire community (cf Jdg 6:28-30) would have gathered at the *bamah* where stood the altar of Baal and the Asherah pole before its destruction by Gideon (Jdg 6:25-26; cf 2.3.4.3b; 3.6.1.1e). The early Israelites were commanded to give special food and drink offerings in the beginnings of the month (Nm 28:11-15). The new crescent moon would have been regarded by the idolatrous Israelites as a special divine sign from the other gods (the moon god/Baal) for it symbolized rebirth and renewal signified by the reappearance of the moon – the first crescent – after the invisible new moon cycle was complete. As previously indicated, the sighting of the new moon auspicated a favorable time for divination and seeking affirmative augurs for the fertility of the family, animals and the land.⁴⁴⁴ The divine will would also have been sought for other important family-related decisions and events (cf Jr 7:9, 18; 32:29; Zep 1:4-6). However, according to the biblical worldview, the purpose of new moon festivals (Nm 28:11-15) was to exalt YHWH and to express gratitude towards the LORD for His bounty.

The bible authors refer to the new moon using the term 'new, renewal' (*chodesh*) rather than one of the conventional words for moon – *yareakh* and *levonah* (Pearce 1996:702).⁴⁴⁵ Accordingly, the Hebrew word translated as 'new moon' – חֹדֶשׁ יָרֵאֵךְ – (Nm 10:10; 28:11) which is derived from the Hebrew root word חֹדֶשׁ [*chodesh*] can also mean month or the beginning of the month.⁴⁴⁶

According to Jeremiah (7:18) (in an idolatrous family) the sons gathered wood and the fathers lit the fire to wrongly bake offering cakes to the Queen of Heaven.⁴⁴⁷ Assuming the tradition to stem

⁴⁴³ The new moon was initially fixed by declaration of witnesses regarding the reappearance of the moon's crescent, according to early rabbinic traditions. The new moon was declared on the thirty-first day of the month if the crescent had not been seen on the thirty-fifth. On the Mount of Olives, beacons were lit to signal the appearance of the crescent of the new moon (Pearce 1996:702).

⁴⁴⁴ The Jewish new moon celebrations are mentioned in Galatians 4:3-11 and Colossians 2:16 and also appear in Judith 8:6 and 1 Maccabees 10:34; the latter would have paralleled the festivals celebrated at the Temple in Jerusalem and stem from traditions that date back to previous centuries (see Thornton 1989:97-100).

⁴⁴⁵ Pearce (1996:702) remarks that the Hebrew has two words for moon: *yareakh* and *levonah*. *Yareakh* is a typical Semitic word, appearing as *yrkh* in Phoenician and as *arkhu* in Akkadian where it is also the usual word for 'month' or one lunation. *Yareakh* is a typical Semitic word, showing as *yrkh* in Phoenician and as *arkhu* in Akkadian where it is also the standard word for 'month' or one lunation. 'Yerakh also means month in Hebrew.' *Levonah* is derived from the Hebrew word 'white.' In numerous biblical allusions *levonah* is used in parallelism to *shemesh* 'sun' to indicate 'the brilliant luminosity of the moon' (Is 30:26). However, 'in Isaiah 24:23, *levonah* is used in parallelism to *bosh*, 'shame' to evoke an image of colourlessness accompanying embarrassment' (Pearce 1996:702).

⁴⁴⁶ חֹדֶשׁ יָרֵאֵךְ by implication means a month or the beginning of a month [Hebrew: 'head of the month'] as it is signified by the new moon (See Bible Hub 2022. Chodesh; See also Encyclopedia Britannica 2022. New Moon. Jewish Festival).

⁴⁴⁷ Preparations for the new moon celebrations had started at the break of day. During the day, mother and daughters would have prepared the rooftop area for the ritual. Clearing a sacred space, they moved storage bins aside and set to one side the flax stems, from the previous harvest, placed on the rooftop to be dried and bleached by the sun (see King

from earlier generations, the Queen of Heaven would have been the goddess Asherah mentioned in the Book of Judges.⁴⁴⁸ Perhaps some devotees among the early Israelites were looking for the planet Venus that appeared in the sky in the evenings in the western sky from January to May.⁴⁴⁹ Earnest hymns and prayers muted and loud filled the clear skies and were uttered in hope that they would reach the ears of the celestial gods (see Olson 1982:44).⁴⁵⁰ The idolatrous Israelite women

and Stager 2001:149). Sweeping and removing all traces of dust from the rooftop as best they could, they laid down comfortable rugs woven by their own hands to stand, sit, eat on or pray on during the forthcoming ceremony.

⁴⁴⁸ The mothers and daughters would have prepared the dough for the cakes the evening before or the following day in the early morning hours before they began their usual household chores.

Children would have played an active role in the preparations for a full moon astral worship ritual. Children old enough for carrying out chores were part of the work force subsistence families needed to survive (see Sha 2018:297-301; cf Dt 6:7; 11:9). The women might have added raisins, dates or figs to the dough for these were food items associated with the fertility goddesses. One of the daughters cleaned a small incense altar, such as the one discovered among the remains of 7th century roof in Ashkelon (see Cooley 2011:283) of the ashes, remnants from the month before, dusted and placed on the roof. The daughters arranged other small painted cult stands mounted on wheels with 'relief and incised decoration made with clay, basalt, limestone. If the family could afford it, their cult stands were also made of bronze (see King and Stager 2001:340). Less affluent families owned 'cult stands in clay, slipped and burnished, meant to look like glistening copper. King and Stager (2001:341) mention an inexpensive offering stand with four sides popular in Late Bronze Cyprus and from Iron Age I Ekron. The daughters of the house would have polished these clay cult stands, that were between 25-40 centimeters tall (see King and Stager 2001:344), until they sparkled. In the Israelite cult stone incense altars occupied an essential role. King and Stager (2001:344) mention incense altars have been discovered in Israelite sites, in Judah, areas and as mentioned above in the Philistine city of Ekron and that of Ashkelon and were found also in 'domestic industrial installations' and were probably manufactured by Israelite artisans for ten of the altars were horned which is a mark of Israelite religious activities.

Stager and King (2001:340-341) comment that these portable offering or cult stands are typical of the Iron Age I and II in Israel. King and Stager (2001:341) also report on a couple of cult stands from 10th century Ta'anach: one discovered by Ernst Sellin in 1902 which he classified as an incense altar and a second by Paul Lapp in 1968 that was seen by him as a cult stand. For more information regarding the Ta'anach cult stand and incense altars see King and Stager (2001:341-346). The authors note that the altars found at Ekron in 'industrial, affluent and domestic areas and therefore do not denote utilization in a usual Israelite ritualistic setting but that they were used to burn incense as an offering.' The scholars also remark that this use of the altars has been disputed by Haran (1993:237-247) in his assertion that a less expensive item other than incense was offered befitting the small size of the stands (King and Stager 2001:345). In modern times cheap imitation incense consisting of, for example, saltpeter and charcoal mixed with an artificial fragrant oil is used in the place of real incense which can be quite expensive. In all probability poorer families used some type of imitation incense in the place of the more expensive product.

Incense stands were also used as containers for water, possibly oil and milk (available to most households), vegetables and the unleavened cakes perhaps similar to the ones mentioned above and other offerings made to the gods (see King and Stager 2001:340). Smaller children possibly brought their own offerings of flowers, little toy animals, other toy items such as rattles (see Albertz and Schmitt 2012:75), and so on.

⁴⁴⁹ Ancient Akkadian priest and priestesses would chant the verses of the Exaltation of Inanna, a hymn to the planet Venus: 'At the end of the day, the Radiant Star, the Great Light that fills the sky, The Lady of the Evening appears in the heaven, The people in all the lands lift their eyes to her. They purify themselves; the women cleanse themselves... The young man makes love to his beloved' (Campion 2014).

The hymn to Venus was composed circa 2300 BC by the astrologer and high priestess of the moon god, Nanna, who was also the daughter of the powerful Akkadian King Sargon. Taylor (2006:3) comments that Mesopotamian mythology has its roots in the observation of celestial bodies and this is how planets and stars as well as environmental phenomena came to be representative of the gods. Ishtar, for instance, was a Babylonian goddess who was represented by the planet Venus. From the perspective of the earthly watchers of the sky, Venus' close solar orbit resulted in its swift movements in the sky, frequently sweeping by other planets. Taylor (2006:3) concludes that the description of Ishtar as a 'young independent woman with multiple lovers' was based on these celestial observations.

⁴⁵⁰ Incense would have air on the rooftops and the *bamah*. But the burning of incense by the idolatrous Israelites was unlawful for it was a substance that was a priestly right only and its use restricted to the miskhan at Shiloh (King and

and diviners would have observed very closely the patterns of smoke from the incense and altars and later the sacrificial altars as well those forming on the water surfaces in the libation containers for prognostication signs (see Dalley 2000:65).⁴⁵¹ Similar to many modern day Middle Eastern cultures, incense used in the pre-monarchic rooftop rituals and *bamot* was valued for its apotropaic abilities. To the women of the ancient Israelite household the new moon had a very special significance as their menstrual cycles were closely connected to the phases of the moon. Accordingly, celebrations centred the new moon would have been held a special significance for women.⁴⁵² Women were held to inhabit powerful and important positions as diviners and astrologers and in the past specifically as the proxies of the Queen of Heaven, the goddess Inanna and Ishtar and later in the pre-monarchic period, probably Astarte or Asherah (see Champion 2014).⁴⁵³ With dire portents and warnings, they admonished the worshippers of the heavenly deities to best obey their gods and follow their decrees (see Van Kooten 2015:507). Then it was time to present the offerings on the cult stands to the celestial deities and gift them with libations of water, possibly wine made of dates pomegranates (see Borowski 2003:29), milk, perhaps beer and olive oil. Presumably a meal offering of flour and meat followed next (see King and Stager 2001:339). A sacred banquet in which all the worshippers on the rooftop and below at the *bamah* partook and ritual cursing and blessings occurred were typical of cultic feasts (cf Jdg 9:27). Amid the song and music-making, wine drinking and feasting a festive air enveloped the rooftops and *bamah* (cf Jdg 21:21). Magic rituals were performed and the (astral) divination specialists gathered the charred animal bones from the altar to divine the future for the worshippers. Vessels filled with sheep or goat ankle bones (astragali) have been discovered in cultic corners in Megiddo and Ta'anach (604 BC) that King and Stager (2001:341) speculate may have been used for divination purposes. Similarly, in the pre-monarchic period charred bones from the unsanctioned sacrificial altars at the new moon feasts might have been scrutinized for signs about the future. The household gods would have been consulted to determine the divine will (cf Jdg 17:5).

Stager 2001:346). King and Stager (2001:346) describe the 'most common word for incense as קִטְרֵי (qatōre' - that which goes up in smoke). Since the Old Testament had precise instructions for the making incense, its ceremonial use, the unauthorized use of qatōre' was strictly condemned and regarded as an act of betrayal against YHWH (see King and Stager 2001:346).

Families who could afford it wore their best linen clothing. Linen production was a major industry in ancient Canaan and in Egypt since olden eras and among the materials of value in the Old Testament (cf Gn 41:42; Ex 25:4; 35:25; Lv 16:23, 32; 1 Chr 15:27; cf 2 Sm 6:14; see also Jdg 14:12-13). King and Stager (2001:149) state that flax was grown in Deir 'Alla since ca 1200 and beyond.

⁴⁵¹ The female members of the family would have cupped their hands together and directed the thick fragrant wafts of incense to flow over their children, husbands and other relatives. These gestures are still traditional among many Arab women today when they burn incense at home and places of work.

⁴⁵² Rosen and Rosen (2000:263-277) comments on the new rituals which have sprung up in modernity that connect women to the traditional festival of the new moon, *Rosh Codesh*. These are very ancient celebrations that might also have taken place during the pre-monarchic period.

⁴⁵³ It is probable that after rituals invoking the gods, the divinatory specialists perhaps the olden grandmother or a gifted younger woman articulated their oracles and revealed their visions communicated to them by the gods and goddesses of the sky.

In the Yahwistic religion, however, the moon (like the stars, see above) were created by YHWH (Tischler 2006:140) and apparently its deification was anticipated by the edicts made against the worship of the moon in Deuteronomy (Dt 4:19; 17:3; Pearce 1996:702). The moon ritual described above would have been fiercely condemned by the prophets in Judges (cf Jdg 2:1-3; 6:8-10; 10:10-14).

5.4.4.5 *The proper lunar celebration*

a. Introduction

The Book of Judges contains scant information regarding the new moon feast dedicated to YHWH. On the other hand, the Israelites were told to observe a new moon festival, and this celebration might be inferred from some narratives in Numbers. The Yahwistic festivals of the early Israelites reinterpreted the Canaanite cult festivals by recontextualizing the Canaanite theology attached to these (Canaanite) festivals and ascribing to them a monotheistic worldview. Meyers (1979:92) asserts that the Israelites had developed a novel and revolutionary worldview in the pre-monarchy (see also Chapter Four). The fundamental laws of early Israel, the ten commandments (Ex 20:1-17) encapsulated this radical religious paradigm. The theological reconceptualization of the Canaanite sacred landscape (see also Chapter Four) reassigned the Canaanite worship of the moon god to the proper deity, YHWH. The Israelites demystified the role of the new moon and the full moon in their sacred festivities by placing the lunar cycles within more realistic realisms associated with a pre-monarchic agrarian lifestyle and lunar festivals were celebrated in honour of YHWH to thank God for His abundance (Gn 1:14-18; Lv 23:4-44; cf Ex 20:8-11).

The Israelite annual festivals rejected and redefined the nature and character of the Canaanite festivals (cf 7.3.2-7.3.5). Instead of rituals of appeasement and sacred sex rituals, the Israelite festival sacrifices and offerings were primarily made as rites of thanksgiving; to celebrate the beneficence of God. The Israelites were supposed to understand that it was YHWH that brought about the fertility of the land, in keeping with the covenant blessings (cf Dt 28:1-14).

b. The moon festivals dedicated to YHWH

The moon also marked the start of festivals among true worshippers of YHWH (cf Nm 10:10; 28:11; Is 66:23). Festivals celebrating both the full moon and the new moon were held (cf Ps 81:3-4). A full moon was welcomed by the early Israelites since it marked the beginning of the major festivals Passover and Sukkoth in their religious calendar (Ps 81:3-4; Unterman and Achtemeier 1996:1152).

If a moon festival dedicated to YHWH took place in Judges it would have commenced at the sighting of a full or new moon the pre-monarchic tribes of Israel would commence the festivities with the sounding of a ram's horn (Nm 10:10). It most likely that a Yahwistic moon festival

occurred during a cycle of peace and covenantal restoration in Judges. Burnt offerings and fellowship offerings were made to the LORD (Nm 10:10). The burnt offering comprised two young bulls, one rams and seven male lambs a year old, all unblemished. A grain offering of fine flour mixed with oil as well as a drink offering of wine were to accompany each of the animal offerings (Nm 28:11-14). Numbers 10:10 state that the new moon feasts counted amongst the appointed festivals as memorials for the early Israelites before YHWH. The celebrations were held at the approved holy sites and sanctuaries in Shiloh, Bethel, Mizpah and the unadulterated *bamot* of YHWH. Instead of rumbunctious revelry, the Israelites were to be solemnly joyous (cf 2 Chron 2:4). Songs were probably sung accompanied by dancing and music made with tambourines, the lyre and harp. Song, music and dance played an important role in the early Israelite religious and secular lives (Sha 2018:155). Marsman (2003:616) remarks that ‘Israelite women probably acted as cultic singers, musicians and dancers in the pre-monarchic period.’ In the place of magic rites, the priests, elders or heads of households blessed the Israelites: ‘The LORD bless you and keep you; The LORD make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; The LORD turn his face towards you and give you peace’ (Nm 6:24-26).

5.4.6 Extispicy

5.4.6.1 Introduction

Judges does not indicate extispicy as a divinatory method used by the Israelites but, as stated before, it stands to reason that since the early Israelites adopted the Canaanite cults, they would have adopted their rituals and divinatory methods as well. The discussion on extispicy that will follow will hopefully provide a glimpse into a way of life that was probably followed by the idolatrous Israelites, in their syncretic religions and given their close proximity to the Canaanite cults (cf Jdg 3:5-6; 8:27; 17:5; 18:31). Koch, U (2016:330-332) remarks that ‘extispicy enjoyed a wide popularity in the ancient world and was practiced at some time in some form by all ancient Near Eastern cultures, including Israel...’ Babylonian extispicy is mentioned in Ezekiel 21:21. Cryer (1994:169) agrees that extispicy was practised throughout the ancient Near East ‘from Elam to the Hittite kingdom, Ugarit, Megiddo and Hazor.’ Bray (2006:130) observes that extispicy was performed in ‘Palestine’ during the Bronze Age, and ‘model “practice” livers’ were discovered in a cultic setting at Hazor. There have been suggestions that the skill of extispicy was brought to Hazor from Mari. Uninscribed livers were also found at Megiddo dated between the 13th and 12th centuries BC (Bray 2006:130). Cryer (1994:302-303) has suggested that the text in Judges 18:6 has to do with extispicy.⁴⁵⁴

⁴⁵⁴ Cryer (1994:295-305) explains why he thinks it plausible that the Israelites used extispicy as a form of divination. Additionally, according to Cryer (1994:329), extispicy eventually vanished in Israel because it was too costly to maintain in a non-monarchical setting (cf Bray 2006:130).

5.4.6.2 Definition

Extispicy involved the examinations of the internal organs of sacrificed animals for signs of the divine will (Taylor 2006:7; see Figure 5.11). It is particularly the internal organs of the sacrificed animals the diviners paid great attention to (see Cryer 1994:295-305).



Figure 5.11 Liver divination (Gabbay 2020)

However, the organ which attracted the most divinatory inspection was the liver (see a reconstruction of liver divination in Figure 5.11). The rationale behind this was that in the ancient Near East it was believed that the liver was the epicentre of the thoughts and emotions of an individual (Benoit 2020). The liver of an animal represented a certain type of a divine message; it could be analyzed to discern the thoughts and desires of the gods regarding the future of humans.

If extispicy was practised in the pre-monarchic period, it was probably mostly wealthy individuals and families that could enjoy this type of divination (see below). Text reveal that extispicy was a popular form of divination in use among the elite Mesopotamians dating back to the 3rd millennium BC. Less affluent Israelites probably did not have time to spare from their arduous tasks for the lengthy preparations and intricacy involved in the extispicy ritual (see below). Cryer (1994:295) remarks that the omen sacrifice (extispicy) was ‘a very involved cultic-ritual act, which required extensive preparations and had its own specific prayer.’

5.4.6.3 Liver omens

The ancient Near Eastern texts (see below) and evidence from Ugarit may provide insight into the extispicy observances of possible Canaanite and idolatrous Israelite diviners.⁴⁵⁵ Cryer (1994:296)

⁴⁵⁵ In the absence of any actual evidence, I make this type of comparison with great caution. I agree with Cryer who states, ‘it is conceivable that the Israelites utilized the omen sacrifice [extispicy] among their several forms of divination’ (Cryer 1994:295-305). The early Israelites would have been familiar with extispicy as a divinatory method since it is well known that they did adopt the Canaanite cults which in turn took on rites acquired from the other ancient Near Eastern nations. An account of a definite rite of divination involving an animal is recorded in Genesis 15:8-21 but this event excludes extispicy. Any other references to extispicy rites on the part of true YHWH followers such as Samuel and Amos (in Amos 7:14 the word בֹּקֵר [bōwqêr – sheep breeder] simply means that they cannot be accurate. I would like to propose that the tradition of Genesis 15:8-21 may still have been extant. At times I am frustrated at scholars looking for recurring patterns in archaeology to confirm ideas and yet use singular occurrences of a word or a situation in the Bible to formulate definitive theories. Certainly, divinatory omens were looked at but those connected

cites some Ugaritic evidence for the plausible practice of extispicy among the Israelites. Among these Ugaritic evidences are Ugaritic lung and liver models that reveal the non-cultic focuses of the extispicy client such as ‘the purchase of a slave and the success of the sacrifice for the dead’ (Cryer 1994:296). Another Ugaritic model (see Figure 5.12) represents an omen sacrifice for an individual enquiring about the conjunction of the new moon and the planet Mars (Cryer 1994:296).



Figure 5.12 Replica of a divinatorial liver (Benoit 2020)

The liver model in Figure 5.12 was discovered in Room 108 at the palace at Mari along with several others. Cryer (1994:296) records the following important line: ‘*kbdm tbqrn*: a liver you investigate(d)’ as referencing a completed omen sacrifice. In light of the above, it is possible that the idolatrous Israelites during their (syncretic) new or full moon ceremonies would have utilized the liver of the sacrificial animal for divination, thus making use of an ancient tradition at that time to divine the future.

Extispicy was a prominent part of Sumerian royal decision making and cultic ceremonies and in the Akkadian speaking world was also a common form of divination among both the royals and the ordinary people (Koch, U 2016:331). Koch remarks that the Akkadian extispicy text (2nd millennium BC) known as ‘The Art of the Seer’ (*bārûtu*) was transferred almost unaltered into the (Neo-Assyrian) 1st millennium BC (cf Starr 1992:45-53).⁴⁵⁶ In what follows next, I will discuss the *bārû* specific occult specialist and perhaps glean some idea of possibly similar personages among the early Israelites. Cryer (1994:296) reports that the Ugaritic lung and liver models were found in a private residence, that is an individual who did not live in the palace compound. Some of the subjects he covered were related to the crown, while others were obviously private in nature (Cryer 1994:286). It is possible that similar personages were privately consulted by wealthy and

to the approved divinatorial methods solely. Extispicy practices such as that by the apostate King Ahaz in 2 Kings 16:15 were contra-covenant and thus banned.

⁴⁵⁶ Starr (1992:45-53) discusses the first two ‘chapters of the *bārûtu*. A more precise description of the *bārûtu* is that it is as an ‘omen series composed by the scribes of Assurbanipal’; that is, a corpus of Neo-Assyrian texts consisting of approximately 100 tablets that was based on the ‘large Assur compendium’ that preceded it ‘with respect to the order of parts of the sheep’ (Starr 1992:46). In other words, the Mesopotamian extispicy texts written in Akkadian were transmitted almost unchanged from that era to the Neo Assyrian/Babylonian Age (see also Cryer 1994:295; cf DeJong Ellis 1989:126-131).

powerful early Israelites. If true, this provides even another window into the idolatrous Israelites' communing with the other gods and a way of life that was antithetical to the Sinai Covenant.

5.4.5.4 *The art of the bārû*

Like the astrologer, the *bārû* or diviner, who was usually male, occupied a powerful and yet precarious position at the royal court. The diviner was depended upon to utilize his expert skill in the art of omen interpretation such as in extispicy most proficiently and accurately since it frequently involved matters of the state (Zsolnay 2016:669; cf Robson 2011:607; Jeyes 1991:23-41). An incorrect reading of the extispicy omen affected the prognostication for a military campaign or an important political event and could incur the displeasure of the king and his court (see Robson 2011:607).

The ancient Near Eastern texts (both Old Babylonian and Neo-Assyrian [see above]) record the use of cultic rituals and incantations (known as *ikribû*), clay replicas of liver (see Figure 5.12), lungs and coils of colon as well as texts for the interpretation of the entrails as part of the practice of extispicy (Koch, U 2016:331; see also Robson 2011:619-620).⁴⁵⁷ The models of divinatory livers discovered at Mari are engraved with abnormalities and inscriptions providing the attendant prognostications (Jeyes 1991:26). The inscribed clay livers were probably used by priests as mnemonics and/or used to train diviners in the art of hepatoscopy (extispicy) (Benoit 2020).

In Canaan diviners (cf Jdg 9:27) might also have adjusted the (old Babylonian) extispicy rituals to fulfil the requirements of the individuals who sought their particular divinatory skills (Koch, U 2016:331). According to Cryer (1994:306) the early Israelites possessed knowledge of the Mesopotamian tradition of dream interpretation (see also Jdg 7:13-14) as well as knowledge of omen sacrifice (extispicy). Within the socio-cultural milieu of idolatry and the adoption of the Canaanite cultic practices, extispicy included, Israelite diviners handling omen sacrifice might have existed (cf Jdg 2:11-13; 3:5-6).

The entrails of the animal sacrificed by Gideon might also have been inspected for an omen. Having been met with no success, Gideon asks the Angel of YHWH for one to confirm His identity. The narrative indicates that Gideon was part of an idolatrous household and community and the altar to Baal was utilized for animal sacrifice and divination in the ancient Near Eastern tradition (cf Jdg 6:25-31). Judges 8:27 shows that Gideon took up his idolatrous ways after the victory over the Midianites. It is possible that he did not want to lose the status that he had gained as the military leader of Israel and by means of the ephod wanted to retain the same prominence in the community

⁴⁵⁷ Koch (2016:331) comments that the Akkadian texts also record the extispicy performed for private individuals in the 2nd millennium BC) and the king. Extispicy was an extremely expensive method of divination and therefore mostly reserved for the king and affluent classes who could afford to have their animals sacrificed on a regular basis for divining the future (Koch 2016:331). This form of divination while very popular in the 2nd millennium was eventually replaced by astral divination (Koch 2016:331; Van de Mieroop 2020:297).

(cf 4.3.1.1d). Cryer (1994:306) maintains that references to divination in the Old Testament are frequently utilized in literary contexts to confer divine authority on specific characters (such as Joseph and David) or, as in the case of Saul (1 Sam 28:6, 15), the lack of it shows the ‘loss or absence of such charisma’ (cf Nm 17:1-10). The same applies to the prophecy regarding Samson who because of it became a renowned Israelite judge (cf Jdg 13:24-25).

Although Israelite individual such as Deborah could undertake multiple roles in society, the Israelite diviner unless he was wealthy enough to avoid farm work and other tasks required of him, presumably did not fill the same, multiple, roles of the ancient Near Eastern diviner who was ‘a man of education and learning, a scribe, a copyist, an editor, a librarian, a master of ceremonies, a man of god, an anatomist and a courtier’ (Jeyes 1991:23).⁴⁵⁸ On the other hand, like his ancient Near Eastern counterpart and the *bārûtu* in the later years, the imagined Israelite diviner had to be extremely adept at interpreting the sacrificial omens. As indicated before, the mixing of cultures between the early Israelites and the Canaanite (cf Jdg 3:5-6) possible led to the appearance of Israelite diviners in the community who were experienced in the art of reading liver omens. The early Israelites came into contact with the cultic traditions of many nations. Judges 10:6 mentions the gods of Aram, Sidon, Moab, the Ammonites, and the Philistines in addition to ‘serving the Baals and the Ashtoreths’ (see 3.6.1.1). A parallel for the mixing of cultures (Israelite and Canaanite and the impact of the Canaanite culture upon the Israelites) (cf Jdg 3:5-6) may be found in Ugarit. Different collections of tablets written in Babylonian, Sumerian, Ugaritic and Hurri which were discovered in a house at Ugarit demonstrate that this house was a ‘cultural microcosm of the Mediterranean world’ (Van de Mieroop 2010:194-195). There was a co-occurrence of ethnic and foreign traditions with Babylonia serving as the primary inspiration in literature. The house demonstrates that, despite being different, the traditions influenced one another (Van De Mieroop 2010:195). In the house were found also 21 clay models of livers of which six were inscribed with alphabetic Ugaritic and one inscribed model of a clay lung used in divination. Scholars refer to the collection of texts as the ‘archive of the Hurrian priest’s archive, the name of the owner of the

⁴⁵⁸ The idea created by Jeyes (1991:23) of the *bārû* as more of a scholar and a scientist who is doing a related job rather than a cultic agent of the gods with his own predilection for religion is contested by Sweek (2002:46) who conceives of the diviner as a priestly figure who does not conduct divinatory activities independent of the organized cult. Sweek (2002:47) also question whether Jeyes’ idea that the *bārû* was a highborn a member of an informal professional organization with ‘its own society of education and craft’ – a type of guild in my opinion. Membership of this professional diviner’s society was gathered from only the educated elite with a close association with the power structures of the state and therefore the divination processes were mainly focused on the political and economic interests of king and state. I think that Jeyes in painting a picture of the *bārû* as focusing his craft of divination more or less free of cult is trying to recreate the image of a man in the pursuit of understanding and participating in an activity steeped for education and learning instead of engaging in a rite steeped in the supernatural is more in keeping with modern day scientific rationalism and not with the actual perception of the *bārû* as he might have seen himself: a key figure in his cultic role of maintaining the order in society that was necessary for survival (see also DeJong Ellis 1989:128; Sweek 2002: 41:56). The *bārû* is also someone who could manipulate the omen results that gave him the power of deception and the ability thus to cause harm (see Sweek 2002:48). This is a reason why YHWH had set laws in place to protect the Israelites from this type of divinatory practice and the potential for abuse by the practitioners (cf Dt 18:14; Lv 19:26, 31).

house is unknown (Van de Mieroop 2010:195). Van de Mieroop describes the liver models in the priest's archive as a perfect example of cultural interaction. They were tools for a divinatory practice that was typical Babylonian; that is, divination by examining an animal's liver. Liver models, such as the Mari livers were inscribed with graphic information that serves as a code on how to interpret the omens relayed by the livers (Koch, U 2016:16-17). Could the above scenario not have been the same for the early Israelites living in close proximity to the Canaanites, giving their children in marriage to the Canaanites and serving their gods (Jdg 3:5-6)?

As mentioned previously, Judges indicates a tradition of literacy among certain groups (possibly priestly) (cf Jdg 8:14). Consequently, an Israelite diviner may have possessed literacy skills to be able to read the inscriptions on the liver models used to read the omens provided by livers of the sacrificed animal (see also Jeyes 1991:23-24. In the mindset of the author/s of Judges the above scenario would have been abomination since it constituted an unapproved divinatory method which only served to further lead the Israelites away from the one true God.

During the Old Babylonian epoch, prior to the ritual, the *bārû* had undergone a purification rite that included cleansing of the hands and mouth. In the Neo-Assyrian/Babylonian era, the purification ritual had evolved into a more elaborate practice including changing into fresh clothing and placing tamarisk and cedar into the ear of the diviner. Sulphur and Yellow Sulphur were also used 'to anoint and fumigate' the diviner for probably apotropaic measures (Jeyes 1991:25, 29). Ceremonial washing and anointing or purification rites before worship or service before the gods were common in Mesopotamia and Egypt as well as in early Israel before worship of YHWH (Hill and Walton 2010). Thus, the imagined early Israelite diviner may have undergone the same cleansing rituals to undertake the extispicy rites in earlier times. As for the ritual itself, described above, he may have invoked the name of Baal. Judges records the Israelites' affinity for Baal worship (cf Jdg 2:12; 8:33; 10:6; cf Jdg 6:25-26). It is conceivable, as stated before, that the early Israelites in their cycles of idolatry adopted the divination traditions and methods of the Canaanites who themselves would have been influenced by the Babylonian traditions via their trade relations.

5.4.6.5 Extispicy ritual sites

Extispicy omens carried a certain gravitas; they were divine revelations and therefore communicated as if from the lips of the gods themselves (Zsolnay 2016:669). The gods could only reveal hidden knowledge of the future in a place of ritual inviolability as required by tradition. In this sacred space under the prescribed conditions the deities could communicate by means of the entrails to satisfy the queries of the worshipper (Jeyes 1991:26).⁴⁵⁹ Like the sacred festivals of the Israelites,

⁴⁵⁹ Diviners escorted their king everywhere the ruler went. Extispicy could be performed in palaces as indicated in Neo-Assyrian texts, on temple rooftops and at sacred spots by rivers; the latter would be advantageous for a purification ritual.

extispicy rites could only be performed at the appointed times – on certain days of the month for example and not on others (Jeyes 1991: 30-32; Robson 2011:612).

Koch, U (2016:331) describes the extispicy divination rite as an extravagant affair, lasting for a period of two days. Offerings and prayers were made to the gods, requesting the deities to lay a ‘true verdict’ in the innards of the oblatory lamb or bird (Koch, U 2016:331). A 9th century BC relief from the North-West Palace of Nimrud shows a diviner and an assistant arranging an oblatory animal to divine will of the gods (Gabbay 2020; see Figure 5.13).



Figure 5.13 Animal sacrifice for divination (Gabbay 2020)

Jeyes (1991:25) believes that a ram or goat was sacrificed to the ancestral or personal god of the king, royal consultee or other wealthy personage (cf Robson 2011:612-613). The diviner put a divinatory question to the god Shamash (the god of justice and judgement) and the divine council (Jeyes 1991:26; Zsolnay 2016:669; cf Robson 2011:612). ‘The question posed to the divine council was whispered into the ear of a lamb which was given as a special sacrifice to Šamaš and Adad (Jeyes 1991:28). The divine response would then be given through an examination of the entrails and spoken by the *bārû* (Sweek 2002:46; cf Koch, U 2016:331; see also Van de Mieroop 2020:296).⁴⁶⁰ Zsolnay (2016:669) observes that the answer ‘was given as the *awât* (word) or the *pirištum* (secret).’

The description above may offer a glimpse into the world of divination in among the idolatrous early Israelites. The altar of Baal (Jdg 6:25-26) would have been an ideal place for omen sacrifice probably by means of the entrails of an animal sacrificed to Baal. Gideon seems to be prosperous. Judges 6:27 mentions that he had ten servants. He could easily afford the sheep or bull required

⁴⁶⁰ Van de Mieroop (2020:297) remarks that in extispicy the examination of the liver was more important than any of the other organs. He later observes that diviners ‘analyzed discolorations of the liver in the same way as celestial phenomena’ (Van de Mieroop 2020:298). Koch, U (2016:331) remarks that the actual act of extispicy involved observing the behaviour of the animal prior to its sacrifice; after it was slaughtered, the diviner inspected the internal organs and concluded the ritual with an examination and count of the colonic coils.

for the omen sacrifice. An extispicy specialist would have been utilized and, if one was not available, a person or someone from the household or community who were skilled enough.

Extispicy, as pointed out before, was an expensive divination practice since it involved numerous attempts to determine the divine will. The diviner would employ extispicy omens to approve or refute cultic and secular questions or intentions consistently asked by (influential) individuals about their public and private lives (see Koch, U 2016:331; cf Koch, PR 2016:263). The god's disapproval was indicated by any aberration in the animal's entrails and thus the ritual and offering had to be repeated (DiLuzio 2016:463; see also Robson 2011:614).⁴⁶¹ Repetitions were also necessary when the category of the omen was ambiguous (see above) as a definite divinatory message of promising or unfavorable was required (Robson 2011:614). Extispicy sacrifices and rites were presumable repeated at further costs.

5.4.6.6 *War outcomes*

Omen sacrifices to divine the outcome of a military campaign were of great importance to kings and military commanders (see Melville 2020:401-402). It is unlikely that extispicy or celestial divination rituals formed part of Israelite military campaigns recorded in the Book of Judges (cf Jdg 3:10; 4; 6; 7; 10:17-18). It is likely, however, that these rituals were practice among the elite Israelites in their households as mentioned above during their cyclical patterns of idolatry and apostasy. Nonetheless, the narratives of Judges recount the Israelites turning to YHWH for liberation from their enemies during times of oppression. Military counsel was sought before warfare was initiated. Throughout the intertribal warfare (Jdg 19-21) divination techniques consisted of the approved methods that involved the casting of lots and probably the *Urim and Thummim*. The elitist nature of ancient Near Eastern divination techniques of extispicy and astrology left the majority of the ordinary people and the poor out of the politico-economic sphere that at the end of the day held great power and control over their lives. If extispicy was a part of the Israelites' cultural lives, it would have undermined the ethos of equality that was embedded in the covenant (see Chapter Seven). Ultimately, the Israelites were to serve YHWH as their sovereign King and covenant God with all their hearts (Dt 6:4). It is likely that that author/s of Judges viewed the divination of the Canaanites as taking the Israelites' focus away from YHWH's plan and purposes for them and placing it on their own self-serving needs.

5.5 RESTORING DIVINE COMMUNICATION

5.5.1 Appeasing YHWH

⁴⁶¹ It is possible that the cultic ritual involving extispicy had to be repeated including the oblation rite if it was not performed according to custom or it was interrupted (see DiLuzio 2016:463; see also Sweek 2002:48).

Bochim ('weepers' – Jdg 2:5), represents the turmoil that the Israelites were probably experiencing at that moment in time and which would continue into their future. Aided by the lure of the Canaanite gods whom the Israelites apparently could not banish from the land, the meeting between the Angel of YHWH and the Israelites at Bochim is also a sign of unwholesome divine communication. Judges 2.3-5 recounts the Israelites' sorrowful state and sacrificial offering as a means of propitiation:⁴⁶² 'When the angel of the Lord had spoken these things to all the Israelites, the people wept aloud, and they called that place Bochim, there they offered sacrifices to the Lord' (Jdg 2:4-5).

In the tradition of the ancient Near Easterners who understood that a wrathful deity could cause a personal or national disaster, the Israelites identified the source of their calamity as the wrath of YHWH. The ancient Near Easterners did not always know the reason for the god's anger (cf 2.2.5.8). This confusion led them to seek revelation from the god in the form of an omen, oracle or a dream to ascertain the cause of the divine wrath. Nations such the Hittites placed their hope in magic rites to bring about restoration and appease the wrath of the god/s (Pagolu 1998:106).

The author/s of Judges narrate that Israelites in Judges, on the other hand understood that the calamities that befell them were the result of their covenant violation and they knew what was required of them to restore YHWH's favour upon them (cf Jdg 2:1-5; 6:8-9; 10:16). Pagolu (1998:106-107) notes that it was the mercy and grace of YHWH within their unique covenantal relationship, which was not found in the ancient Near East, that brought healing and restoration.

The early Israelites knew from their historical past that interaction with YHWH included prophetic divination ([at the tabernacle] Ex 33:7-11; cf 25:22; 27:21; 30:36). Did they attempt to determine the divine will for their future considering the trouble they were experiencing by some other Canaanite means given their idolatry? Be that as it may, instead of a favorable oracle, the Angel of the LORD makes an appearance and delivers an alarming message (Jdg 2:1-3). As stated above, in order to appease YHWH, the Israelites atone for their idolatry by 'weeping' and offer sacrifices to YHWH (Jdg 2:4-5). The author/s of Judges juxtapose this account with that in Judges 10:16 when the Israelites got rid of their foreign gods in order to regain YHWH's favour. The author/s also offer sacrifices to YHWH at Bethel (Jdg 21:26) in order to acquire a favourable war outcome.

In the ancient Near East, it was the custom to mollify divine anger by means of 'prescribed rituals' (Hill and Walton 2010:947-952). Sacrificial offerings of loaves and libations and gifts accompanied invocations and ceremonial prayers to placate angered gods (Pagolu 1998:106; see Arnold

⁴⁶² Ryan (2007:10) is of the opinion that the Israelites were not penitent but merely wept out of self-pity. Certainly, they would have been shocked at the Angel's prediction. Their acts of sacrifice could symbolize genuine regret but subsequent cycles of idolatry shows that is not the case.

and Beyer 2002:202).⁴⁶³ The Israelites at Bokim may have made sin and guilt offerings (Jdg 2:4-5; cf Lv 6:24-25; 7:1-2) on an approved altar (Ex 20:24-25) since the blood of the guilt offering had to be sprinkled on a proper altar (cf Jdg 6:26).

The Israelite God, however, did not require these sacrifices or sacraments as a means of reconciliation but a truly remorseful heart and a return to the covenant (cf Jdg 10:16 Pagolu 1998:106).⁴⁶⁴ The altar on which the sacrifice was made, may embody spiritual precincts and establish the boundaries of sacred geography (Davis 1996), but it is YHWH who truly sanctifies the Israelites (Houston 2001:87). Altars may attract intense cultic activity, but it is YHWH to whom this specific religious behaviour must be directed. The Old Testament reveals (see above) that YHWH communed with the Israelites around sacrificial altars for the very reason that sacrificial acts on altars were acts of expiation. Thus consecrated the worshippers and particularly the priests could stand in the presence of their God and communicate with Him (Haran 1985:187). The sacrifices at Bokim were ultimately made to alleviate the prediction of the Angel of the LORD; perhaps this was the hoped-for outcome more than they were truly willing to surrender their idolatrous lifestyle and restore their relationship with YHWH.

5.6 CONCLUSION

Communication between YHWH and the Israelites encompasses more than just the accepted methods of divination. It is meant to embody a complete and sacred covenantal relationship and way of life. This monotheistic lifestyle is defined by the concept of ‘walking with YHWH’ (see 5.2.1). Therefore, when the Israelites remain faithful to their covenant and dutifully serve Yahweh, their communication with Him is wholesome and beneficial. However, the author/s of Judges demonstrate that the opposite is often the case throughout the text of Judges. The descriptions of people, customs, rituals and attitudes involved in divine communication were utilized to shed light on the mindset informing the author/s of Judges.

The only approved modes of divination allowed by the Yahwistic religion were the casting of lots, the *Urim and Thummim*, prophecy and dream messages performed in some instances by specifically elected specialists. Any other divinatory method was considered a covenant violation and a defilement of the Israelites and the land in accordance with the mindset of the author/s of Judges. In the context of the Israelites’ worship of Canaanite deities, it is plausible that they assimilated many forms of Canaanite divination, including necromancy, celestial divination, and extispicy.

⁴⁶³ Pagolu (1998:106) specifically mentions *Sumerian letter prayers* and certain *Hittite petitionary prayers* to appease angry deities.

⁴⁶⁴ Although confessions of sin were made to the gods as in the case of the petitionary prayer or the Hittite king, Mursilis II for instance, these confessional prayers were accompanied by the ceremonial offerings of gifts to appease the gods. (see Arnold and Beyer 2002:202). Pagolu (1998:106) also states ‘that not all prayers...revealed the personal piety behind it.’

These practices, which involved seeking supernatural guidance from sources other than YHWH, were subject to critical evaluation as evidenced by the messages conveyed in Judges 2; 6 and 10.

In the section of prophecy – it was revealed prophets in certain ancient Near Eastern nations (at Mari, for instance) who occupied minor positions and who uttered prophecies mainly pertaining to the realm of the king (Malamat 1998:62).⁴⁶⁵ Israelite prophets, on the other hand, were indispensable members of the Israelite community whose prognostication messages brought powerful socio-ideological changes in society. It is ironic that the prophet in Judges significantly operates within in the context of idolatry which presages the future function of prophets to criticize idolatry and correct it. The utilization of prophesy in the Book of Judges by the author/s serves as a means of both judgement and a deliberate effort to restore the covenant.

Consequently, the prophet in Judges (4; 6:8-10; cf Jdg 10:11-14) functions to challenge the dominant cultural ideology of polytheistic worship within Israelite culture (see also Hill and Walton 2010) which aligns with the underlying mindset held by the author/s of Judges. The use of analogous archaeological evidence and texts from the ancient Near East, compare-and-contrast genres, as well as descriptive writing styles in this chapter illuminate an improved understanding of Judges' religious perspective on divine communication.

Through the discussions of proper and improper contact with the divine by means of divination which determined an anti-covenantal lifestyle, this chapter has illustrated the way in which the author/s probably viewed divine communication in Judges. The idolatrous practices prevalent among the early Israelites subsequently evoked a strong defence from the author/s of Judges that revealed their religious worldview and beliefs. The various methods of divination proved to be a trap and a constant source of trouble for the early Israelites. The worship practices of the Canaanites posed a greater threat than their formidable iron chariots.

⁴⁶⁵ However, Malamat (1998:62) mentions that the marginal status of the prophets of Mari may be deceptive originating from the corresponding texts (see also Malamat 1980:62-82). He goes on to say that the Mari prophecies are restricted to placing requests to the king regarding the creation of a building or a city or other mundane demands regarding military affairs or property for example. In my opinion, the latter description presents an important distinction between Mari prophets and the Biblical prophets who were always acting on behalf of YHWH and on a communal level.

CHAPTER SIX DIVINE MANIFESTATION

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The discussion of YHWH's self-revelation in the Book of Judges, specifically in Chapter Five, was centred around prophecy. In Chapter Three, the focus was on the appearances of the Angel of YHWH and the divine '*I am*' statements. This chapter will thoroughly explore the theme of theophany, including its origins, characteristics, and nature. Additionally, specific miracles in Judges will be examined as a way for YHWH to reveal Himself to His people. The main objective of this chapter is to investigate how divine manifestation in the Book of Judges reflects the mindset of its author/s.⁴⁶⁶

The author/s of Judges demonstrate that YHWH has the ability to manifest Himself to individuals in a manner that does not cause harm, contrary to the prevailing cultural belief that encountering God would result in death for people. Accordingly, the Spirit of YHWH and the Angel of YHWH (see also Van der Kam 2000:386-389; cf White 1999:299-305) primarily define the way in which He appears to people in Judges. There are also instances of weather phenomena and the persona of the Divine Warrior that YHWH utilizes to disclose His power and presence to the Israelites. It is noteworthy that the divine processes of YHWH's direct self-revelation in Judges always occur in relation to His covenant.

6.2 THEOPHANY: NATURE AND PURPOSE

6.2.1 Introduction

The Book of Judges narrates that the Israelites were intermingled with the Canaanites and, against their patriarchal traditions and covenant obligations, adopted the Canaanite gods and by extension their lifestyle and habits (Jdg 3:5-6; cf Jdg 1:27-36). The material culture shows many 'similarities in pottery, religious items and house types' between the early Israelites and the Canaanites (McDermott 1998:69) probably as a result of the intermingling between the two groups as narrated in Judges (see also 4.2.1.1).⁴⁶⁷ Based on the aforementioned information, it can be inferred that the

⁴⁶⁶ Schmidt and Nel (2002:257) observes that designating theophany as a 'religious phenomenon' is problematic and confusing a situation that arises from: (1) terminological confusion: many terms are used to describe the same phenomenon while the same term is used to describe different phenomena – for example theophany is used synonymously with epiphanies, dreams, and visions and (2) historically theophany has been written from different viewpoints dependent on academic perspectives. See Schmidt and Nel (2002:256-281) for a discussion of the difficulties scholars experience in describing theophany as a 'religious phenomenon.' This study has attempted to avoid these problems by defining theophany in Judges solely as a visible manifestation of YHWH in human form in the physical domain of the early Israelites (Jdg 2; 6; 13) (and in nature [Jdg 5]).

⁴⁶⁷ According to the low date ascribed by conventional archaeologists to the events in Exodus – Judges, Deborah was judge of the early Israelites circa 1250 BC (Allison 2003:326; cf Mayes 1969:353-360; Merrill, Rooker, Grisanti 2011:195). At the beginning of the 12th century BC, the central highland region was showing signs of increased

ancient Israelites, in light of their adherence to the deities worshipped by the Canaanites (Jdg 2:11-17; 3:5-6; 6:10; 8:33; 10:6), possessed knowledge about the religious convictions held by these neighbouring nations, such as the Hittites and the Amorites concerning the revelation of the divine.

The creation of the world in the Ancient Near Eastern tradition is credited to different deities or a single deity within a pantheon.⁴⁶⁸ These gods reveal their presence in the physical realm as a collective group of gods. As a result, none of these gods can appear as an independent creator entity since authority is distributed among the deities, nor can they to materialize outside their cult images in the physical world (see Chapter Three). Throughout this study, it becomes evident that the gods' manifestation in the earthly realm is brought about by their inherent material needs. Specifically, the gods require people to fulfill the responsibility of tending to their statues and temples (see Chapter Three).

The creation of the material world is attributed to YHWH in the biblical worldview, which consequently impacts the way God reveals Himself to humanity. In the biblical worldview, monotheism attributes the creation to mono-YHWH who governs His creation with absolute authority in accordance with His sovereign nature (cf 3.3.5.1).⁴⁶⁹ Monotheism attributes the creation of the

Israelite settlements (Bloch-Smith and Nakhai 1999:62-92; Finkelstein and Silberman 2002:72-120; cf McNutt 1999:59-60). It is held that there are no signs of the Israelites in Canaan prior to 1200 BC. But the fact that the Israelites were using tents or non-permanent settlements may have contributed to the absence of archeological evidence for Israelite (urban) settlement prior to 1200 BC. Pursuant to the high biblical date for the Exodus, Deborah lived circa 1350 BC (Jdg 4:17; 19:9; 20:8; cf 1 Ki 8:66; 12:16; see Rose Book of Bible Charts Volume 2 2008:59; see also Wood 1990:44-47, 47-49, 56-57; 2003:256-282; Sha 2018:34). Judges 7:8 states that Gideon sent the rest of the Israelites to their tents (*ESV; NASB; KJV*; Finkelstein and Lipschits 2017:7). Although the Israelites certainly lived in houses some may have remained tent dwellers in the period of the Judges (Longman and Strauss 2023). These tent dwelling Israelites probably set up their tents on the fringes of villages and towns (see Holman 2002:52; cf Jdg 4:17) which could account for the gap in the archaeological record.

⁴⁶⁸ Although extant sources do not provide a complete Hittite cosmogony, certain Hittite ritual texts refer to the 'moment the cosmos began' and 'the goddesses Gulš and Maḥ as those who create' humankind (Putthoff 2020:86-87). The text is called 'A River Ritual with a Mythology on the creation of the World' (Putthoff 2020:86; see Hasel 1972:1-21; Hoffmeier 1983:39-49; cf Walton 2008a:48-63; see also Güterbock 1974:323-327). The Hittite gods were among the many gods worshipped by the early Israelites including the Amorites (cf Jdg 3:5-6). The nearest approach to Amorite cosmogony (is) in the Babylonian literature, the creation account, – the *Enūma Eliš* (see Clay 2006:91-92; cf Dalley 2000:229). The *Enūma Eliš* provide valuable insight into the nature of the gods. Their colophons suggest the *Epic of Creation* was copied from more ancient sources that dates prior to the fall of Sumer in circa 1750 BC.

⁴⁶⁹ See Wenham (1987:37); Clay (2006:91) and their descriptions of the earth's origins (cf Waltke 1974:136-144 and Johnston 2008:176-194); Walker 2014; Lyon 2019). See Rea (2007:136); House and Mitchell 2007:3; Holland (2010:35); Hart (2005:129); Bodine (2009:8) for Egyptian creation accounts. Dalley (2000:228-277) grants an updated translation of the Babylonian creation account, the *Enūma Eliš* (see also Heidel 1951:1-61; King 2007:116-222; Brandon 1963:120-121; Clifford 1994:4; Ogunlana 2016:103-104 and Bloom and Collins 2012:1-8 for a discussion of the text).

The Genesis creation account is regarded as superior since it reads less mythologically than its ancient Near Eastern equivalents despite some believing it to be a work of the Priestly scribes (see Brett 1991:1-16; Seely 1991:235; Blenkinsopp 2011:6-7, 22-24; Day 2013a:1-5; cf Landy 1979:513; Habel 2000:34; Wallace 2000:62; Walton 2008a:43; Payne 1964:9-14; Davidson 1973:21-22. Some purport that the Genesis creation story is in keeping with modern scientific and evolutionary approaches (Payne 1964:5-9; cf Walton 2009:114-118; cf also Heidel 1951:139-140; Speiser 1969:67-68).

universe to one uncreated God alone.⁴⁷⁰ This perspective thus could present people with a radical view of the nature of the divine and people's relationship towards deity. YHWH desires to bestow His lovingkindness upon the early Israelite people through a covenant. In return, He expects His people to demonstrate love and devotion solely towards Him, while faithfully adhering to His covenantal obligations and laws (see Chapters Two and Three). This worldview is consistently embraced by the author/s of Judges.

The biblical perspective acknowledges that the ancient Near Eastern deities, which were believed to be created by YHWH, have misled nations into falsely believing that they are the ultimate creators (see 2.2.5.8).⁴⁷¹ However, YHWH has made Himself known as the one and only true God to the Israelites through the Sinaitic Covenant (see 2.2.5). Consequently, the author/s of Judges viewed the idolatry practised by the Israelites as a grave offence against YHWH. This not only undermined His authority but also ridiculed His sovereignty and the covenant that He had established. The primary purpose of the theophanies in Judges is to rectify the Israelites' deviated inclination towards idolatry and reinstate their faith in YHWH as the one true God.

6.2.1.1 The 'first theophany'

Monotheism ascribes a divine value to creation when the רוח אֱלֹהִים Spirit of God Himself hovers over the waters – the very first instance of the appearance of YHWH in the physical realm of the earth. The presence of the Spirit of God, who is none other than God Himself, is witnessed during the creation of mankind (cf Gn 1:2, 26). As God breathes life into man, He imparts that very essence of Himself, which is the source of life.

Genesis 2:7 reads: The LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils and breathed into Him the breath of life (רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים – *hayyîm nišmat*), and the man became a living being. *Nišmat* (*neshamah*) is also translated as soul or spirit or the breath of God (Blue Letter Bible 2024. רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים).⁴⁷² This combination of the spiritual and physical aspects

⁴⁷⁰ For this reason some scholars believe that Genesis is a polemic against ancient Near Eastern creation narratives (Wenham (1987:37; Jonker 2004: 248-249; Shepherd 2014:102; Boyd 2021:188; cf Amit 2000:11). Vogt (2009:62) remarks that the polemic against the ancient Near Eastern religion 'centres on the supremacy of Yahweh, the God of Israel.' Genesis reads less mythologically and, consequently, demystifies and depersonalizes the powers of the primordial waters and all objects associated with creation (Jonker 2004:248n23). Clifford (1994:4) concurs that the way the Genesis creation narrative describes the creation of the universe is considered to be superior to that of its ancient Near Eastern counterpart.

⁴⁷¹ Genesis 1 not only ascribes creation to one God but also 'describes the creation of even those things understood as divine and worshipped as gods in the ancient Near East' (Vogt 2009:62; cf 2.2.5.8). Stars, for example, venerated in the ancient Near East as gods, in Genesis serve no purpose other than to illuminate the planet and serve as markers for sacred days; they are certainly not gods (Gn 1:14-18; Vogt 2009:62-63; cf 5.4.5.1; 5.4.5.3). Jonker (2004:248) remarks that Genesis 1 declares the supremacy of (the Israelite) God 'over and against' the Babylonians gods, by not presenting created things or beings as having divine status (see also Wenham 1987:37). Vogt (2009:63) states that 'in this way, God is elevated to a status far above that of any other ancient Near Eastern god or goddess.'

⁴⁷² Other words used in the Old Testament that means neshamah are רוח – *rûah* (*ruach*), the Spirit of God is רוח אֱלֹהִים (*elohim ruach*) and נֶפֶשׁ *nepeš* (*nefesh*). These words however may also mean different things: *nišmat/neshamah*:

foreshadows the way in which YHWH will interact with people and how people, the early Israelites in Judges, must respond to YHWH. Deuteronomy 6:5 reads: Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. The Hebrew word for soul is נַפְשׁ *nepeš* (nehfesh) with the same meaning as the word *nišmat* (neshamah or soul) in Genesis 2:7. At the time of the judges during periods of idolatry רִיחַ יְהוָה (the Spirit of YHWH) came upon certain judges. Judges 3:10 reads: ‘The Spirit of the LORD came upon him [Othniel] so that he became Israel’s judge’ (insertion mine). The Hebrew word for came וַתָּחִי – *wattāhî* is derived from the root חָיָה *hayah* which means to become or be and YHWH’s name itself is derived from the same root word (cf 3.4.3).

It is evident from the aforementioned information that theophany in the Book of Judges is intricately linked with the life that YHWH intends to bestow upon the Israelites which is none other than YHWH’s own life. Consequently, the Spirit of YHWH which protects life plays a role in this process in Judges, just as He did in the creative processes described in Genesis. However, in Judges, the Spirit of YHWH redeems the lives of the idolatrous Israelites by means of warfare. The Spirit of YHWH thus restores a rebellious nation to the covenantal life, the type of life ordained from the very beginning.

Brandon (1963:120-121) remarks that extra-biblical creation texts typically were not driven by the desire to speculatively explain how things came to be; rather, they were intended to advance the interest of some temple or city ‘and took the form of a brief explanation of the precedence of some deity in certain (unplanned) rudimentary acts of creation (cf Clifford 1994:4, 13-117). Moreover, the cosmogonies in ancient Near Eastern creation texts were more concerned with accounting for the origin of the world – the creation of the stars as representing the gods – than for that of mankind...’ (Brandon 1963:14; Clifford 1994:4). Wenham (1987:37) observes that Genesis grants a different concept of man compared to the ancient Near Eastern creation stories: ‘man was not created as the lackey of the gods to keep them supplied with food, he was God’s representative and ruler on earth, endowed by his creator with an abundant supply of food and expected to rest every seventh day from his labour.’⁴⁷³

As indicated before, the biblical worldview ascribes YHWH’s involvement in the creation processes as comprehensive, methodical, planned and purposeful in order to create man with whom He desires to have a relationship (see also 2.2.3.1). Humans are created, as stated before, in the image of God and commissioned to replenish the earth as the representatives of YHWH with this

divine inspiration, intellect; *rūah*: courage, mind and *nepeš*: heart, body, person and will (see Blue Letter Bible 2024. רִיחַ; Blue Letter Bible 2024. נַפְשׁ).

⁴⁷³ Wenham (1987:37) states that ‘the seventh day is not a day of ill omen as in Mesopotamia but a day of blessing and sanctity on which normal work is laid aside. Marduk rests after slaying Tiamat and before he creates the world and humans (Dalley 2000:254). The creation of the world is followed by great celebrations and adoration of Marduk (Dalley 2000:257-259). YHWH rests after creating the world and the first humans.

divine image (Wenham 1986:37). In the same manner this divine commission was, ideally, to be fulfilled by the early Israelites in Canaan. This commission could only be realized if the Israelites maintained a wholesome covenantal relationship with YHWH. In the worldview of the author/s of Judges this commission outweighed all other responsibilities of the Israelites. Brandon (1963:120-121) remarks that ‘the Hebrew accounts of the human race ‘and its fate ‘were an integral component ‘of a veritable philosophy of history’ aimed ‘to trace out the purpose of Israel’s god, YHWH from the very creation to the settlement’ of His elected people in Canaan (cf Clifford 1994:4; Dyrness and Garcia-Johnston 2015). The aforesaid divine path and purpose frequently involved divine self-revelation and YHWH’s direct contact with people in the form of the Angel of the LORD and the Spirit of God in Judges (Jdg 2:1-5; 6:11; 13:3-20).

6.3 DIVINE MANIFESTATION IN JUDGES

6.3.1 Definition of permanent and transitory theophany

The word (divine) ‘manifestation’ is regularly used to designate ‘the materialized form that a deity takes, such as a cult statue, celestial body or another visual/physical appearance’ (Allen 2015:3; cf Putthoff 2020:29). In the Book of Judges, theophany in the form of the Spirit of YHWH and Angel represents YHWH’s direct manifestation, His immanence in the physical realm of the Israelites. Kim (1987:539) observes that ‘immanence suggests a shared nature.’ In Judges, the Yahwistic theophany may demonstrate the commonality between YHWH and the human judges, as YHWH bestows upon them His qualities of leadership and redemptive attributes (Jdg 3:10; 4; 6:34; 7, etcetera).

The term manifestation is also used to describe actions of a deity that are manifested in the physical world even when the deity’s physical form is not made known (Allen 2015:3). The god in his temple, inhabiting his statue, or the divine indwelling of the celestial spheres by the gods (Putthoff 2020:29) are examples of permanent theophanies.⁴⁷⁴

A *permanent theophany* is defined in this study as a manifestation of a god in a recognized and discernible physical form, the statue of the god for instance, in a known sacred locale such as the temple of the god. Deities may be carried throughout the land at certain times (Kang 2011:71), traverse the heavens as celestial bodies or embody nature in the form of a river or a tree (Van Till 1991:32). The term permanent theophany is derived from the aforesaid divine manifestations which were perceived to encapsulate the divine presence in or represented by the statue or other theophanic form such as thunder and lightning, the visible prime focus of the divine presence (Middlemas 2014:81).⁴⁷⁵

⁴⁷⁴ Permanent theophanies is my term. See the definition above.

⁴⁷⁵ Middlemas (2014:81) mentions that it was the Ark of the Covenant that was the ‘visible focal point of the divine presence’... the ‘functional equivalent of the divine image among Israel’s neighbors’ and ‘the most likely candidate

In the aniconic Israelite community these ancient Near Eastern cult statues and images of the deity were forbidden (Walton 2019:349-354; cf 2.3.2.1c). In early Israelite society, the Ark of the Covenant which rested in the Tabernacle was associated with the presence of YHWH and could be viewed as a ‘*permanent theophany*,’ but this sacred object was never venerated as YHWH Himself (see 6.3.5.1b). When YHWH does reveal Himself in the Book of Judges to the community (Jdg 2:1-3), Gideon (Jdg 6:11-20), Manoah and his wife (Jdg 3:20) it is always in human form (see above).

The theophanies described in the Judges narratives are never permanent and are sudden and unanticipated (Jdg 2:1-3; 6:11-20; 13:3-20). Accordingly, this study applies the term *transitory theophany*⁴⁷⁶ to these unexpected manifestations of YHWH as, for example, the Spirit of YHWH and the Angel of the LORD in the physical realm (of the early Israelites) (cf Niehaus 1995:20-21). The permanent theophany, represented by the statue of the god installed in the divine abode and the transitory theophany signified by the sudden, unexpected and uninduced (by [magic] rituals) appearance of YHWH denote the major differences between the manifestation of the divine in the ancient Near East and early Israel in the Book of Judges.

6.3.2 Definitions of the Hebrew verb רָאָה – *rā’āh* (to see)

The Hebrew verb *rā’āh* (to see) is discussed in this section as it denotes the theophanic manifestations of YHWH in Judges. Rooker (2003:859) comments that in the Old Testament – in the Book of Judges – the manifestation of YHWH to His people is often described as a theophany. A Yahwistic theophany denotes the visible, but temporary, appearance of YHWH – a divine appearance that can be classified as ‘a self-disclosure of the deity’ (Rooker 2003:859; cf Suter 1996:1140; Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:380). The word theophany does not appear in the Bible, but it is widely used by scholars to refer to the visible appearance of God to people in the Old Testament. The word is composed of the Greek words *theos* (God) and *phainein* (to appear) and thus theophany denotes the appearance of God (Rooker 2003:859; cf Schmidt and Nel (2002:256-257).

In Judges divine self-revelation predominantly occurs in the person of the Angel of the LORD (מַלְאָכִי יְהוָה – *Yahweh mal’ak*) who visibly appears to the Israelite community (Jdg 2:1-3) and certain individuals and who appears to be YHWH Himself (Jdg 6:11-24; 13:3-21; cf 3.3.5; 3.5.3.1). In all instances of theophanic manifestations, the Hebrew word for ‘appear,’ conjugated to reflect tense in the Judges narratives, contains the verb root רָאָה – *rā’āh* (to see). Judges 13:3 reads: ‘The Angel of the LORD appear רָאָה – *rā’āh* to her’ (the wife of Manoah in order for her ‘to see’ Him).

for a representational equivalent to a cultic statue of Yahweh...’ The spiritual meaning and function of the Ark of the Covenant is represented by the *kappōret* – the cover on top of the Ark of the Covenant also called the mercy seat. YHWH elected the Israelites to convey to the nations not only that He is a God of judgement but also mercy.

⁴⁷⁶ Transitory theophany is my term for the temporary manifestation of YHWH in the Book of Judges.

Rooker (2003:859) states that the ‘Niphal⁴⁷⁷ of the verb *r’h* ([*rā’āh*] to see)’ often emerges in the context of a theophany with the meaning ‘to appear’ ([insertions mine] Lv 9:23; Nm 14:10; 16:19; 20:6). There is also an appearance of the Angel of YHWH in Judges 2:1-3 but in this text נִרְאָה – *rā’āh* is not used. The word נִרְאָה – *rā’āh* is also used of the divine manifestation in Judges 6:12 when the Angel of YHWH appeared to Gideon.

In Judges 13:10 the wife of Manoah, regarding her encounter with the Angel of the LORD, informs her husband: ‘He’s here the man who appeared to me the other day’. The Hebrew verb נִרְאָה – *nir’āh* for the word appeared, used by the wife, comprises the verb root נִרְאָה – *rā’āh* (cf Jdg 6). In Judges 6:22 Gideon upon realising that he has seen the Angel of YHWH cries out: ‘Alas, Sovereign Lord! I have seen the Angel of the Lord face to face!’ In this case the verb ‘have seen’ רָאָה – *rā’ū* also contains the verb stem *rā’āh*. Thus, as understood by the verb *rā’āh* (appear) – ‘to let oneself be seen’ (Benton 2009:261) and, since there are other forms of theophanies (see above; cf 6.1), YHWH wished to be seen by the people and individuals in Judges explicitly in the person of the Angel of the LORD (see below for reasons) (cf Gn 18:2).⁴⁷⁸

Theophanies, as indicated before (see 6.3.1) also occur in the ancient Near East primarily in the form of the image of the gods that represented the manifestations of the gods in the human domain (the divine image could be removed from the temple and presented to the worshippers during festivals) (Elwell 1984:1172; Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:107). Divine manifestation in the ancient Near East also occurred in the celestial sky and in the natural environment in the form of meteorological phenomena and on the land in the form of rivers, streams and trees (Van Till 1991:32-33; see 6.3.7). YHWH effortlessly appears within his own creation (cf 6.3.1), but God is never the storm or the river such as the other gods were (cf 1 K 19:11-12). YHWH is in full control of the weather phenomena as He is the One who brings it about and it also signifies His power and presence. Rooker (2003:859) observes:

God ... is in no means limited by it [His creation]. Thus when he appears in theophanies, he in essence limits himself to specific and particular forms within the context of the creation he has made.

Theophany should be regarded as one of the means whereby God reveals himself to humanity. Whereas God’s special revelation may be divided into the broad categories of word and deed, God’s revelatory deeds occur as either theophany or miracle (insertion mine).

Accordingly, YHWH’s revelatory acts occur in 1) the theophanies in Judges 2; 6 and 13 (cf Jdg 7:22) in which events the divine presence appears in a recognizable (human) form and is also referenced as the ‘man of God’ (Jdg 13), and (2) the instances of miracles in Judges 5:4-5 and 6:36-40 (see Table 6.1). Theophanies essentially constitute a message system between God and

⁴⁷⁷ Niphal is the name given to one of the seven principal verbs stems of Biblical Hebrew (Definitions 2022. Niphal), called בנינים (*binyanim* or constructions) (see also Blue Letter Bible 2022. Lexical Definitions – Niphal Stem; see also Van Wolde (2019:453-478).

⁴⁷⁸ See Bible Study Tools 2022. Appear.

man in which the divine will is revealed for a specific purpose regarding the present and the future (see also Rooker 2003:360).

Table 6.1: Theophanies in Judges

Theophany	Revelatory Mode	Person/Persons
Judges 2:1-5	Angel of YHWH	Israelite community
Judges 5:4-5	Thunder, rain, earthquake	Deborah and the Israelite army
Judges 6: 7	Dream	Gideon
Judges 6:11-25	Angel of YHWH	Gideon
Judges 13	Angel of YHWH	Parents of Samson

Divine transcendence in the Book of Judges serves as a unique and defining characteristic of the author of Judges' monotheistic worldview.

6.3.3 Perceptions regarding divine manifestation

According to the perspective held by the author/s of the Book of Judges, individuals were inclined to assume that encountering the divine presence of YHWH directly would result in their demise, owing to their inherent inclination towards sinful behaviour (Jdg 6:22-23; 13:22; especially Ex 33:20). This concept dates back to the visible and powerful manifestation of YHWH on Mount Sinai which invoked great terror in the Israelites. The theophany at Mount Sinai led the Israelites to seek an intermediary (Moses) between God and themselves because they were afraid that they would die if they should see YHWH in person (Ex 19:16-21; 20:18-21). Given the display of thunder and lightning and a quaking mountain on Mount Sinai, the early Israelites thought it would be impossible for YHWH to dwell with man in His true form since God's transcendent holiness would cause humanity to perish (Goldingay 2003:405; Sommer 2009:3). Based on Exodus 33:20, Sommer refutes the interpretation that YHWH does not have a body. Sommer, instead, describes YHWH's body as existing in such a state of luminosity that it would be deadly for people to see God. Wafula (2019:25), however, has a different view of why humans could not see YHWH and relates it to the inequality that existed between master and servant in terms of 'post-coloniality' (cf Wafula 2019:10-26). Nevertheless, Goldingay (2003:405-406) argues that YHWH's presence could only be experienced in the lives of the early Israelites through their acceptance and obedience to the covenant stipulations and its laws. However, the Book of Judges clearly demonstrates that that people may indeed see YHWH and live (Jdg 2:1-3; 6:11-20 and 13:3-20, see below). But specifically in Judges 13, Samson's father accurately interpreted the theophany described in the narrative as a divine encounter with the LORD that did not result in their demise. He understood that they were able to see the LORD without facing any harm or destruction.

The idea in Judges that God could dwell among His people was paralleled in the ancient Near East (cf 4.5.2.2e-f). Niehaus (2008:116) comments that ancient Near Eastern people thought that their gods not only had authority over them but also lived among them. However, Block (2013:134)

observes that divine transcendence in the ancient Near East mainly occurred by means of the images of the gods indwelled by the spirit of the god as mentioned throughout this study. Chapter Five demonstrated that people in the ancient Near East believed that although the gods lived in heaven, nature, or the netherworld, ‘an extension of their personalities also inhabited the various cult statues’ created for them by their worshippers (Black and Green 2004:94). Upon the dedication of the statue, a ceremony that consisted of the mouth-washing (*mīs pī*) and mouth-opening (*pīt pī*) rituals were performed by which the statue was infused with the divine presence (Berlejung 1997:45-72; Black and Green 2004:94; Hundley 2013:239).⁴⁷⁹ The ancient Near Eastern people also believed that their gods sought to extend their rule through them by having them engage in conquest battles beyond the borders of their territories (Niehaus 2008:116).⁴⁸⁰ The god’s image would subsequently be set up in a temple in the subdued territories in order to dwell in the conquered lands.⁴⁸¹

YHWH revealed Himself to the early Israelites in the power or the form of the Spirit of YHWH and the Angel of YHWH as opposed to only being represented by holy objects ‘autochthonal’ to Yahwism such as the Ark of the Covenant symbolic of the power and presence of YHWH (cf 4.5.6.5a-b). Walton, Matthews and Chavalas (2000:176) remark that on the whole, YHWH’s self-revelation was both by means of the everlasting covenantal law (YHWH is holy and so too the Israelites had to be) and through His salvatory acts (via the Spirit of YHWH and the Angel of YHWH in Judges) that are always in relation to the covenant (see 6.3.4-6.3.5).

⁴⁷⁹ Within the ceremony, the mouth-washing always came before the mouth-opening ritual and comprised the application of water, enriched with cleansing agents, to the mouth of the statue. The mouth-opening rite involved the application of various flavorsome and aromatic substances (syrup, instead of honey, ghee, cedar and cypress) (Hundley 2013:239-240). For a detailed description of the rituals see Hundley (2013:241-255) who provides a summary of the rituals gathered from Nineveh and Babylonian texts as well as structural interpretation of the two rituals, their use and the ideology behind the rituals. Berlejung (1997:45-72) presents a description of the consecration of the divine image in the ancient Near East. See also Putthoff (2020:29-30). In Judges 3:19, 26, Ehud passes the stone images at Gilgal. In all probability these stone images were imbued with the life-force of the gods by means of the mouth-washing and mouth-opening rituals described above. Thus animated, Gilgal stone images would have been considered alive to the people who worshipped them (cf 2.3.2.1c).

⁴⁸⁰ Niehaus (2008:116) goes on to say that imperial expansion was to take place from the temples of the gods which ‘were their earthly bases of operation (or central command) in cities and kingdoms.’ Additionally, ancient inscriptions are replete with propaganda descriptions of the emperor’s accomplishments in conquering other lands and subjecting them to the rule of his gods, and every monarch claimed that he had achieved such triumphs because his deity had fought on his side against the enemy (Niehaus 2008:116). The Israelites, on the other hand, did not receive the divine commission to expand their territory outside the borders of the land allotted to them; rather their task as YHWH’s representatives was to draw nations into YHWH and restore their (broken) relationship with Him.

⁴⁸¹ It is possible that ancient Near Eastern soldiers took with them small statue of their patron god into battle. These statuettes, like the great statue of the god in the temple, contained the life-force of the deity and acted as a protective device against harm coming from the enemy. Cserkits (2022:8) mentions that the patron gods of Mesopotamian cities were thought to be the ‘life-force’ of the city and that protecting them was of the greatest importance. The theft of the statue of a city’s god of a city was a customary and harsh punishment and often enforced on insubordinate or captured cities.

As indicated before, the ancient Near Eastern peoples fought on behalf of their gods whose motives were imperialistic and acquisitive in nature. The ancient Near Eastern gods were not bound to an entire nation by a special covenant and thus there was no need for any god to personally defend a nation. Therefore, gods could abandon their lands (Block 2013:134) upon their defeat by another god (Niehaus 2008:116). YHWH, on the other hand, will personally engage in combat to thwart the imperialistic notions of the enemies of His chosen people and the perennial threat of oppression and tribal land dispossession that they faced in Canaan (Jdg 6:1-11; 7:22; cf Jdg 5:4-5, 20). Walton, Matthews and Chavalas (2000:176) remark that through the two unique and principal aspects of the covenant, election and revelation, YHWH distinguishes Himself from the other gods ‘by these actions.’ (cf Mariottini 2022:33). The gods would at times choose a family or an individual, a king, to favour and bless (cf 4.2.2.3). However, ‘without revelation such election is only inference or propaganda’ (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:176; cf Haith 2007:170). Thus, the author/s of Judges narrate that YHWH chooses the judges to bring back His elect people to this covenant and to Himself as their only and rightful sovereign covenant God.

6.3.3.1 *The divine presence*

The Tabernacle and the Ark of the Covenant that rested in the Holy of Holies of the Tabernacle were perceived to exemplify the presence of YHWH among the Israelites (Cross [ed] 1997:1573; cf Fairbairn 2009:18). Judges also shows that there is a direct manifestation of YHWH’s presence among the Israelites in His divine Persons of the Spirit of God (רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים – *Ēlōhīm rūah*⁴⁸² [Spirit of God]) and the Angel of YHWH’ (מַלְאָכֵי יְהוָה – *Yahweh mal’ak*).

Clements (2016:64) states that many aspects ‘of a divine epiphany’ were appropriated by the Israelites from the Canaanite worship system ‘since here also the gods were thought to manifest themselves in the same way but the Sinai covenant tradition became an important interpretative factor’ However, the divine revelation in the manifestation of the Spirit of YHWH (Jdg 3:10; 6:34; 11:29; 13:25; 14:6; 15:14) and the Angel of YHWH (Jdg 2:1-3; 6:11-20; 13:3-20) differed not only from the manifestation of the gods in the form of their images in the temples but also in terms of the purpose of divine revelation in Judges. As stated above, YHWH’s manifestation in the world of the early Israelites is covenantal; YHWH appears to the Israelites to confront their idolatry (Jdg 2:1-5); and to deliver them from their enemy (cf Jdg 6:11-34; 13:3-20).

The Divine Presence in Judges contradicts the prevalent cultural notions of the ancient Near East regarding the remote, uncaring deity in the temple by showing a God who may take on human form, appear from heaven, and dwell among the early Israelites (Willis 2019:23; cf Walton 1990:241; 2018; cf 3.3.2.1a). It is understandable, thus, that the divine manifestations in Judges occur in the personas of the Spirit of YHWH and the Angel of YHWH since they demonstrate

⁴⁸² The English transliteration of the Hebrew words, in this study, will, to the extent practicable, follow the same pattern as Hebrew, which is read from right to left.

YHWH's active interest and involvement in the affairs of the Israelites (Clements 2016:64). Clements remarks that 'Yahweh's presence was always an active coming to his people, as he had come to rescue them from Egypt to lead them into their own land.' Similarly, YHWH comes to rescue His people in Judges from the oppression of the Canaanites as well as other oppressors (Jdg 2:16-19; 3:9-11, 15, 28-30, 31; 5:31, etcetera; cf 2.5.5.).

The Spirit of YHWH and the Angel of YHWH present the ancient Near East with the novelty of the divine presence as a manifestation 'other' than the unequivocal revelation of deity as nature gods or the manifestation of the cult image (cf 3.3.2-3.3.2.1). The Spirit of YHWH, for example, who was present at the creation of the world and whose manifestation in Judges serve to empower certain leaders/judges to overcome the enemy, serves to illustrate 'the inability of people to control or manipulate God's Spirit' (Duvall and Hays 2019). YHWH's presence and actions in Judges, demonstrate His supremacy over the other gods; and shows that God's acts are autonomous, independent of human influence. The aforesaid, as stated before, was in contrast to the ancient Near Easterners' belief that they could obtain the knowledge of the gods and influence the divine will through magic rites, ritual sacrifices, prayer praise and bribes (Uffenheimer 1986:157; Walton 2006:265; Taracha 2009:3).

6.3.3.2 *The pairing of heaven and earth*

The heavens (הַשָּׁמַיִם – *haššāmayim*) and the earth (הָאָרֶץ – *hā'āreṣ*) have been paired since the beginning of creation (Gn 1:1).⁴⁸³ Heaven and earth, according to Chambers (2020:215) are connected (see Figure 6.1) in a 'bipartite cosmological formula [heaven and earth].' Chambers notes that heaven and earth are also paired in 'most cognate languages' of the ancient Near East. The Phoenician language pairs heaven with earth as denoted by the designations '*l qn ars*' and *b'l šmym*' ('El creator of earth and Baal-of-heaven') (Chambers 2020:215). But heaven and earth are particularly paired in Judges (2:1-3; 3:10; 6:11-20, 6:34; 11:29; 13:3-20, etcetera) when YHWH reveals Himself in the physical world (Osborn 1993:117; cf Frick 1999:59; Willis 2019:23; see O'Callaghan 2022:159-160).

⁴⁸³ The terms heaven and earth are paired 185 times in the Old Testament, they are conjoined with 'a simple waw' – the sixth letter of the Hebrew alphabet – and in an extra 120 cases the words are connected within a wider context (Chambers 2020:215).



Figure 6.1 Ancient Israelite cosmology (Clay 2012)

Judges 5:20 might be a reference to the pairing of heaven and earth that accordingly shows that the entire universe is thus concerned with establishing the sovereign will of YHWH (Jdg 5:20; McCann 2011:59-60; cf 3.3.5; 3.3.5.1). There, thus, existed a synergistic relationship (earlier described as covenantal [see Chapter Two]) between earth and heaven that could be beneficial to the early Israelites (Jdg 3:11, 30; 5:20, 31; 8:28, etcetera), for example, in incidents of deliverance warfare (Jdg 5:20; 7:22).

YHWH's direct actions in the domain of the Israelites show that, in the worldview of the author/s of Judges, the earth may become an extension of heaven in some manner and thus that earth and heaven may intersect as they do in Judges 5:20 (cf Jdg 5:4-5; 7:22) when the stars above are also engaged in the battle against Sisera (see figure 6.1).

In the ancient Near East, the stars, who were thought to embody the gods, were also sometimes believed to leave their heavenly paths in order to aid in human conflicts, confuse adversaries and infect animals with diseases (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:252). Walton, Matthews and Chavalas note that the *Gebal Barkal Stele* of Thutmose III (1479-1425 BC), for example, references the aid of 'stars' blazing from the sky to confound and annihilate his Hurrian adversaries (cf Nm 24:7).⁴⁸⁴ Walton, Matthews, and Chavalas (2000:252) emphasize that the stars in Judges act only as YHWH's messengers and tools, not as personified deities, in contrast to the stars in the ancient Near East who were personified gods (cf 2.2.5.8; 5.4.4). Consequently, an exceptional summer storm that poured torrents of water flooding the Kishon River decided the war at Kishon

⁴⁸⁴ Winkler (2013:231-248) provides more information on the subject of the supernatural star mentioned on the Gebal Barkal Stele. Nederhof (2009) provides a translation of the Gebal Barkal Stele. Walton, Matthews and Chavalas (2000:252) note that as early as the third millennium, (the Babylonian) Sargon's texts mention the sun darkening and the stars advancing on the enemy. According to legend, following an attack on the Greek city Perinthos, by Philip, the father of Alexander the Great, witnessed a mysterious light in the sky that was immediately attributed to divine intervention (Burn 1959:39).

with the help of stars in the heavens, a source of rain in Ugaritic and Mesopotamian myth (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:252; see Figure 6.2).



Figure 6.2 The defeat of Sisera (Web Gallery of Art 2022)⁴⁸⁵

Judges 5:20 (cf Jdg 5:4-5; 7:22; 6:11-10: 13:3-20) also indicate that the early Israelites were aware of a certain structure of the cosmos (see Figure 6.2).⁴⁸⁶

McFarland (2014:165) observes that the earth ‘exists always in the presence of heaven (since it exists in the presence of God).’ Claydon (2020:142) observes that heaven as YHWH’s dwelling place is a place of ‘timeless eternity outside’ of the created sky and the earth. McFarland (2014:165) notes that because God is unseen and transcendent, heaven is a transcendent and invisible location that cannot be perceived naturally by humans. However, as previously stated, YHWH overturns the aforesaid ideas by appearing to the early Israelites and by visibly manifesting in the persona of the Angel of YHWH and displaying His great power in the earthly realm (cf Jdg 5:4-5, 20; see also below 3.3.4-3.3.5). The narratives in Judges 2; 6 and 13 support the aforementioned perspective and in a dynamic way.

⁴⁸⁵ The Defeat of Sisera (1690-1692) is a painting by Italian painter Luca (1634-1705) done in the Baroque style (Web Gallery of Art 2022. Giordano, Luca).

⁴⁸⁶ The early Israelites’ awareness of the cosmic structure might not have been as sophisticated as the depiction in Figure 6.1. Judges 5:20 and Exodus 20:11 indicate that they may have had more than a rudimentary understanding of creation. As stated before, Judges 5:20 indicates that the early Israelites were aware of the realm of heaven and of earth and that there was a certain interaction between the two (cf Jdg 1:1-2; 2:1-3; 11-23; 13:3-20, etcetera). In biblical cosmology the term heaven denotes one of three realms (Stewart 2022).

These three realms comprise: The unseen and numinous third heaven (שמי השמים – *shamayi h'shamayim* or ‘Heaven of Heavens’; cf Gn 28:12; Dt 10:14; 1 Ki 8:27]. The third heaven is also perceived to be the throne and abode of YHWH (Cross 1997a:1573; McFarland 2014:165). The second realm is the invisible heavens (שמי – *šamayim*) where other heavenly beings dwell. The third realm is also known as the first heaven which consists of the visible celestial sky and the earthly sky (Clay 2012; see Figure 6.2; see also Wright 2016).

The early Israelites’ view of the universe may have perceived of the earth as a fixed locality which is surrounded by the sky consisting of the earth’s atmosphere where birds fly (the first heaven) (Gn 1:7), the celestial sky where the stars, planets and other celestial objects are located (the second heaven) (Gn 1:14-17) and the dwelling place of God, the third heaven which lies beyond the first and second heaven (Cornford 2018:56; cf McFarland 2014:165; Thierens 2020:11).

When the Divine Presence becomes visible on earth, the earth is manifestly paired with heaven with enormous displays of power (cf Jdg 6:21; 7:22; 13:20; see 6.3.5.1-6.3.5.2). At Mount Tabor, God's cosmic power is on full show (Jdg 5:4-5, 20; Joerstad 2019:101). The display of the pyrotechnic miracles, for example in Judges 6 and 13 (cf Jdg 7:21-22) also show the might of the sovereign God. The powerful synergetic relationship between heaven and earth can be seen in the weather phenomena (Jdg 5:4-5), celestial events (Jdg 5:20), and the blazing flame that flashes towards heaven (Jdg 13:20; cf Jdg 6:19). It is also seen in the manifestations of YHWH in persons of the Spirit of YHWH (see 6.3.4) and the Angel of YHWH (see 6.3.5) in the Book of Judges. The Spirit of YHWH descends upon Othniel, Gideon, Jephthah and Samson (Jdg 3:10; 6:34; 11:29; 13:25; 14:19; cf 2.3.3; 3.2.2.1b; see also below). The Angel of YHWH (Jdg 2:1-5; 6:11-10; 13:3-20) appears, as stated above, to impact upon the earth in a powerful way (McFarland 2014:165; cf also Jdg 5:4-5, 20; 7:22).

6.3.4 The Spirit of YHWH

Genesis 1:2 describes the elegance of divine purpose: 'Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep (תְּהוֹמֹת – *təhōwm* [tehom])⁴⁸⁷ and the Spirit of God (*Ēlōhīm rūaḥ*) was hovering over the waters. The Hebrew verb רָחַף – *rachaph*, which is translated as 'hovering' also means to cherish or to watch over young like an eagle.⁴⁸⁸ The word *rachaph* is used to describe the gentle movement of the Spirit of God above the waters in Genesis 1:2. It should be emphasized that the powerful manifestation of the Spirit of YHWH as the avenging God in the pre-monarchic judges described in the Book of Judges stands in contrast to the soft nurturing presence of the Spirit of God at the creation of the world. Nevertheless, when the judges, who are empowered by the Spirit of YHWH, deliver the Israelites from the adversary, they demonstrate the character of protection implied by the hovering action of the Spirit of God in Genesis (see 6.2.1-6.2.1.1).

In both Genesis and Judges the Spirit of God/YHWH implies the divine presence on earth; the presence of YHWH in the midst of the early Israelites (in Judges) (Duvall and Hays 2019). The Spirit of YHWH רִיחַ יְהוָה (*Yahweh ruach*) in the Book of Judges is frequently associated with divine power (see also below) (Wright 2019:431).⁴⁸⁹ The reader of Judges will find that the Spirit of

⁴⁸⁷ It has been claimed that the word *tehom* in Genesis 1:2 was derived from the Akkadian Tiamat (salty waters) in the *Enuma Eliš* (m:124; cf Pelham 2012:216). Accordingly, it has been held that 'the presence of *tehom* shows that *Enuma Eliš* is a source for Genesis 1' (Vail 2012:124). Vail contends that it is more plausible that the apparent connection between *tehom* and Tiamat is a shared semitic root *thm* when considering the tendency in Mesopotamia and Canaan to take common nouns and 'later' transform them into divine names in restricted mythological settings. A more straightforward logical explanation for *tehom*, according to Vail, is that Israel never deified its word, which derives from the root *thm*, the way some of its neighbours did 'in select contexts.'

⁴⁸⁸ The same root verb רָחַף or hover is used as in Genesis 1:2. See Bible Hub 2022. *rachaph*.

⁴⁸⁹ In Judges the Spirit of YHWH fulfills various other functions, inter alia, providing the Israelite military leaders with supernatural strength to win the battles against the Canaanite oppressors as well as inspiring prophetic utterances in prophets. See Robson (2006:14-24) for a comprehensive discussion of the role of the Spirit in the Old Testament

YHWH is YHWH Himself exercising power on the earth either directly or indirectly through human agents (Jdg 3:10; 6:34; 11:29; 14:6; 15:15; 16:5; Wright 2019:431). Wright (2019:431) describes the Spirit of YHWH as ‘God’s power at work – either in direct action or empowering people to do what God wants to be done as also indicated before. As stated before, in Judges the Spirit of YHWH frequently empowers the judges to go to war against the enemy (Jdg 6:34; 11:29; Hayford [ed] 2013:290; Martin 2008:4-5). The actions of the Spirit of YHWH are enumerated as follows (Martin 2008:4-5):

Othniel is indwelled by the Spirit of YHWH to defeat the enemy – the king Cushan-Rishathaim of Aram (Jdg 3:10; 6:34; 11:29; 13:25; 14:6, 19: 15:14; Hildebrandt 1993:113; Martin 2020:78; see also 3.2.2.1b) serves to ‘illustrate that the Spirit of God is closely associated with power and with the implantation of His will’ (Duvall and Hays 2019; see also McCann 2011:59-60; cf 3.2.2.1b). Gideon organizes an army and achieves a miraculous victory while being enabled by the Spirit (Jdg 6:34; 7; Martin 2008:4-5). Jephthah also vanquishes the foe by the power of the Spirit (Jdg 16:3; Martin 2008:4-5). Samson destroys a lion (Jdg 14:6), kills a thousand Philistines (Jdg 15:15), and seizes the gates of Gaza (Jdg 11:29; Martin 2008:4-5).

Although it is not directly stated in the text, as a prophet of YHWH and a judge, Deborah is clothed with the Spirit of YHWH (see also Le Roux 2015b:np). It is perhaps for this reason that Barak will only engage the enemy at the Kishon River accompanied by Deborah (Jdg 4:8). In the area of the Kishon River, YHWH caused an unexpected rainstorm that allowed the Israelites to be triumphant against the Canaanites (Jdg 4:14, 23; cf Jdg 5:4-5; cf 3.2.2.1b; 3.2.3.3b; 3.3.4; 6.4.1).⁴⁹⁰

Hildebrandt (2019:5) observes that in the ancient Near Eastern texts *rūah* (ruach) is never used (in the sense of the *rūah* of YHWH. Ancient Near Eastern literature does not utilize *rūah* to show that gods have spirits or that *rūah* is an extension of a god (Hildebrandt 2019:5). Hildebrandt remarks that the word *rūah* is a distinctive ‘development of its lexical range of meanings in the Old Testament.’ Only in the Old Testament, as an ancient text, is this term developed to describe people’s interactions with their God (as in the Book of Judges, for example) (Hildebrandt 2019:5). Le Roux (2015:np) remarks that the indwelling of the Spirit endowed Gideon with unique supernatural powers but also with ‘wisdom’ to deliver his people with the ‘clever strategies’ provided by the LORD (cf Eccles 9:15; cf Jdg 7:16-20). The ancient Near Eastern countries would assiduously seek from their gods through technical divination the type of military techniques that the judges obtained by God’s Spirit (see De Jong 2007:265; Ulanowski 2016:75).

and particularly as seen in relation to the classical prophets (in particular Ezekiel). The Spirit of YHWH is essential to the word of YHWH in the same way that it enables the judges to wage war against the enemies of the Israelites.

⁴⁹⁰ Previously YHWH had also parted the Red Sea to deliver the Israelites (Ex 14:21) as well as the Jordan River (Jos 3:13) to allow the Israelites to cross into Canaan. Many theories have been proposed for the occurrence for the Biblical tradition recorded in Exodus 14 (Segert 1994:195-203; Drews 2011:30-35; Harris 2007:5-31).

In light of the above, the Spirit of God fills or takes possession of the aforesaid judges in order to equip them for the task that they had been called to carry out (Le Roux 2015b:np). Le Roux observes ‘that the RSV translation take possession of’ sounds violent, as in the case of Samson (Jdg 14:6) and Saul (1 Sm 11:6). The Hebrew actually says something different, *lavshah*: God’s Spirit ‘enfolds,’ ‘clothes him,’ or ‘like putting on clothes’ as with a cloak. Le Roux (2015:np) adds that ‘it can also be understood that the Spirit took on Gideon’s personality like a garment’ (cf 1 Ki 12:8; 2 Ki 24:20). A garment (in the Old Testament) is intended to protect and adorn (Le Roux 2015b:np) or serve as a symbol of identity with God as well as symbolizing acts of divine judgement to come (as well as restoration) (cf Jr 13:2-22). Le Roux (2015:np) observes that if Gideon is clothed in this manner, it indicates that the Spirit bestows the advantages mentioned above. When the Spirit clothes the judges in the manner outlined by Le Roux, it reenacts the idea of supernatural protection supplied by the Spirit of God in the same way that He hovered over the waters of creation in Genesis (see above).

6.3.5 The Angel of YHWH

The Angel of YHWH (who is YHWH Himself [Jdg 2; 6; 13]) (Nelson 2013:36) proves that God is not radically transcendent and remote (even from the idolatrous Israelites in Judges), but rather close to creation and always in relation to people and history (Haight 2007:170). The Angel of YHWH is first mentioned in Genesis 16:7 and thereafter in Genesis 16:13 (Hagar); 22:14 (Abraham); Exodus 3:14 (Moses); Gideon (Jdg 11-22) and the parents of Samson (Jdg 13:3-20; Nelson 2013:36). The word angel in the phrase Angel of YHWH literally means ‘messenger’ and can refer to a human messenger sent by YHWH such as a priest or a prophet (Meier 1999a:53-54). However, in the Judges’ narratives the Angel does not only not behave like a human messenger but is unmistakably referred to as YHWH Himself (Jdg 6:14, 16, 18; 13:19-20, 22; see Meier 1999:53-54).⁴⁹¹

Haight observes that the God of the Old Testament has less emptying to do in the incarnation than does a God who is conceived in such ‘wholly other terms’ (cf Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:176). YHWH dwells within His creation in the world of the early Israelites in the Person of the Angel of YHWH and ‘thus is immanent to or within the world’ (see Haight 2007:170). Accordingly, YHWH is continuously present in the domain of humans, in the world of Judges, and

⁴⁹¹ Meier (1999a:53-54) mentions that the term ‘*mal’ak YHWH*’ is difficult to explain by using ancient Near Eastern paradigms, since it poses a variety of peculiar problems in the Bible. In the ancient Near East, it was common for gods to have some lower ranking deities at their disposal to carry out errands and convey messages (Meier 1999a:53). These messenger gods serve more as a conduit between gods than between gods and humanity. These deities all act like their human equivalents who serve as messengers on earth for everyone, from kings to commoners (Meier 1999a:53). The ‘*mal’ak YHWH*’ of the Bible is not characterized by these features of the messenger gods. The ‘*mal’ak YHWH*’ in the Old Testament is never given a name, and He does not necessarily behave like a human messenger, unlike the messenger deities of the ancient Near East who have names (Meier 1999a:53). For more about the singular ‘*mal’ak YHWH*’ in the Old Testament see Meier (1999a:54-59).

as He (noteworthily) ‘takes on human form’ He is ‘always negotiating with the humans’ in Judges (Jdg 2:1-3; 6:11-20; 13:3-20; Haight 2007:170). Haight (2007:170) observes that ‘to suggest that God first entered into time and history in the Christ event is to ignore this wide swath of Old Testament material. God’s act in Jesus is an intensification of this already-existing trajectory of God’s way of being present in and relating to the structures of the world.’ Haight continues: ‘God cannot be.... absent from the world, rather God’s continuous presence manifests itself by degrees more intense at certain times and places and perhaps supremely intense in the incarnation in Jesus.’ In Judges, YHWH takes on human form since His covenant with Abraham and the early Israelites (at Mount Sinai) is only made with humans and since these particular humans are need of His salvation.

The LORD appeared to Abraham and said: ‘I am God almighty, walk before me and be blameless. And I will make my covenant between me and you and will make you exceedingly numerous’ (Gn 17:1-2; Haight 2007:170; see also 2.2.4). Haight goes on to say that ‘in such a context the ‘incarnation would appear as the supreme exemplification of this kind of divine relatedness and its irrevocability.’ In other words, Haight is arguing that the incarnation of YHWH, in the form of the Angel of YHWH, is always associated with (the eternal) covenant. The Angel of YHWH’s appearances in the Book of Judges are always in the context of covenant and covenant restoration and preservation (Jdg 2:1-3; 6:11-20; 13:3-20). In keeping with this tradition, one of the names of the Angel of YHWH is also the ‘messenger of the covenant’ (Mal 3:1) in addition to Angel of God and Angel of His presence (Is 63:9; Nelson 2013:36).

The reader should also note that Haight (2007:170) is convinced that whenever YHWH appears in human form (in Judges), the divine transcendence is not compromised by the human form. The infinite can be achieved by the finite. The work of ‘clothing God’ (YHWH clothing or indwelling certain judges) can be accomplished through the empirical world (human form) (Haight 2007:170; cf Le Roux 2015b:np).

Given the aforesaid, the Angel of YHWH is ‘Yahweh Himself’ as confirmed by Burney (2004:35). Haight (2007:170) concurs that ‘the symbol for God become ‘incarnate’ in the world in human form’ is the Angel of YHWH. ‘Now the angel of the Lord came and sat under the oak at Ophrah (Jdg 6:11). And the angel of the Lord appeared to the woman ...’ (Jdg 13:3; Haight 2007:170). In these narratives, clearly, the Angel’s ‘movement from heaven to earth [cf Jdg 13:20] is a movement within the creation’ (insertion mine; Haight 2007:170) – it is a ‘covenant movement’ (see above).⁴⁹² Haight further remarks that ‘there is no such thing for Israel as a nonincarnate God. The Old Testament God is a God who is prone to incarnation, and ... the interpreter can discern a divine trajectory of which the incarnation is climatic.’ In light of the aforesaid, the early Israelites at Bochim can readily accept the identity of the divine Person, who is adjudicating, as YHWH

⁴⁹² My term that refers to the Angel of YHWH’s association with the covenant.

Himself (Jdg 2:1-3). However, in Judges 6 and 13, Gideon and Manoah need confirmation of the identity of the Angel. Is it possible that, at this point, the idolatry of the early Israelites which led them to forget their YHWH (cf Jdg 2:10) had rendered unrecognizable the appearance of YHWH? Yet the mother of Samson, a devoted follower of YHWH would easily recognize Him (cf Jdg 13:3-23).

Efird (2001:34) remarks that when the Angel of YHWH appears something significant and spectacular is about to happen (see also above Haight 2007:170) usually with substantial ramifications that could either be positive (Jdg 6:11-20; 13:3-20) or negative (Jdg 2:3). As a result, the Angel rebukes the Israelites for breaking their covenant (Jdg 2:1-5; Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2001:182). Divine orders to wage war against the Midianites were given to Gideon, and Manoah and his wife were informed that they would have a son in the future. The Angel of YHWH assumes the duties of prophetic messenger in Judges 2:1-5; 6:11-19; and 13:3-20 in which narratives He makes predictions that will affect the entire Israelite community in the future of the Book of Judges (Younger 2020:103-104).

Another singular feature of the Angel of YHWH is His appearance as the Divine Warrior in Judges as He had promised in the covenant stipulation (Ex 23:27; see 2.5.5; see also 6.4): YHWH sends His *ʾēmāfī* ([my] terror who is the Angel of the YHWH) ahead of the invading Israelite tribes to confuse the nations and fight on their behalf. Exodus 23:27 reads: I will send my terror ahead of you and throw into confusion every nation you encounter. I will make all your enemies turn their back and run. I will send the hornet ahead of you to drive the Hivites, Canaanites and Hittites out of your way (cf Ex 23:20-23).⁴⁹³ See the discussion in 6.4.

Since YHWH is omnipotent, He may appear to the early Israelites in whatever form He wishes and takes on the offices of Prophet, Messenger, and Divine warrior. In the worldview of the author/s of Judges, the actions of the Angel of YHWH in Judges shows that the synergy or relationship between heaven and earth in Judges is always covenantal, a partnership between God and humans with the LORD as the sovereign King.

6.3.5.1 *Theophany in Judges 2:1-3*

Theophany has always provoked trepidation and wonderment in the early Israelites (Sarna 1992:589-700). At Mount Sinai, the early Israelites prepared themselves for the theophany in Exodus 19:1-25 (Sarna 1992:589-700). The people arrived in the wilderness of Sinai on the first day of the third month after the Exodus, camp there, and prepare for a collective theophany on the third

⁴⁹³ Deuteronomy 7:20 and Joshua 24:12 also refer to the hornet that assisted in driving the Canaanites from the land (Neufeld 1980:30). Neufeld (1980:31) calls the use of insects as well as other unidentifiable reptiles and insects as agents of warfare in the ancient Near East ‘an early form of biological warfare.’ Is it possible that a similar strategy was used in Judges 7:22? (See Neufeld 1980:30-56 for more details on the subject).

day of their arrival. They set up camp at the foot of the mount (Sarna 1992:589-700). The people are instructed to purify themselves by washing their clothes and abstaining from sexual relations (Ex 19:10, 14-15). On the third day YHWH appeared in a terrifying display of thunder, lightning, smoke, and an earthquake that shook the mountain and YHWH descended on it in fire' (Ex 19:16, 18). YHWH delivers the Ten Commandments, but the people, filled with terror at dying for seeing YHWH's face, ask Moses to mediate (Ex 20:1-21; Sarna 1992:589-700).

Unlike that momentous event in the history of the Israelites at Mount Sinai, the theophany in Judges 2 (see also Jdg 6:11) comes about because of the idolatry of the Israelites. In Judges 2 the Angel of YHWH comes from Gilgal to speak to the early Israelites at Bochim regarding their illegal covenants made with the Canaanites (Jdg 2:1-3; see the discussions in 2.2.1.1b; 2.2.2.1; 4.3.1.1bi; 5.3.2.2a; 6.3.5.1; see Table 6.1). Hiebert (1992:505-511) describes theophanies as God appearing at springs (Gn 16:7), rivers (Gn 32:23-33), trees (Gn 12:6-7 [YHWH also appears at the oak tree at Ophrah in Judges 6:11] and also largely and most importantly at mountains (Gn 12:8; Ex 18; Ps 48; see 6.3.4.1a-c). These were features in the natural landscape that were considered to be particularly sacred and 'particularly conducive to contact and communication between the divine and human's spheres of reality' (Hiebert 1992:505-511). Likewise, the Angel of YHWH appears to the Israelites in Judges 2, to inform them about their future in Canaan. Judges 2 has been viewed as a text that includes an 'angelic theophany' (Butler 2009:38). The theophany in Judges 2 and the judgment of Israelites by the Angel of the YHWH for their idolatry serve as a preface to the cycles of insubordination, 'punishment and deliverance' that will follow in the ensuing texts of the Book of Judges as discussed in 2.2.2.1 (see Butler 2009:38).

The exact nature of the theophany in Judges 2 is ultimately a mystery: was it a whole communal theophany in which the LORD's manifestation was physical within the sphere of humans (cf Jdg 6:11: 13:3-20) or a visionary experience by a group of Israelites – the elders for example? Judges 6:11-20 and 13:3-20 demonstrate a visible manifestation of the Deity in which the participants had seen (*rā'āh* – to see [see 6.3.2]) the Angel of YHWH in physical form. The Hebrew word *rā'āh* (to see; see 6.3.2) is also used in prophetic texts for visionary experiences (Fuhs 2004:237).

Both the direct manifestation of the Angel of YHWH and the visionary experience are brought about by YHWH (Fuhs 2004:237). To experience the direct presence of God rather than the divine presence in the *kābōwd* (or *kābōd*) (see also 6.3.5.2) emphasizes the extent of the Israelites' crimes against YHWH (Jdg 2:1-3). However, YHWH acts in history in judgement of humans (Jdg 2:1-3), the theophanies in Judges 6 and 13 show that He is also compassionate (cf Jdg 10:16). It breaks God's heart when He has to judge humans (cf Gn 6:6).⁴⁹⁴

⁴⁹⁴ The *NLT* translation of Genesis 6:6 reads: 'So the LORD was sorry that he had ever made them and put them on the earth. It broke his heart.'

6.3.5.2 Theophany in Judges 6:11-23

Judges 6:1 states that ‘The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD, and for seven years he gave them into the hands of the Midianites.’ The Israelites assemble and cry out for assistance to YHWH who subsequently sends them a prophet with a message of reproach for their idolatry, not quite what they might have expected.

The Sinai theophany probably was one of the events referred to by Gideon when he enquired of his divine visitor as to what happened to YHWH’s ‘wonders’ that the Israelite ancestors told them all about (see Niditch 2001:182). Boadt (1992:711-722) notes that the statement at the end of laws in the Holiness Code in Leviticus 19: ‘I am the LORD’ (Lv 19:3-4, 9, 12, 14, 16, and so on) ‘is a formula of divine self-revelation used in a theophany to establish divine authority’ (cf Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:253; Niditch 2001:182). The declaration affirms God’s authority to act and His choice either to act in support of Israel or to punish them (Boadt 1992:711-722). Previously YHWH had addressed the community and the words ‘I am the LORD (your God)’ uttered by the prophet identified the God that the seer spoke on behalf of as well as validating His authority to act either to assist the Israelites or not (Jdg 6:10). But YHWH had decided to act on behalf of the Israelites and commissioned Gideon to engage the Midianites in warfare (Jdg 6:14, 16).

Le Roux (2015:np) notes that it was customary to make a meal or food offering for a stranger or visitor if you had supernatural experiences or expectations ‘(cf Manoah’s actions in 13:15-16)’. Gideon prepares a meal for the Angel who instructs him to lay it out in a precise manner on a rock. The rock that would function as a table, according to Le Roux (2015:np), was likely a component of an old Canaanite stone altar with cup-shaped hollows for libations (cf the Canaanites’ *bamot*, of which an excellent example may be seen at Megiddo).

When the Angel touched the food offering it became a burnt offering and Gideon received the confirmation he had requested. According to Jdg 11:31 and 1 Sm 6:14, the purpose of a burnt sacrifice was to honour YHWH in a specified sacred location. If the offer was accepted, it functioned as a symbol of the LORD’s approval of the Israelites and, as it turned out later, as a renewal of the covenant (Jdg 6:24; Le Roux 2015b:np). As with Gideon the display of miraculous fire produced by the Angel of YHWH in Judges 13:20 is further confirmation of His divine identity (Smith 2019a:107).

Once the Angel’s identity is confirmed Gideon expresses His fear of dying having seen the face of the sovereign LORD, that is the Angel of YHWH (Jdg 6:22; cf 6.3.3; see 8.2.2; see also 7.5.1.1b). The Israelites held the view that they could not see God’s face and survive, as was already mentioned (and as stated in Exodus 33:20) (Drinkard 1992:743-744; see 6.3.3). YHWH, however, upturns these perceptions in Judges.

Drinkard (1992:743-744) notes that Exodus 33:20 states that man cannot see YHWH or YHWH's face and live, 'thus the smoke and cloud of the theophany hid God' (cf Ex 19; see also 6.3.5.1). 'Even the *'kābt-glory'* (glory of the *kābōwā*) (see 6.3.5.1) does not represent the fullness of God or God's glory' (Drinkard 1992:743-744), but it does protect the individual from YHWH's 'un-mediated presence.' How then is it possible for the people in Judges to see YHWH face-to-face and experience His direct presence without the protection of the 'smoke and cloud?' It is feasible because YHWH, who is omnipotent, is able to reveal Himself to humans while also preventing their demise. YHWH may put aside certain aspects of His glory in His appearance as the Angel of YHWH. Gideon, therefore, does not die when he sees the Angel of YHWH since he is protected from experiencing the completeness of the holiness of YHWH. Gideon uses both terms *rā'ūī* (see) and *pānīm* (face) to describe having seen the face of YHWH (cf 6.3.6). The word *pānīm* is also a term used for visiting a sanctuary (Drinkard 1992:743-744). The place where the Angel appeared to Gideon was possibly a sacred site as denoted by the oak tree at Ophrah and the altar of Baal near it (cf 4.3.1.1c).

6.3.5.3 *Theophany in Judges 13:3-20*

The context for the theophany is stated in Judges 13: 'Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD, so the LORD delivered them into the hands of the Philistines for forty years' (Jdg 13:1). The Angel of YHWH appears to Manoah's wife in answer not only to her prayer for a son (see the discussions in 3.4.4.1c; 4.3.1.1biii; 5.3.2.2e; 6.3.5.3) but to deliver the Israelites from the Philistines and to restore them to their covenant. The wife of Manoah describes the Angel's appearance: 'He looked like an angel of God, very awesome' (Jdg 13:6).

In the Sinai theophany, the mountain was engulfed in smoke because YHWH descended on it in fire (Ex 19:18; cf 6.3.5.1). In the Judges 13 theophany, YHWH ascends in the fire. The fires in both theophanies that are associated with the divine presence symbolizes a liminal place – the threshold where heaven and earth meet, and it is only YHWH that can move into both spheres (see also Wright (1992b:237-249). Thus, the altar at Zorah is transformed into a place of divine assistance, deliverance, and judgement, where YHWH promises to deliver the Israelites with the blessing of the birth of a son who 'will take the lead in delivering the Israelites from the hands of the Philistines' (cf Jdg 13:19-20). Like Gideon, Manoah expresses his fear for having seen the face of YHWH, but he does not die as his wife assures him since they have an important role to play in the future redemption of the Israelites (see also the discussions in 6.3.5.3; see 8.5.4.1).

Wright (1992b:237-249) explains that YHWH's manifestations (Ex 40:34-35; Nm 9:15; Lv 9:4, 6, 23-24; 1 Ki 8:10-11; 2 Chr 5:11-14; Ez 43:1-5) have purifying and dedicatory effects and demonstrate YHWH's acceptance of the 'structures and the cult' and the worshippers themselves. Thus, YHWH's accepts Manoah's burnt offering by its total consumption of it in the miracle fire (Jdg 13:19-20). Likewise Judges 13 indicates the dedication, the setting apart, of the mother and

her child to YHWH (Jdg 13:6-7, 13-14; see also 7.5.3.1a). Similar to Gideon, Manoah and his wife did not die because they ‘had seen’ (*rā’inū*) ‘God’ (Jdg 13:22; cf 6.3.2) for the Angel had come to bring good news of imminent life, the birth of a special child.

6.3.6 Weather theophany

YHWH’s self-revelation as the divine warrior occurs on Mount Sinai in the rain and thunderstorm weather phenomena (Jdg 5:4-5; see 6.4). The mountain serves as the throne of God from where He rules as ‘king of the cosmos and history’ and from where He ‘issues decrees about the divine will and intentions for the human community’ (see for example Ex 19; Hiebert 1992:505-511; cf 4.3.1.2).

The Israelites had sinned against the LORD by their idolatry (Jdg 4:1-3) and as punishment were oppressed by Jabin, king of Canaan, who ruled from Hazor. In the tradition of the ancient Near East YHWH reveals His power and presence by means of thunder, a rainstorm, and an earthquake. Apparently, Deborah is inspired by these weather phenomena to exultation and praised her God for His mighty deliverance of the Israelites (Jdg 5:1-31). YHWH is never in or the weather phenomenon itself in Judges 5:4-5 but manipulates these weather elements to bring about a successful outcome for the Israelites (Jdg 5:31; see also 6.3.2). The aforementioned concept is established as follows. Deborah states that the mountains quaked *before* the LORD, the One of Sinai, *before* the LORD, the God of Israel ([italics mine] Jdg 5:5). The Hebrew word for before (*מִפְנֵי* – *mippānē*) is derived from the root *פָּנִים* – *pānīm* (or *paneh*) which means face and since it also serves in the text as an adverb of location, it is translated as the word before in English (cf 6.3.5.2).⁴⁹⁵ The *NASB* translates Judges 5:5 as ‘the mountains flowed with water at the presence of the LORD...’. The *JPS Tanakh* 1917 translates the verse as ‘The mountains quaked at the presence of the LORD...’ and the *ISV*: ‘Mountains tremble at the presence of the LORD...’. Clearly, YHWH is not the earthquake itself, but it is His power and presence on earth that affects the natural environment. Numbers 11:25 states that YHWH ‘came down in the cloud’ to speak to Moses (cf Ex 16:10; 34:5). This cloud, however, is not a natural phenomenon but it is *כְּבוֹד* – *kəbōwd*, the glory of YHWH (see also 6.3.5.1.-6.3.5.2). The definite article ‘the’ before the word ‘cloud’ (*הַעַנָּן* – *be’anān* [in the cloud]) indicates that is not an ordinary cloud but a phenomenon familiar to the Israelites (cf Ex 13:21-22). Judges 5:4-5 demonstrates that nature could be signs of YHWH’s presence. However, elements of nature such as a rain storm or a display of thunder and lightning do not contain God’s Spirit or are God in themselves as stated before (see 6.3.2).

Although weather theophanies (rains and storms) would have signalled the fertility of the land, they are devoid of the type of fertility aspects that the ancient Near Eastern nations attributed to their transitory seasonal theophanies (see below). As previously stated, weather theophany may

⁴⁹⁵ Bible Hub 2022. *panim* or *paneh*.

happen due to an infraction against the god or just out of divine whim (cf 6.3.7). In the Book of Judges, YHWH uses the weather phenomena (Jdg 4; 5) to save the Israelites from the Canaanites (cf Jdg 2:16-18).

6.3.7 Theophany in the ancient Near East

Transitory theophanies (see 6.3.1) that also occurred in the ancient Near East (Niehaus 1995:21) mainly depicted meteorological phenomena⁴⁹⁶ – the actions of the gods in the natural environment – represented by thunder and lightning, earthquakes, rain, and floods, fire, and earthquakes (Ortlund 2006:57). Divine self-revelation occurred in the natural environment also, as the result of the aforementioned phenomena, in stormy winds, dark clouds, smoke (cf Jdg 5:4-5; Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:380, 619, 690; cf Christensen 1996:338; Houston 2001:71; Rooker 2003:360; see Table 6.1). The storm is a manifestation of the storm god Baal, Yam reveals himself in the sea and Shamash in the sun (Niehaus 1995:21).⁴⁹⁷ To the ancient Near Eastern people, nature and the deity/s were one; the river, for example, was not merely controlled by the god but ‘the river and the god were one... their actions indistinguishable’, the river ‘was a manifestation of the god’s very being’ (Van Till 1991:32; cf 4.3.1.2c). Similarly, in ancient Egypt, the gods manifested themselves in creation through their *bas* (Putthoff 2020:29).⁴⁹⁸

A weather theophany may occur for some offence committed against the deity or for no reason other than divine caprice (cf 2.2.5.8).⁴⁹⁹ The power of the Akkadian Adad (Baal) as the ‘irrigator of heaven and earth’ is invoked either to deprive a land of rain or to unleash a flood producing thunder that will bring starvation or destruction to a land respectively (Meek 1969:179). The curse

⁴⁹⁶ I will also use the term weather theophany to describe this type of divine manifestation.

⁴⁹⁷ In a *hymn to Inanna*, the goddess is acclaimed to be a: Loud Thundering Storm who pours her rain all over the earth: “You make the heavens tremble and the earth quake... You flash like lightning over the highlands, you throw firebrands across the earth. Your deafening command, whistling like the South Wind, splits apart great mountains” (Ortlund 2006:57-58; cf Kramer 1969d:580). Ortlund also references Wolkstein and Kramer (1984:95) as a textual source.

⁴⁹⁸ In ancient Egypt, the soul or soul aspect – the *ba* – of the Egyptian gods are closely correlated with manifestation (divine) and could in certain situations reveal the true nature of the gods to the external world (Putthoff 2020:29). Putthoff describes Atum as manifesting himself through the winged disk that gleamed throughout the universe. An Egyptian text states that Atum’s ascent to heaven ‘with his *ba* upon him’ was a ‘beautiful’ ‘sight’ (Putthoff 2020:29). Putthoff goes on to say that the text mentions Atum’s *ba* was not just ‘in’ him but also upon him. The text is PT 480, that is part of a corpus of ancient Egyptian religious texts known as the *Pyramid Texts*, the oldest Egyptian funerary texts dated to the Late Old Kingdom (Allen 2005:1-2). For a more detailed and informative description of the *Pyramid Texts* see Allen (2005:1-14); see also Malek (2003:102).

⁴⁹⁹ In a Sumerian hymn, *Enheduanna* describes the goddess Inanna as a ‘venomous, thundering flood-and-fire raining deity... an irate, relentless and intractable goddess of war’. As the goddess of love and war, Inanna ‘deprives the un-submissive city of all procreation and vegetation’ (Kramer 1969d:579). Enheduanna (2286-2251 BC) was the daughter of Akkadian ruler Sargon the great who appointed her as *En*-priestess (high priestess) of moon god Nanna-Sin in the most important temple in the city of Ur in Sumer. She is also the world’s first author and poet known by name (Kramer 1969d:579, 581; Mark 2014a).

for breaking an Akkadian treaty⁵⁰⁰ included the entreaty to Adad to deprive the land of Mati'ilu from the god's thunder and rain (Reiner 1969:533). These theophanies, the manifestation of the storm god in the seasonal rains and the vegetation of the fields, are intimately associated with the fertility aspects of the agricultural deities (cf 8.2.2.2a-b) and the theophanies, therefore, are vital phenomena for the fecundity of the people and the land. The aforementioned weather theophanies are cyclical demonstrating the appearance of the storm god Baal at the beginning of the rain season and his departure or death when the rains make way for the hot summer season (Sanders 2003:132-163). *Ugaritic texts* reveal that the storm god Baal blessed the land with rains: 'Now, too, the seasons of his rains will Baal *observe*' (Ginsberg 1969a:133) or that the storm god could, for no reason, withhold the life-giving rains: 'Seven years shall Baal fail, Eight the Rider of the Clouds. No dew, No rain; No welling-up of the deep' (Ginsberg 1969a:153). Sanders (2003:163) observes that Baal was thought to be 'a meteorologically theophanic god who controlled the rains which were by turns beneficent and dangerous.'

The ability of YHWH to occupy terrestrial spaces in a theophanic appearance can also be paralleled by the ability of the *bas* of the Egyptian gods and that of the nature gods of the other ancient Near Eastern nations to inhabit in physical spaces. However, the distinctiveness of the theophany in Judges (Jdg 2:1-3; cf 6:11-20; 13:5, 20), as stated before, lies in the following: YHWH never is the weather phenomena itself but controls it (Jdg 5:4-5; see 6.3.1). Regarding the function of YHWH's theophanies, in the worldview of the author/s of Judges, they occurred to dispense judgment and justice (see Walton 2018). In the mindset guiding the author/s, YHWH's theophanies are not capricious acts; they are always related to the divine will, to the installment of His covenant and restoration of His people.

6.3.8 Theophany as a mystico-religious experience

Schmidt and Nel (2002:256) remark that theophany as a 'religious phenomenon' experience is differentiated from other divine manifestations such as epiphanies, dreams and visions in the ancient Near East and the Old Testament.

Mystico-religious theophanies are also distinguished from the distant weather or meteorological theophany as described above. They are intense physical and emotional experiences in the everyday realm of the human partakers. At first the participants may not be aware that an extraordinary event is taking place, but they later perceive it as such as the event progresses and reaches its conclusion (Jdg 2:1-5; 6:11-23; 13:3-20; cf 6.3.5.1-6.3.5.3).

Theophanic experiences in the Book of Judges are usually explicit (cf Jdg 2:1-3; 6:11; 13:3-20; cf 6.3.5.1-6.3.5.3) and as indicated previously centred on the covenant relationship. However,

⁵⁰⁰ The treaty (ca 15th century BC) was made between Idrimi a Hurrian king of Alalakh in ancient Anatolia and Pilliya king of Kizzuwatna in an alliance with the Mitanni empire (Reiner 1969:532-533; Von Dassow 2006:174-176).

theophany may also be unclear. In the conversation between Gideon and YHWH it is uncertain if a theophany has occurred (Jdg 6:25, 36; 7:2-11; Walton 1990:60; cf 5.3.3.1).⁵⁰¹ The LORD instructs Gideon in the night (Jdg 6:25) and it is not clear if YHWH directly appears to Gideon or if the instruction is given in a dream message or a vision (likewise Judges 7:2-12).

Walton (1990:60) observes that the same uncertainty is found in the ancient Near Eastern texts. Ea speaks to Adapa in person although the text does not state it explicitly. There is a possibility that in the *Keret* the dream is a theophany and in *Aqhat* it is difficult to identify a theophany since there is hardly any division between the divine and human realms (Walton 1990:60).⁵⁰² Be that as it may, in the *Keret* and *Aqhat* texts the focus is always fixed on the deity; displaying the proper attitude towards the god (Speiser 1969:101-103) *inter alia* by making elaborate offerings and sacrifices to the gods (Ginsberg 1969a:142-155). A theophany might also involve trickery on the part of the gods, or they may bring great suffering. Ea tricks Adapa into not accepting the gift of immortality. Distress is incurred upon a ruler when his son Aqhat is killed by Anat (Bienkowski 2010:24; Pritchard and Fleming [eds] 2011:134).

Houston (2001:71) describes theophany (in Judges) as a (magico⁵⁰³-religious) experience which is of an enigmatic and splendid presence – that of YHWH – and at the same time it demonstrates the involvement of the human participants with the holy that creates awe-inspiring fear (cf Jdg 6:22; 13:20-22; see below).

6.4 YHWH: DIVINE WARRIOR

The mindset informing the author/s of the Book of Judges features the divine warrior motif and also echoes imagery of the warrior theophany that was prevalent in the ancient Near East. YHWH is constantly going to war against the oppressors of the early Israelites and the supernatural is involved in these divine acts (Jdg 3:10, 15, 31; 5:4-5, etcetera).

YHWH is the LORD or commander of the (heavenly and earthly) hosts or armies (cf Gn 2:1; 1 Sm 1:11 *ASV*).⁵⁰⁴ Exodus 14:13-14 declares: ‘The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still’ (cf Dt 20:1-8) and, in Judges, if they adhere to His covenant. YHWH’s war stratagem includes sending His ‘terror ahead (of the Israelites en route to Canaan)... and throw into confusion every nation’ so that they will flee before the Israelites (insertions mine). He will also send the ‘hornet ahead...to drive out the Hivites, Canaanites and Hittites’ (Ex 20:27-28). According to Joshua 5:1, as YHWH’s reputation as Divine Warrior spreads, the Amorite kings in West Jordan and Canaanite

⁵⁰¹ These dialogues between Gideon and YHWH has been discussed in terms of dream messages in section 5.4.1.2.

⁵⁰² Both *Keret* and *Aqhat* are Ugaritic texts dated to 1350 BC.

⁵⁰³ My term.

⁵⁰⁴ The Hebrew word for host in 1 Samuel 1:11 *שָׁבָא׳־ֹמַי* (*šəḇā׳ōmāi*/ of hosts) is derived from the word *שָׁבָא* (*tsaba*) which is translated as army in Genesis 21:22, 32; 26:26; Exodus 6:26; 7:4; 12:16. Other translations are army and warfare: Numbers 1:20, 22, 24, 26, 28, 30, 32, etcetera.

kings ruling over the coastal region are no longer inclined to engage the Israelites in warfare (cf 1 Sm 4:8). Considering this history of YHWH's salvatory acts (cf Jdg 6:13), it is likely that the Israelites, erroneously, regarded YHWH primarily as a warrior God and this could explain why they mostly call out to Him in times of oppression (Jdg 3:9, 15, etcetera) while abandoning Him during times of peace.

In view of the above, the early Israelites in Judges cried out to YHWH, 'Rise up, LORD! May your enemies be scattered; may your foes flee before you' as they had before their battles in the wilderness (Nm 10:35; cf Jdg 3:9; 4:3; 6:7; 10:15). It is evident from the 'battle cry' that the Israelites expected YHWH to destroy the enemy by some means and grant them the war victory.

However, to the author/s of Judges, YHWH is their Covenant God, inescapably proclaimed in the narratives of Judges 2:1-5; 6:8-10; 10:6-16.

6.4.1 Engaging the enemy in battle

Nysse (1987:194-195) describes YHWH's warrior status as one who fights for justice for the oppressed and the poor which could also be extended to non-Israelite nations. One of the war stipulations in Deuteronomy instructs the Israelites to extend an offer of peace to the people in a city before an attack which was intended to preserve lives (cf Dt 20:10-11). The idea of YHWH as a violent, militaristic God is refuted by Deuteronomy 20:10-11. As stated before broke God's heart (*NLT*) when people became evil to the point that God had to wipe them out (cf Jdg 2:18; 10:16; Gn 6:6).

YHWH, however, is merciful with His idolatrous people in the Book of Judges. Consequently another divine war strategy (see above) is the raising up of judges by YHWH to come to the aid of His oppressed people (cf Jdg 2:16; see 2.3.3; 3.2.2.1b; 6.3.4). Previously, Judges 2:14-15 explains that because of His people's idolatry YHWH 'gave them into the hands' of 'raiders ... who plundered them.' The Israelites were defeated by their enemies in battle and because of this the Israelites 'were in great distress.'

Then the LORD raised up judges who saved them but the Israelites would not listen to their judges and worshipped the other gods (Jdg 2:16). Judges 2:18 further clarifies that when the LORD raised up a judge, 'he was with the judge and saved them out of the hands of the enemies as long as the judge lived; for the LORD relented because of their groaning under those who oppressed and afflicted them' (Jdg 2:18). YHWH will always protect His people from their enemies. He made a covenant to fulfil that promise, and He carried it out by raising up judges and empowering them physically as they overcame their adversaries (see 3.2.2.1b and 6.3.4 in which descriptions of the various judges that YHWH judges raised up are presented). The narrative described above shows that it is their covenantal unfaithfulness that leads to the Israelites' defeat. Judges, on the other

hand, demonstrates that is their faithfulness towards YHWH, which is the primary covenant stipulation (cf 2.5.5; see also below), that brings about victory (cf Jdg 10:16) and miraculously every time.

Similar to early Israel, the ancient Near Eastern war policy encompassed the ideology that a king and his army engaged on the battlefield were physically assisting the gods in their desire to re-establish universal order (Hamblin 2006:12; cf 3.4.4.2b).⁵⁰⁵ Crouch (2009:18-19) notes that while an Assyrian went to battle as the human equivalent of the god, it is the God of the Old Testament, YHWH, Himself who directly influenced Israelite history by fighting the wars of the early Israelites (see above; see also 3.2.2.1b; 6.3.4) (cf Jdg 1:19; 6:16; 7:22; 5:4-5, 20; cf Siddall 2013:159-160).

Ryan adds that Sisera is equipped with the fearsome weaponry of shock and awe that crushes Israel's life. His chariots are two-wheeled vehicles drawn by one or two horses and driven by skilled elite warriors (Ryan 2007:26). Israelite wars demonstrate a distinctive aspect that woman may assume a prominent role either alongside warriors or independently (see below).

Although Barak is the head of the army, 'he too takes orders from and therefore acts as second in command to Deborah,' her gender making this all the more striking (Schneider 2000:62). Ryan (2007:26) comments that 'Israel' will need a leader of exceptional bravery to take on an army of formidable iron chariots. Enter Deborah, female leader of the Israelites and Jael, a woman that belonged to a minority ethnic group the Kenites, that was once associated with the tribe of Judah (Jdg 4:11; cf Jdg 1:16; Baker 2016:52). Hailed as a hero by Deborah (Jdg 5:24-27), Jael strikes down Sisera, the army commander of Jabin's army (Jdg 4:2, 7). She may have some authority because she is the wife of Heber, the head of the Kenites, but she does not have the same standing as Sisera and Barak, the commander of the Israelite army. Deborah sings about Jael striking down Sisera, 'he sank at her feet, he fell, there he lay' (Jdg 5:27). The prophetess praises Jael for a strong military leader was murdered by a 'weaker' woman carrying out a man's deed. (Jdg 4:9; see Meyers 1988:31; Niditch 2001:176).

6.4.2 'War rituals and 'the people of YHWH'

⁵⁰⁵ Military activity and conquest were certainly almost always initiated upon the instructions of the ancient Near Eastern deities (see Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:192). An early Mesopotamian inscription records the Ningirsu the war god, commanding Eanatum, grandson of the Mesopotamian warlord Urnanshe (ca 2494-2475BCE) of Lagash, to crush the king of Umma, Enakale. Enakale the adversary of both the gods and Eanatum was destined for a second round of destruction (Hamblin 2006:51,54). King Eanatum raised a stele, the Stele of Vultures to commemorate his triumph over Umma (Gabriel 2002:51). A text recounts upon the order of the god Enlil, the Akkadian king Sargon (ca 2300 BCE), who entered into battle against his enemies and was granted victory by Enlil (Ricks and Hamblin [eds] 1990). Assyrian texts relate the god Ashur commanding the Assyrians to make war (Niehaus 1988:39). Biblical texts document instances of Israelites warfare only upon the explicit approval of YHWH (cf Jdg 1:1-2).

Warfare within the context of the covenant was a cultic initiative and parallel to the ancient Near East was considered as sacred conduct (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:192; cf Crouch 2009:18-19; Harris, RW 2011:128; Trimm 2017a:405).⁵⁰⁶ Priests and religious representatives complemented the armies (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:192). In fact, one of the stipulations of war was the priest addressing the army for the encouragement and support of the soldiers before a battle (Dt 20:2-3). In the ancient Near East, Assyrian writings and reliefs portray the roles of the priestly entourages in the armies who were practised in the skill of delivering morale building speeches in the name of the gods (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:192).

The laws of war regarding military organization and operations were also delineated by the covenant: military leaders were to be appointed over army units (Nm 2:2-29; Dt 20:9). In Deuteronomy 1:15 a military chain of command was established with ‘commanders of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties and of tens’ (cf Nm 31:14). Judges 9:54, shows that aides-de-camp (‘armed bearers’) were assisting military officers with armaments and in battle (cf Gooding 1983:73). The warfare stipulations required army officers to give the able-bodied men a choice to join or withdraw from warfare (Dt 20:8). Men who were engaged, planting vineyards and who built new houses and those who had religious responsibilities were given deferments (see Dt 20:5-7; see Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:192).⁵⁰⁷ This was a stratagem of selection that prudently exempted the ‘faint-hearted’ soldiers and those who were distracted (Dt 20:8). Otherwise, they might abscond during fierce fighting and induce their fellow soldiers to follow their example. Men above twenty were assembled and only the able-bodied were conscripted for armed service (Nm 1:2-3, 17-46: 26:2).

⁵⁰⁶O’Connell (1996:253-254) holds that the intertribal war fought in Judges 20-21 was a ‘holy war.’ However, the intertribal war has only a superficial appearance of a ‘holy war.’ The war follows the ‘conduct’ war described in Deuteronomy 20 (see Tollington 2010:72). But the motivation for the tribal war differs from that of the wars of conquest and deliverance from Canaanite oppression. It was not initiated by YHWH nor did He actively intervene in it. The motivation for the war in Judges 20-21 was to execute (tribal) justice against the crime committed in Judges 19; The events in chapters 19-21 occur in a time in which the covenantal lifestyle is not completely followed (cf Jdg 21:25). By contrast after each holy war, the Israelites returned to their covenant God. Another indication that the tribal war was not a ‘holy war’ such as those in Judges 1, 4 and 7 for instance, is the unsuccessful outcome of the divination answers on two occasions (Jdg 20:18, 23). This indicates that something other was involved in the divination process and that the responses did not come from YHWH, that the divinations were performed in an inappropriate manner by a) ‘Yahwistically’ unapproved personage/s (cf Dt 18:9-13) and b) unapproved divinatory methods. According to Deuteronomy 18:20-23, Judges 20:18,23 constitute false prophecies which may be further indications of other (syncretic-Canaanite) influences in the divination ceremonies performed. Judges 20:28, 35 indicate that the third attempt at divination was done by the priests in the presence of the Ark of the Covenant, in the approved manner. Only then did YHWH answer and successful war results were achieved. I agree with Younger (1990:260), who states that the term ‘holy war,’ which is used to characterize specific wars in the biblical narrative, including the tribal conflict in Judges 20-21, should be avoided. See Tollington (2010:71-87) for more about warfare in Judges; Ackerman (1975:5-13) for prophecy related to warfare in Judges 4; cf Seevers (2013:45-67) describing the organization, weapons and strategies of warfare in the Old Testament.

⁵⁰⁷ Walton, Matthews and Chavalas (2000:192) report that in exceptional circumstances an army may be assembled in which ‘normal exemptions’ such as newlyweds ‘are abandoned’ such as the army assembled by the king in the Canaanite *Keret Epic*.

Accordingly, the judges Othniel (Jdg 3:9-11), Ehud (3:12-30) and Shamgar (Jdg 3:31) overcame the enemy. It appears that they accomplished it independently (Jdg 3:10, 20-23, 31), but it is highly likely that they gathered a military force to engage in warfare against the adversary (cf Jdg 4; 6:34; 7; 11). Even Ehud, who singlehandedly assassinated Eglon, would have returned to the king's palace accompanied by a group of armed individuals. Deborah and Barak mustered an army against Sisera and his army (Jdg 4). Jephthah, the leader of a group known as the 'gang of scoundrels,' expanded his ranks by gathering an army from the tribes of Israel (Judges 12:1). Fearful men in Gideon's army are given the option of leaving and subsequently twenty-two thousand men left. YHWH further whittles down the remaining ten thousand men to three hundred (Jdg 7:3-6). Judges 7:2 provides the reason: The LORD said to Gideon, "You have too many men. I cannot deliver Midian into their hands, or Israel would boast against me, 'My own strength has saved me.'" According to Judges 7, the Israelites emerged triumphant, but it was ultimately YHWH who, in a miraculous manner, defeated the Midianites (Jdg 7:22).

Although, YHWH alone could deliver the tribes, it was essential for the tribes to be united in warfare against their enemies. The tribes that do not join Deborah and Barak in their war campaign against the Canaanites are severely criticized for it by the prophetess (Jdg 5:16-17, cf 5:23; see Stager (1989:51-55, 57-59, 62-64). However, Deborah also mentions that those who fought in the war were 'willing volunteers' (Jdg 5:9).⁵⁰⁸ In the ancient Near East soldiers were threatened for not mobilizing. A *Mari Letter* references threats against Hanean soldiers (Szink 1990:35-45; cf Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:192).⁵⁰⁹ Szink (1990:35-45) describes a Hittite soldier's oath to affirm a soldier's loyalty and solidarity to his god and army.⁵¹⁰ Similar ritualistic practices

⁵⁰⁸ Still Von Rad (1991:40-41) asserts that 'willingness to participate in the war could hardly be taken for granted' and thus the flesh of a sacrificed animal – an ancient custom – was sent out (to the tribes) to call people to take up arms. The aforementioned tradition could lie behind the dismemberment of the abused and deceased wife of the Levite in Judges 19:29-30 which ended in the intertribal conflict narrated in Judges 20.

⁵⁰⁹ The *Mari letter* reads as follows:

Tell my lord: your servant Bandi-Lim sends the following message: I have been waiting now for five days for the Hanean [a nomadic tribe in ancient Syria] auxiliaries at the place agreed upon, but the soldiers are not assembling around me. The Hanean auxiliaries did come out of the open country but they are now staying in their own encampments. I sent messages into these encampments once or twice to call them up, but they did not assemble; in fact, it is three days now and they still are not assembling. Now then, if this meets with the approval of my lord, one should execute some criminal kept in the prison, cut off his head, and send it around outside the encampments as far away as Hutnim and Appan, so the soldiers will become afraid and will assemble here quickly (Szink 1990:35-45; cf Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:192).

⁵¹⁰ Szink (1990:35-45) reports the Hittite Soldier's Oath inscribed on a tablet dated to the 2nd millennium BC found at Boghazköy in Turkey. It is 'designated as the second in a series (of rituals) entitled: When they lead the troops to the oath'. In one ritual someone, presumably a priest, offers the soldier an object which symbolizes the penalty for the breaking of the oath and disloyalty towards the king. 'Should the soldiers break the oath; they would suffer the fate at the object'. The tablet reads: Then he places wax and mutton fat in their hand. He throws them on a flame and says:

as described by Szink against soldiers who broke the Hittite soldier's oath were outlawed among the early Israelites, for the fidelity of the Israelite soldiers was related to their faithfulness towards their covenant as indicated above.

The army was referred to as 'the people of Yahweh' once it had assembled in the camp (cf Jdg 7; 20:2; Von Rad 1991:41). The army was now subject to strict sacral rules prior to military combat. The men were consecrated (Jos 3:5). 'They submitted to sexual renunciation' (1 Sm 21:5; 2 Sm 11:11-12). YHWH was present in the camp in His role as the Divine Warrior and (cf Jdg 7), therefore, the entire camp population had to be ritually clean (Dt 23:9-14). Undoubtedly, the making of vows played a part in the pre-war proceedings (Nm 21:2; Jdg 11:36; 1 Sm 14:24; Von Rad 1991:42).

If the army was defeated by an enemy attack, a ceremonial act of repentance and lamentation was performed by the entire army (Jdg 20:23, 26; 1 Sm 20:4; 11:4; Von Rad 1991:42). As a (renewed) military attempt loomed ahead, the army offered sacrifices to YHWH (probably to avoid another defeat) (Jdg 20:26; 1 Sm 7:9; 13:9-10, 12) and of particular significance was the 'oracle of God' as indicated above (Jdg 20:13, 18; 1 Sm 7:9; 14:8; Von Rad 1991:42). In the ancient Near East, the gods are consulted for a favorable military campaign (Kang 2011:42-43; Graigie 1978:118; cf Siddall 2013:159). In the tradition of the ancient Near East, the Israelites consult YHWH via their various divinatory methods for counsel and the war outcome (Jdg 1:1-2; 4; 5; 6:36-40; 20:1-2; 18, 23, 26-18). On the basis of a decisive divine pronouncement the leader announced to the armed force: 'Yahweh has given the ... into our hands' (Von Rad 1991:42). Returning from a scouting trip to the Midianite camp and hearing a soldier describing a dream he had in which the Israelites won the war against the Midianites (Jdg 7:9-13), Gideon rallies his men with the battle cry: 'Get up! The LORD has given the Midianite camp into your hands (Jdg 7:15; see also below).

6.4.3 The supernatural

Supernatural manifestations of YHWH as the Divine Warrior occur in the form of the Angel of YHWH who is also described as the terror of the LORD whom God will send out before the Israelites to overcome their enemies as indicated before (Ex 23:20, 27; see 6.3.4). As previously signified the theme of theophany in human form, in Judges, is also transferred to 'divine men' or men elected for a divine task (Zeller 1999:470). It is the *רוּחַ יְהוָה* – *rūah Yahweh* (the Spirit of YHWH) (cf 3.3.4) that comes upon the judges Othniel (Jdg 3:10), Gideon (Jdg 6:34), Jephthah (Jdg 11:29) and also 'stirs' Samson at Mahaneh-dan (Jdg 13:25) to lead the men into the battlefield as also previously described (see 3.2.2.1b; 6.3.4). It is the LORD, as the Divine Warrior, who will lead Sisera and his army to their demise at the Kishon River (Jdg 4:7) and it is the LORD who

'Just as this wax melts, and just as the mutton fat dissolves, whoever breaks these oaths [shows disrespect to the king] of the Hatti [land], let [him] melt lik[e wax], let him dissolve like [mutton fat]!' [The me]n declare: "So be it!"

overpowered the enemy ‘by the sword’ (Jdg 4:15). An (unnatural) thunderstorm, a sign of YHWH’s presence (Jdg 5:4-5, 20-21) also assisted in defeating the enemy.⁵¹¹

The sound of the trumpet signalled the gathering for a holy war (Von Rad 1991:41; cf Kang 2011:5). Judges 6:34-35 states that the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon, and he blew the *shofar* (a ram’s horn) summoning the Abiezrites to follow him (cf 3.3.4; 5.3.2.4ai). He sent messengers throughout Manasseh, calling them to arms, and also into Asher, Zebulun and Naphtali, so that they too went up to meet them (cf Jdg 3:27; see also Von Rad 1991:41). When the *shofars* are sounded in Judges 7:22, it is a sign that there will be an appearance of YHWH (cf Jdg 6:34; cf Nm 10:9; Ryken, Wilhoit and Longman [eds] 1998); that deliverance and victory will ensue for Gideon and his men.⁵¹²

There is no weather theophany in Judges 7, but it is possible that it is either the Angel of YHWH or the glory-cloud that will appear to overcome the enemy. The ‘glory’ (*kābôd*) or glory-cloud of YHWH that was, as stated before, regarded as ‘a manifestation of power and strong enough to destroy anyone who should gaze upon it’ (Rooker 2003:860; cf 6.3.5.1-6.3.5.2). Previously, in reference to a battle against the Canaanites, Deborah used the word *pānîm* (face) to describe the glory of YHWH that is also associated with God’s face and thus refers to a theophanic appearance of God (Rooker 2003:860; cf 6.3.5.2; 6.3.6). It is possible that this form of the divine presence may have supernaturally defeated the Midianites in Judges 7:22 (cf Ex 24:16). Judges 7:22 states that YHWH creates confusion in the Midianite camp, causing the Midianite soldiers to kill each with their swords (Jdg 2:10-19; 3:9-11, 15, 28-30; 4:6-7, 23-24; 5:31; 6:14, 16; 7:15-25).⁵¹³ As the soldiers blow their *shofars* the battle cry, ‘A sword for the LORD and for Gideon’ (Jdg 7:20; cf Nm 10:35) rings out announcing impending victory for they have the assurance of the theophany (Jdg 6:11-39) and the dream message (Jdg 7:15) that YHWH will fight for them.

The empowerment of the judges with the *רוּחַ יְהוָה* – *rūah Yahweh* granted them extraordinary and supernatural strength to overcome their enemies. Shamgar, who managed to kill six hundred Philistines with an ox goad, could only have achieved such a feat if the *רוּחַ יְהוָה* – *rūah Yahweh* came

⁵¹¹ Deborah and Barak are the principal characters in the warfare initiative against the Canaanites in Judges 4 and 5. With YHWH’s involvement in the Israelite war campaigns, the narratives in Judges demonstrates that warfare displayed a distinct ‘religious character’ (Von Rad 1991:4) and at the same time it was essentially a domestic concern since the Israelites did not have a permanent professional army and fighting men were drawn from the tribal households (Yee 1993:111; Sha 2018:174-175). For more details regarding Deborah and Barak’s war see Boling 1996:103; Baly 1996:405; Boraas 1996:406; Lapp 1996c:544; Cundall and Morris 2011:189, 191 and Brenner-Idan 2014:63.

⁵¹² The sound of the trumpet also signalled the gathering for a holy war (Von Rad 1991:41; cf Kang 2011:5). Judges 6:34-35 reads: Then the Spirit of the Lord came on Gideon, and he blew a trumpet, summoning the Abiezrites to follow him. He sent messengers throughout Manasseh, calling them to arms, and also into Asher, Zebulun and Naphtali, so that they too went up to meet them (cf Jdg 3:27; see also Von Rad 1991:41).

⁵¹³ In the Biblical worldview, YHWH’s battle is with *הֵלֵל* – *hēlêl* (Helel; cf Is 14:12) (Ryken, Wilhoit and Longman [eds] 2010:54, 262-263). See Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:603; Coggins 2001:450; Riley 1999b:246; Larkin 2001:612; cf Ryken, Wilhoit and Longman [eds] 2010:52, 262-263 for more information regarding Helel.

upon him. Similarly, when the יהוה יְהוָה – *rūah Yahweh* came upon Samson, he was able to defeat thirty Philistines in Ashkelon (Jdg 14:19), slay a thousand men with the jawbone of a donkey (Jdg 15:15), and ultimately bring down the temple of Dagon with all its occupants (Jdg 16:30), causing more casualties in his death than during his lifetime.

6.4.4 The divine warrior in the ancient Near East

A recurring motif in the ancient Near East is the portrayal of a divine warrior deity who instils fear in the hearts of the enemy. Walton Matthews and Chavalas (2000:588) report that the terror of a god as a divine warrior was frequently thought to lead a formidable, successful army into warfare. Egyptian, Hittite and Assyrian and Babylonian texts describe their divine warriors who would bring about a successful war campaign (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:588).⁵¹⁴ An indication of the god's involvement in a war effort is the quaking earth and cloud formations that are seen as the god's chariot raging through the skies (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:588, 608). The divine warrior utilizes thunder and lightning as weapons to overcome the enemy (Barré 1999:519).⁵¹⁵ Baal is described as seizing a handful of thunderbolts (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:380). Along with these weapons of war it is the frightening luminosity and magnificence of the gods that serve to overwhelm the enemy (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:666). Mesopotamian texts speak of the gods as wearing *melammu* – 'terrifying radiance and splendour' – (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:666; Black and Green 2004:93-94; Hundley 2013:219), a type of divine military armament that the gods used to defeat the enemy (Rooker 2003:860).⁵¹⁶

The whimsical deities have the power to initiate conflict whenever they please. Previously, the goddess Inanna was described as a deadly, irate, and headstrong 'goddess of war' (see 6.3.7; Kramer 1969d:579; see also Kramer's description of the Sumerian god, whose frightening displays of thunder in the sky would have terrified people). She also called 'the lady of the battle and the fight' (Ackerman 2022a). Ishtar is also a goddess of love so that people feared her impulsive warlike nature which could emerge in the sudden stormy downpour of rain (Kramer 1969d:579) and at the same time worship her as a fertility deity who could grant them fruitfulness of land and abundance

⁵¹⁴ Walton, Matthews and Chavalas specifically mention that in the inscriptions of Thutmose III, the terror of the Egyptian army is attributed to the god Amun-Re.

⁵¹⁵ The gods also exercised psychological warfare. The Tukulti Ninurta – epic refers to Shamash's meddling with the minds of the foe (Niehaus 1988:42-43).

⁵¹⁶ Walton, Matthews and Chavalas (2000:666-667) observe: 'It is the gods who infuse the kings of Assyria and Babylon with the knowledge of warfare, give them strength to overcome the enemy 'like a flashing' [Sargon II] or 'the onslaught of a storm' [Sennacherib]. In the face of such divine magnificence the gods and the forces of other nations are utterly defeated and forced to submit to the supreme deity.' The weather is manipulated by the god as the divine warrior to enabling him to assume celestial reign. The Ugaritic *Baal Cycle* narrates Baal's theophany in a storm as he makes his way to engage in a battle for supremacy (Ortlund 2006:57; cf Niehaus 1995:21; see also). An Akkadian source relates the battle between Adad and Zu (Grayson 1969:515; cf Speiser 1969:113). A Hittite text describes the battle between the storm god Teshub and Ulikummis: the 'Storm-god jumped into his chariot...with thunder he went down to the sea and engaged [Ulikummis] in battle'⁵¹⁶ ([insertion mine] Goetze 1969d:125).

(Ackerman 2022a). As mentioned throughout this study, Baal is also associated with agriculture and fertility. In these deities, Baal and Ishtar, for example, the dichotomy of the divine nature is exposed in their warlike tendencies that destroys life on one end of the spectrum and their ability to secure reproduction and fertility, that is, the ability to bring forth life, on the other end.⁵¹⁷ Regarding Ishtar, Weinfeld (2005:83) remarks that ‘we have here descriptions of both a military and a judicial nature;’ she is both a divine warrior and a deity that dispenses justice to the needy and the subjugated.

YHWH, too, is the ‘God of justice (e.g., of Sinai)’ and ‘has the same characteristics as the God of war both in Israel and in Mesopotamia’ (Weinfeld 2005:83). According to the perspective of the author/s of Judges, YHWH is not only seen as the God of justice and war, but also as the creator and controller of weather phenomena. YHWH’s attributes of justice and wisdom are discussed (see 3.3.6.1-3.3.6.3). What sets YHWH actions (of justice) apart from the ancient Near Eastern gods is that He does what the ancient Near Eastern gods are unwilling or incapable of doing: He actively engages with various individuals, appearing to them personally as shown throughout this study (Jdg 2:1-3; 6:11; 3:3-20) in order to administer His judgment and justice.

6.3.5 Divine revelation and societal transformation

The narratives of Judges 2:1-3; 6:11-20; and 13:3-20 serve as a theophanic prophecy (see also Chapter Five) and in these narratives the community and certain individuals (Gideon and the parents of Samson) are the recipients of YHWH’s revelatory and transformative messages (see Table 6:2). In the aforesaid narratives, the author/s of Judges reveal that YHWH once again upturns the dominant cultural ideology that sees the ancient Near Eastern kings, royalty and priests as the primary recipients of divine revelation (Benzel et al 2010:39; cf Karavites 1992:147; Harrison 2015:89; Maul 2015:128).

Table 6.2: Recipients of divine revelation in Judges

Judges	Recipients	Divine Agent and Message
Judges 2:1-3	Public: Israelites	Angel of the LORD: Prediction and Judgement
Judges 4:6-7	Individual: Barak I	Prophet: Deborah: Prediction
Judges 6:8-10	Public: Israelites	Prophet: Judgement
Judges 6:11-23	Individual: Gideon	Prophet: Angel of the LORD: Instruction
Judges 6:36-40	Individual: Gideon	Angel of the LORD: Miraculous sign for a future war outcome
Judges 10:11-14	Public: Israelites	Text does not indicate: Judgement
Judges 13:3-20	Parents of Samson	Angel of the LORD: Prediction/ Instruction/Miraculous sign

⁵¹⁷ In Mesopotamia, Ishtar in a weather theophany is described as: ‘Ishtar, torch of heaven and earth, splendour of the entire universe...a burning fire which devours the universe.’ You judge men with justice and righteousness...You turn to the oppressed and exploited and justify him daily’ (Weinfeld 2005:83).

Similar to the Yahwistic tradition, in the ancient Near East, the (god's) revelatory messages, being of divine origin, could not be disputed and the will of the god from which the king derived his decision-making ability could not be challenged (Harrison 2015:89).⁵¹⁸ The sustained power and rule of kings, military endeavours and the coordination of civilian activities were contingent upon the timely delivery of (divinatory) messages (Crown 1974:244; Bryce 2014:1-2; cf Weeks 2017) and the transference of information and instructions via inter alia these messages were vital for the well-ordered functioning of city states on socio-economic, religious and political levels. Ancient Near Eastern literature confirms seeking the knowledge of the gods via divination: texts that depict Egyptian rites and incantations (Wilson 1969a:325-329), Akkadian rituals (Sachs 1969:331-343) and Hittite rituals and invocations and celebrations (Goetze 1969a:346-358).⁵¹⁹ Transport technology would have played an important role in delivering the messages and thus only the swiftest and most reliable chariots to which the elite classes alone were entitled were used (see Figures 6.3 and 6.4).



Figure 6.3 An ancient Egyptian 'postman' (Forman 2020:125)

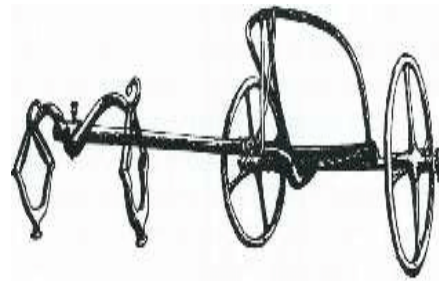


Figure 6.4 Ancient Egyptian postal chariot (Chondros et al 2016:232)

Judges 2:1-3, 4:6-7; 6:8-10, 11-20, 36-40; 10:10-16 and 13:3-20 demonstrate that kings and royalty are not the only decision-makers or participants on the socio-political and religious fronts of a

⁵¹⁸ Here Harrison (2015:89) references 'message dreams' (cf 5.3.3) as a primary form of divine communication in the ancient Near East that had strong political overtones intended to reinforce the power of the ruler. See also Oppenheim (1956:185) for a more in depth look at dream divination in the ancient Near East. See also DeJong Ellis (1989:126-186) for more on Mesopotamian divine communications in the form of oracles and prophetic texts.

⁵¹⁹ Mundane messages, that is correspondence between people, included the transmission of laws (Goetze 1969g:188-196), instructions (Goetze 1969f:207-210) and treaties (Goetze 1969e:203-206). The highly organized message service under the stringent authority of the elites excluded the ordinary populace from its benefits (Forman 2020:125; cf Basri and Lawrence 2020:1-16). Messages were relayed in the form of letters, clay tablets were preferred, especially between geographically distant kings (Liverani 2001:71; cf Bryce 2014:51). Bryce (2014:51) states that other materials such as bronze, silver or iron as well as wood, lead, leather and papyrus were used upon which to inscribe information, but baked clay tablets were preferred for their durability. Forman (2020) remarks that the Israelite kings also were familiar with and used letter messages as a means of communication with foreign kings (cf Jr 51:31). The Israelites utilized metal such as the silver plaques dated to the 7th and 8th centuries BC. At Kuntillet Ajrud (8th century BC) biblical texts were found to be written on doorways and plastered walls. In addition, papyrus, leather, stone, potsherds (ostraca), arrowheads, bronze, clay seals and wood were used as writing materials (Keener and Walton 2019). The ancient Egyptians were the first to send letter messages (on papyri) and utilized an efficient 'postal service' with 'postal chariots' designed for the specific purpose of carrying letters of the pharaoh throughout the kingdom (Forman 2020:125).

nation. YHWH could reveal Himself to ‘ordinary’ men and women and inspire them to bring about major changes in the aforesaid spheres of the tribal community (cf Jdg 3; 4; 6; 10-11; 13-16; 19-21). Accordingly, Deborah, Gideon and Jephthah (upon whom the Spirit of YHWH came) could amass an army to fight the enemy (see also 6.4.2-6.4.3). Gideon, sent messengers throughout Manasseh (Jdg 6:35) calling them to arms. The territory of Manasseh was vast and included land on both the eastern and western banks of the Jordan River (see Figure 6.5). It is probable that the messengers were swift-footed relay runners who also employed transport such as animals possibly horses or donkeys, carts and river boats to carry Gideon’s message – a call to arms against the Midianites (Jdg 6:34) – across rugged terrain and the waters of the Jordan River.



Figure 6.5 The territory of Manasseh (The tribe of Manasseh 2022)

As stated before, the entire Israelite community is involved bringing about a change in their society. Theophany experienced by individuals will come to affect the community and rarely are for the benefit of the individual/s alone. Accordingly, ordinary Israelite individuals were the recipients and experiencers of theophany that had the potential to revolutionize their society as in the case of Gideon (Jdg 6:14-16) and the parents of Samson (Jdg 13:5). Furthermore, no precise places were designated as specific localities for contact with the divine in Judges unlike the ancient Near East where divination took place at the temples. It is noteworthy that the theophanies in Judges occur external to the *Miskhan* in Shiloh as stated before.

The hierarchical nature of communication in the ancient Near East, reflective of the social system, is evident in the status and role of the messenger: Ordinary messages related to administrative orders for example were dispatched with ‘simple couriers’ who have no knowledge of the content of the letter message (Liverani 2001:71-72). Couriers of high standing on the other hand were educated (see above) and may have been military officers, officials of the royal court or relatives of the king (Liverani 2001:71-72). The Ammonite messengers sent to Jephthah in Judges 11:12-14 were probably military officials since the dispute between the Ammonite king and the early

Israelites was over land from which involvement the ordinary Ammonite men and women would have been excluded.⁵²⁰

YHWH's appearances to people of all status in Judges show that He does not discriminate against anyone. After YHWH's appearance to the community in Judges 2:1-3, He subsequently appears only to certain individual/s. This could indicate the community's reluctance to acknowledge His divine visitations due to their idolatry. Consequently, YHWH reveals Himself to those who truly believe in Him and will accept His message and instructions. Those who are open to receiving His revelations (Jdg 6:19; 3:3, 19) are willing embrace it since then they could bring about much needed transformations within their idolatrous community.

6.3.6 Forbidden

The aniconic religion of the early Israelites (Bright 2000:160; Miller 2000:20; cf Macdonald 2007:26) rejected any representations of YHWH in the form of any man-made images (Ex 20:4). Miller (2000:20) mentions that household and 'extramural shrines' may have been amenable to iconography and in some instances images of God attested to by texts such as Judges 17 (cf Jdg 8:27) as well as archaeology.⁵²¹ Rooker (2003:380) observes that YHWH does not appear in the form of an animal in the Old Testament which correlates 'to the avoidance of any association of

⁵²⁰ Since information that letters contained was crucial for the survival of the power of the king, his rule over the city state and residents (Crown 1974:244), it was required of the messengers to assist in the reading of the messages. Although from a later period Crown (1974:244) reports the following complaint from Sargon II, (the Assyrian king who ruled from 722-705 BC) when his troops lost morale, the result of exhaustion from traversing great distances and losing communication: 'I could not give ease to their weariness, I could not give them water to drink, I could not set up the camp, I could not organize the defense of the headquarters and could not direct my advance guards...' (see also Saggs 1963:151).

The inability to gather military intelligence since the terrain they crossed to defeat the Urartian army was unfamiliar and the vast distance from their homeland meant that Sargon and his troops were not able to send for reinforcements and information regarding their situation. The king could not read and was unfamiliar with the Babylonian 'diplomatic language of the period'. Therefore, it was requested of the messenger to assist the king in understanding the 'authentic meaning' of the message (Liverani 2001:71). As a delegate of the king, the Ammonite messenger in Judges 11 spoke on his behalf and could also negotiate agreements if it came to that (see Liverani 2001:71-72).

Liverani (2001:71) observes that although the Babylonian term: *mār šipri* and the Egyptian word: *wpwty* for messenger remain unchangeable, messengers have different roles and status in societies that went with the type of message delivered and the person under whom they served. As previously indicated the ordinary uneducated populace was barred from these important political messages and political maneuvering. Ordinary people did get divine communications pertaining to their individuals and houses, despite the fact that they naturally did not receive divine messages of immense importance – on the level of state-related importance. Only the priestly ranks, the king, the nobility, and other elite castes had access to significant divine communication.

⁵²¹ It has been suggested that Moses was motivated by the aniconic traditions of the religion of Amun (Macdonald 2007:26). Bright (2000:160) has argued that any influences of the Amun religion on Yahwism was 'indirect and not fundamental.' 'In its essential structure Yahwism was as little like the Egyptian religion as possible' (Bright 2000:160). Bright remarks that a multitude of figurines of the mother goddess have been found in Israelite towns confirming religious syncretism but it is remarkable that no image of YHWH has ever been discovered.

Israelite worship with paganism.’ However, idolatry in Judges would have put the early Israelites in contact with the various animal forms that represented the gods.

In the ancient Near East and particularly in Egypt it was customary for deities to be associated with animal forms (Rooker 2003:860). The Egyptian gods were usually depicted in animal forms that were observable in nature (Teeter 2002:340) and which like the representations of the gods in concrete forms, such as statues, made the gods understandable to humans (Holland 2009:18). Sacred animals, such as the crocodile, which was a representation of the god Sobek (Assmann 1999:617), and the hippopotamus, which was a representation of the goddess Taweret, a bipedal fertility goddess (Houser-Wegner 2002:351-352) were thought to have special numinous characteristics or divine power that the people believed were part of the nature of their gods and goddesses (Holland 2009:18).⁵²²

Considering the prohibition against the hybridization of animals, it is doubtful whether the early Israelites would have developed an affinity for the composite gods of the ancient Near East.⁵²³ There are many other prohibitions listed in Leviticus 19 which are made within the context of the Canaanite cults that allowed these practices and which YHWH considered impure. Therefore, keeping the laws in Leviticus 19 preserves the purity of the Israelites and their worship of YHWH. In this manner the Israelites are holy (*qadosh*), ‘set apart,’ from the impure Canaanite cultic practices. Bloom (1998:107-108) explores the theme of sacred and profane in ancient Israel and

⁵²² See also Reading Museum 2020. Sacred Animals of Ancient Egypt. The *ba* of the Egyptian god could also inhabit animals. Putthoff (2020:29) remarks that the ram of Mendes was the *ba* of Osiris, crocodiles, the *bas* of the Suchos deities and serpents the *bas* of the entire Egyptian pantheon(s) of gods. The snake and the lion were also representations of Asherah, a fertility goddess well-known to the Israelites in Judges (Jdg 2:13; 3:7; 6:25-26; 10:6), who is often shown to hold snakes in one or both hands (Brody, AJ 2018:29).

An iconographic icon from Ugaritic Minet el Beida dated to the 14th century BC shows a naked goddess (possibly Asherah)⁵²² standing on the back of a lion with serpents behind her waist (Cornelius 1993:21). It is interesting to note that all these animals were among the unclean animals listed in Leviticus 11.⁵²² The tribes were familiar with the dove, the emblem of the mother goddess Asherah (Willette 2014; cf Sha 2018:195) and particularly, having lived for centuries in Egypt, the bull motif that was a representation of Baal the Canaanite fertility god (Munnich 2008:42; Willette 2014; cf 2.3.2.1b; 3.6.1.1; 8.2.2.2a-b).

The ancient Egyptian pantheon comprised bull, cow and calf deities that are depicted, inter alia, in reliefs and painting on temple walls and stelae and cult figures, small statues and amulets shaped like bulls, cows and calves (Kessler 2002:29-30). The dove was also the symbol of the goddess Hathor, a fertility deity most commonly represented as a cow goddess also associated with childbirth (Massey 1907:340; Vischak 2002:157-161; Smith 2011:206). Around the 12th BC a Hathor sanctuary was built in the Timna Valley by Egyptian occupiers of the territory (Hess 2007:202; cf Marsman 2003:200). Six Hathor heads were also found at Lachish (Keel and Uehlinger 1998:68) that demonstrate the veneration of Hathor in the Late Bronze and early Iron Age.

⁵²³ In the Egyptian cults the god could be a composite deity such as Taweret who had feline traits, copious women’s breasts as well as the limbs of a lion and the tail of a crocodile (Houser-Wegner 2002:351-352) or a composite of an animal head on a human body (Holland 2009:18; Rooker 2003:860). Apparently, the exception was Bes a composite a gnome like a winged creature with a lion like face (Malaise 2002:28-29), that was also worshipped in Canaan as a divine protector of mothers and children (Zevit 2001:386, 606; cf Hadley 2000:139-142). Together with the goddess Asherah, Bes played an important role in the (early Israelite) household and local cults (Dijkstra 2001:165; Sha 2018:219). The presence of Bes in these cults is demonstrated by the faience amulets of the dwarflike god found at Kuntillet ‘Ajrud (Zevit 2001:417; cf Golden 2004:195).

Borowski (2002:411-12) observes that the dietary rules of the Israelites are unique in ‘Syria-Palestine.’ However, it is possible that the idolatrous early Israelites in general preferred gods with human-like forms and might have found the worship or appearance of the deities with animal and human mixtures abhorrent despite their acceptances of so many of the Canaanite cultic practices that were prohibited in the unadulterated Yahwistic religion.

6.5 DIVINE MANIFESTATION IN THE FORM OF MIRACLES

6.5.1 The miracle sign of fire

All YHWH’s miracles are supernatural (see 1.10). It is ironic that YHWH reveals His plan to deliver the Israelites from the Midianites to someone who has a junior rank in his household (Jdg 11:15), and not the priest (at Shiloh [Jdg 18:31; 19:18]) or a prophet (cf Jdg 4:4; 6:8).⁵²⁴

Be that as it may, Gideon requests a divine and miraculous sign, and the Angel subsequently turns ‘food into a flaming sacrifice’ as confirmation of His identity (and validation of the commission given to Gideon to go to war against the Midianites) (Gunn 2005:93; cf 3.4.4.1b; 5.3.2.2d). Manoah and his wife receive a parallel sign: ‘... And the Angel of the Lord did an amazing thing while Manoah and his wife watched: As the flame blazed up from the altar toward heaven, the Angel of the LORD ascended in the flame’ (Jdg 13:19-20; cf 3.4.4.1c; 5.3.2.2e). A double theophany occurs in the narratives: YHWH appears as the Angel of the LORD and give the fire as a sign of His presence (see 8.2.3.2). If Gideon and Manoah and his wife were unfamiliar with YHWH’s method of self-revelation (cf Jdg 2:10) then surely they would recognize His presence by means of a blazing flame.

6.5.1.1 *Symbology*

Fire plays an important role in the covenant-making and history processes in the Old Testament (and the ancient Near East); fire confirms the covenant between YHWH and the patriarch Abraham (Gn 15:17; Durken 2017). The miraculous fire created by the Angel of the LORD in Judges 6 and

⁵²⁴ According to Klein (1989:67-68), a type of literary device employed in Judges is irony: the irony of contrasts in Gideon’s relationship with YHWH and his behaviour towards his people (see also Block 1999; Sandy and Giese (eds) 1995:33-34, 77-81, 178, etcetera). It is, however, inappropriate to read the Bible as literature texts (see Brettler 2005:9); as one would read the plays of William Shakespeare despite the historical backgrounds of some of the plays (see Bertler’s [2005:1-21] discussion on the nature of the Book of Judges: historical fact or literature.) Judges consists of narratives that read as records of past events and as such these should be read as historical texts. Biblical authors do employ certain literary forms, to emphasize certain truths in their retelling of Israelite history and underlining the theology that brings about the events. The author/s of Judges in order to redirect the reader’s attention to what is important in the narrative of Judges 6:1-10 quickly moves the setting to the meeting between Gideon and the Angel of the LORD so that the reader may understand the theological aspects, consequences and resolution of the Israelites’ predicament (Jdg 6:11-40). Chiasmus or inverted parallelism is one literary technique utilized by the Biblical writers (see Waltke 2007:119-121; Overland 2008:54-58; Chase 2011:48-49; see also O’Connell 1996:3-9 for more literary techniques used in Judges) that I believe also serves the aforementioned purposes well.

13 parallels that of Moses in Exodus 3:2 (see 3.4.2-3.4.3.1). In Judges 6:21 the Angel of the LORD ‘touched the meat and the unleavened bread with the tip of the staff that was in his hand’ and ‘fire flared from the rock consuming the meat and the bread.’ In both Exodus and Judges a fire theophany accompanies the commissioning of Moses and Gideon (Ex 3:2; Jdg 6:21). Fire in the narratives in Judges serves a three-fold purpose: symbolizing the presence of YHWH, purification (of the participants in the theophany), and judgement upon the enemy (Craigie and Tate 2004; Boyer 2017).⁵²⁵

In Judges narratives, the Angel of the LORD shows his omnipotence and command of nature by creating fire out of nothing and appearing within the fire itself without being harmed. By comparison the god of fire, such as Gibil, as the cathartic power of fire, is invoked by magic spells in magic ceremonies to appear (Leick 2003:68). As indicated before YHWH appears but never because the divine manifestations are initiated by humans (Niehaus 1995:20). There is no ritual that can invoke YHWH to appear or act in accordance with people’s desires but He does so in accordance with the divine will, plans and purposes for the Israelites. In both the accounts in Judges 6 and 13, the fire produced by the Angel of YHWH purified the rock on which Gideon and Manoah placed their meal offerings. Perhaps the place Gideon had made the meal offering was a syncretic ritual space which required a purification rite. It is likely that sacrifices have been made to Canaanite deities at the rock altar or that it is an improper altar (cf Jdg 6:25) and thus the rock altar needed to be purified by God Himself in order for both altar and sacrifice to be acceptable. YHWH, unlike the Canaanite gods Baal and Asherah, will not share His sacred space with other deities (cf Jdg 6: 25-26). As indicated before (see 2.2.5.8) the gods of the ancient Near Eastern people rarely appear in their natural form (Hundley 2013:140); their manifestations occur as elements of the cosmos and the natural environment (see above). With the fire in Judges 6 and 13, comes enlightenment as to the true identity of the Angel of the LORD and the power of inherent in the divine nature. Fire symbology in the narratives of Judges 6 and 13 is not only a symbol of YHWH’s omnipotence and God’s control of nature, in Judges it is always a sign of (impending) redemption of the Israelites and judgement of the enemy and thus is also associated with the sacred covenant.

6.5.2 The miracle of the fleece

Lockyer (1988:88) observes that Gideon, by his own human strength, was powerless to fend off the Midianites. Accordingly, in Judges 6:36-40, there occurs Gideon’s test with the fleece as a sign that YHWH has indeed instructed him to lead the Israelites in warfare against the Midianites. Some scholars view Gideon’s fleece test as ‘a polemic against Baal as the Canaanite water and storm god and instead attributed control to YHWH’ (Bluedorn 2001:44; cf Walton, Matthews and

⁵²⁵ In the ancient Near East fire was a symbol of purification removing the contamination by burning and more thorough than water because it destroyed the polluted person or object (Tetlow 2004:260). The ancient Near Eastern pantheons included fire deities; Gibil (Sumerian) – Girra/u (Akkadian), Rešep (West-Semitic) (Leick 2003:68,143); Akni (Hittite) (Frayne and Stuckey 2021:11).

Chavalas 2000:255). Although he was hailed by the Angel of the LORD as a mighty warrior (Jdg 6:11), Gideon still needed the assurance of victory over the enemy and thus asked the LORD for a ‘double divine sign’ (Lockyer 1988:88). Judges 6:39-40 reads:

Gideon said to God, “If you will save Israel by my hand as you have promised – look, I will place a wool fleece on the threshing floor. If there is dew only on the fleece and all the ground is dry, then I will know that you will save Israel by my hand, as you said.” And that is what happened. Gideon rose early the next day; he squeezed the fleece and wrung out the dew—a bowlful of water. Then Gideon said to God, “Do not be angry with me. Let me make just one more request. Allow me one more test with the fleece, but this time make the fleece dry and let the ground be covered with dew.” That night God did so. Only the fleece was dry; all the ground was covered with dew.

It is noteworthy that Gideon places the fleece not in a field but on a threshing floor where the harvest of the wheat is which signified ‘a plentiful harvest...’ (Franke and Oden [eds] 2014:123). Lockyer (1988:88) goes on to say that ‘Gideon as a man of the fields’ recognized YHWH’s power over nature, that is, the dew, and asks that it be controlled as a sign signifying divine presence and favor. Dew on the fleece was a natural event, but dew only on the fleece while the surrounding threshing floor remains dry was proof of a supernatural power ‘just as dry fleece but dew-laden ground was’ (Lockyer 1988:88). Wiersbe (2007:443) notes that the ground of a threshing floor is usually very hard and would not be significantly affected by the dew, but dry fleece and wet ground is what Gideon found the next morning (cf Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:255). Assured by the double supernatural sign, Gideon knew that the Israelites would be victorious in their battle against the Midianites (Lockyer 1988:88).

Against the backdrop of Gideon’s request for the double sign from YHWH is the Israelite worship of Baal (Jdg 6:25). As a storm god and an agricultural deity, the people believed that Baal had the power to control nature and provide the life-giving rains (dew) needed for the harvests and abundance. The fleece miracles, therefore, are evidence of YHWH’s divine power (Bluedorn 2001:110) and superiority over the Canaanite Baal.⁵²⁶

Gideon’s request for a divine sign that revealed the war outcome before a battle was also customary in the ancient Near East. Because the outcomes of war depended on circumstances beyond human power, divine intervention was needed. The inspection of the liver or kidney of a sacrificed animal such as a sheep before a declaration of war was a common practice to determine if the gods were positively or negatively disposed towards a military undertaking (Kang 2011:139; Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:255). Like their ancient Near Eastern neighbours, the Israelites realized that any military effort was subjected to erratic elements and that victory was only assured when the Divine Warrior, that is YHWH, intervenes (Ames 2012:828). Israelite prognostication rituals

⁵²⁶ YHWH proves his omnipotence and power also over the fertility goddess Asherah, the consort of Baal. The gods were not omnipotent but worked together in partnership and combined their power to affect nature and the lives of people (Walton 2018).

involved the *Urim* and *Thummim* carried by the priest (cf Jdg 20:18, 23, 26-28). Apparently, this is not available to Gideon and so he must be inventive and ‘use a natural mechanism for the oracle’ (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:255; cf Kang 2011:139). Bluedorn (2001:110) remarks that Gideon’s army observed the fleece miracle and consequently the ‘fleece test’ served as an apotropaic mechanism, warding off the fears of the soldier, bolstering their morale and ensure them that YHWH had already given them the victory over the Midianites. However, and perhaps more importantly, given their covenantal allegiance, Gideon’s unbelief in YHWH’s words that he will deliver the Israelites from the Midianites is emphasized by the miracle of the fleece.

6.6 CONCLUSION

In the worldview of the author/s of Judges YHWH, monotheism which asserts the sovereignty of YHWH thus declares that He may be immanent in the realm of the Israelites. YHWH’s immanence in the world portrayed in Judges, the author/s reveal that theophany in the narratives is also a discovery of His self-revelation to the Israelites when He judges them for their idolatry and also saves and delivers them from subsequent oppression. The theophanies and miracles in Judges symbolize YHWH’s presence and power in the earthly realm. In the worldview of the author/s, the power and presence of YHWH denote His faithfulness to His people ensuring their preservation rather than their annihilation.

Monotheism allowed for a radical mindset on the manifestation of the divine (see Jindo 2010:78) as demonstrated in Judges 2:1-3; 3:10; 6:11-34; 11:29; 7:22; 3:3-20; 14:19). As it was since the creation of the world, YHWH’s immanence is expressed in the form of the Spirit of YHWH. Israelite cosmology was encoded in their covenant, giving it the quality of a divine monotheistic rite of worship (see Ex 20:8-11). YHWH’s immanency in the persona of the Spirit of YHWH who may indwell certain judges and the Angel of YHWH as Prophet and Divine Warrior in Judges, contrast with ancient Near Eastern concepts of the god’s presence that was primarily associated with the temple or a specific place (Walton 2018). The theophanies in Judges challenge the dominant cultural ideas of the ancient Near East regarding the distant, uncaring god in the temple by revealing a God who may assume human form, descend from heaven, redeem His people and dwell among them (Willis 2019:23; see also 6.3.4-6.3.5).

Divine manifestation in the Book of Judges defines the character of YHWH: transcendent, immanent, and majestic (see Jdg 2:1-3; 4:15; 6:11-26, 36-40; 7:22; 13:3-5, 9-19). Each theophany in Judges attests to the power and authority of YHWH over nature, the Canaanite people and their gods. Theophany in Judges as it always occurs in relation to the Sinai Covenant, has to do with divine commission, judgement and redemption as YHWH strives to deliver His people from their idolatry and enemies as also previously indicated. Theophany in Judges also occurs in various other forms; in the natural environment in the form of thunder, lightning, fire, stormy winds, rain, dark clouds, and earthquakes to demonstrate the divine presence and protective power (cf Jdg 5:4-

5; see Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:380, 619, 690; cf Christensen 1996:338; Houston 2001:71; Rooker 2003:860; see Table 6.1). Furthermore, the occurrences described in Judges 6:20 and 6:34-40 function as symbols of the divine power and presence of YHWH. Together, these aforementioned elements play a crucial role in shaping the perspective of the author/s of the Book of Judges.

CHAPTER SEVEN

OPPOSING VALUES: EQUALITY AND INEQUALITY

7.1 INTRODUCTION

The main aim of this chapter is to analyze the Israelite society from the perspective of societal equality and inequality. By doing so, it will hopefully, shed more light on the religious beliefs and values that influenced the author/s of Judges.

Embedded within the Sinaitic Covenant lies the fundamental principle of equality. However, the Israelites' disobedience and involvement in anti-covenantal cultic practices frequently resulted in their oppression that gradually undermined the covenant's ethos of equality. In the first part of this chapter covenantal equality will be discussed and contrasted with the unfortunate reality of the lived experiences of the people in the Book of Judges and those elements that contributed to a society rife with imbalances and heartache. In the second part of this chapter the influence of the ancient Near Eastern religious and socio-economic systems and by inference the Canaanite hierarchical systems on the Israelites' lived reality will be discussed in depth.

Throughout this chapter, use will be made of archaeological findings and data from the ancient Near East to enhance an understanding of the subject matter.

7.2 AN IDEOLOGY OF EQUALITY AND INEQUALITY

7.2.1 Egalitarianism

This section will explore the notion of egalitarianism in the ancient Israelite society, specifically examining its implications on wealth and gender. Additionally it will highlight the disparities that existed within the tribal community, providing a contrasting perspective.

The Book of Judges portrays the Israelite economy and society as primarily agrarian (cf Jdg 6:1:11; 1:14-15; 13:3-20). Bloch-Smith and Nakhai (1999:76) describe the rough topography experienced by the Israelites on the highlands and their isolated farmsteads that indicate an unsophisticated and basic agrarian community and lifestyle (see also Scheepers 2010:281-301; cf Gibson 2001:122-123). The author/s of Judges makes reference to the villagers in Judges 5:7, the crops cultivated by the Israelites (Jdg 6), the grape festival celebrated by the Shechemites (Jdg 9:27), and a festival mentioned in Judges (21:19). These references collectively suggest the presence of an agrarian society. Deuteronomy (6:10) describes the land promised to Israelites as well-developed and flourishing. The archaeological evidence demonstrates that the adoption and advancement of sophisticated agricultural techniques during the 12th century BC played a crucial role in the growth and prosperity of the Israelite society (see Scheepers 2010:281-301). According to the perspective of

the author/s of Judges, this progress was seen as an additional blessing bestowed upon the Israelites by YHWH.

Dever (2002:125) reports that in this period (ca 1200 BC), the socio-economic structure of the Israelites was based on a mode of production generated by households in their villages and farmsteads that is held to be egalitarian in nature.⁵²⁷ Unlike the hierarchical structures that were ingrained in Canaanite societies, which tended to favour the king, royals and other elite classes (cf Jdg 3:8, 12; 4:2; 5:30), the biblical worldview indicates that YHWH's promise and blessings of abundance were accessible to all Israelites (Dt 15:4; cf Dt 28:1-14). The covenant had stipulations in place that served to eliminate significant wealth disparities among the tribes. The most noteworthy of these stipulations was the distribution of agricultural surpluses at the Tabernacle. The Israelites were to take (a tenth of) the firstfruits of all their crops to the Tabernacle (Ex 23:19; Nm 18:13; Dt 26:2) to honour the LORD (Prov 3:6; cf 4.2.2.3b). Additionally, these firstfruits were designated to serve as the primary livelihood of the priesthood (2 Chr 31:4; Ez 44:30). Furthermore, any excess produce that remained unutilized by the priesthood was distributed among the community, ensuring that no individual has to endure the hardships of poverty (cf Dt 15:8).

In light of the aforesaid, it can be argued that the author/s of Judges' condemnation of the Israelites for their failure to uphold the covenant was also a vigorous endeavour to preserve the principles of socio-economic equality within the covenant, which were closely linked to their stewardship of the land and the laws applicable to it. This perspective, held by the author/s, can be traced back to the influential teachings found in Deuteronomy 15 that advocated the prevention of poverty by means of a set of guidelines within the Israelite society. The author/s' strong motivation to uphold equality within the tribal society stemmed from the commitment to safeguarding the integrity and stability of the covenantal lifestyle. Moreover, it served as a powerful testament to the Israelites' unwavering loyalty and devotion to YHWH who considered all His people as equal members of their society (cf 7.4.4.1) since He had promised to bless them all with abundance.

Faust (2004:174-190; 2013:45-49, 62-63) believes that an ideology of egalitarianism in the Israelites' society is confirmed in the archaeological record. In this case, the reader of the Old Testament will discover that archaeology and the principles of equality promoted by the Sinaitic Covenant align. Faust (2013:45-49, 62-63; 2004:174-175) has ascribed the paucity of Iron Age 1 burials (cf Kletter 2002:29-31; Fantalkin 2008:24),⁵²⁸ and the lack of pottery decorations (Finkelstein 1998:359; see Figure 7.1)⁵²⁹ as indications of the existence of an ethos of egalitarianism on the

⁵²⁷ Dever bases this statement on the archaeological data. However, as I have pointed out elsewhere in this chapter, the archaeological data also indicates a wealthy class among the Israelites.

⁵²⁸ Kletter (2002:28-48) provides his opinions regarding the lack of Iron Age I burials. See also Bloch-Smith (1992b:8-169, 171, 177-178,192); Faust (2004:175). Faust (2015b:475) notes that simple burials denote an egalitarian ethos among the Israelites.

⁵²⁹ Faust (2002:17-39) describes different types of pottery used by women and men and more ornate ceramics (cf Golden 2004:134).

highlands of Israel (cf also Pfoh 2020:41-42).⁵³⁰ Faust (2013:45-49, 62-63) also mentions the extreme scarcity of ‘temples’ on the highlands that possibly reflects egalitarian beliefs of the Israelites ‘that rejected overt signs of hierarchy.’⁵³¹ Mayes (2002:55) concurs that early Israel was an egalitarian society that originated in opposition to the stratified and feudal systems of ancient Canaan (the dominant cultural ideology) (cf Gottwald 1999:611-617) as also indicated above.



Figure 7.1 Iron Age I pottery assemblage from Shiloh (Finkelstein 1998:360)

However, Noll (2013:171-172) ascribes an economic reason and not an ideology of egalitarianism to the pottery allocation; that it is configured to indicate that some Israelites were more affluent than others as also demonstrated in Judges 10:4; 6:13; 8:2; 12:9, 14; 17. Nevertheless, the principles of equality in the covenant establish that there need be no poor people among you, for in the land the LORD your God is giving you to possess as your inheritance, he will richly bless you as indicated before (Dt 15:4; see also above). The Book of Deuteronomy also foresees poverty among the early Israelites which is attributed to their disobedience to the covenantal laws (Dt 15:5), the Israelites were instructed to be ‘openhanded’ and share generously with those who lacked resources (Dt 15:7-11). However, Judges reveal that instances of poverty (cf Jdg 17), the abuse of power (Jdg 11:34-39; 17; 18; 19: 21:12, 19-23) and the avarice of some tribes (Jdg 8:2; 12:1; 10:4; 12:9, 14) were indicative of an unstable covenantal lifestyle that degraded the ethos of equality inherent in YHWH’s covenant (cf 2.2.3.1e). In fact, the daughter of Jephthah (Jdg 11), the wife of the Levite (Jdg 19), the young women of Jabesh Gilead (Jdg 21:12) and the young women of Shiloh (Jdg 20:23) were exposed to abuse and horrific treatment due to the deleterious decision-making power by those in authority.⁵³²

⁵³⁰ Pfoh (2020:42) has criticized Faust for projecting an image of early Israel that is more relevant to a modern society than a ‘pre-modern Near Eastern context’ (see also Kletter 2016:123).

⁵³¹ House shrines and sanctuaries on high places may have been more common, and if they were made of wood and cloth to emulate the tabernacle, they would leave no trace in the material record.

⁵³² Like the covenant of YHWH, the archaeological evidence demonstrates a recognition and respect for the roles of both men and women within the tribal society. Faust and Bunimovitz (2003:22-31) believe that the design and layout of the Israelites’ four-room house, for example, were a manifestation of their belief in a God who endorsed their way of life and their commitment to His covenant requirements (cf Faust and Bunimovitz 2014:143-164; see also 2.3.4.1a).

7.2.1.1 Kinship

A common and prevailing religious system of beliefs that dominated Israelite life, kinship groups as well the rewards and risks of communal life in isolated villages for instance, created a uniformity of lifestyle and socio-economic equality necessary for survival (Robertson 2005:199; Meyers 2003:190-192). Descent from a common ancestor motivates people within kinship groups to remain loyal to its members, leading to group homogeneity that inspires equality (Robertson 2005:199). The benefits of communal ethics and expectancies within kinship groups encourage the emulation of acceptable behaviour among group members further reinforcing equalitarianism in the distribution and sharing of resources and across the genders.

Aligned with the group's core beliefs, the covenant stipulation and laws, for example, the advantages of conformist behaviours in sharing resources and in valuing others, enable equality to a great degree. Ideology and an associated worldview that indicates equality is not easily detectable in the archaeological record (Faust 2004:174-190). Kinship groups in modern Saudi Arabia provide an analogue to the concept of early Israelites' adherence to a shared ideology and (covenant) law. Maisel (2009) observes that the traditional law of the tribal groups in Saudi Arabia have certain compensations: personal and familial safety and communal property. These advantages serve as an inducement for tribal members to conform to their laws.

Individuals in Judges may also encourage noble behaviour in others whilst kinship may have the opposite effect. The prophetess Deborah would have strengthened the covenantal value systems and beliefs of the faithful followers of YHWH who sought her counsel (Jdg 4:5) particularly since they lived in a period of idolatry and oppression (cf Jdg 4:1-3). It is probable that many Israelites perceived her as a role model, a mother perhaps both biologically and spiritually due to her sagacity and just decision-making (cf Jdg 5:7). Joash seem to have the type of authority that may encourage

Consequently, these beliefs demonstrated the inclusion and acceptance of women in all their biological stages by the male members of the family. Faust and Bunimovitz argue that the design of the four-room house demonstrates the respect given to menstruating women by assigning them the back rooms, which could cater to their personal needs and religious requirements (see 2.3.4.1a). This arrangement ensures that menstruating women are not expelled from their homes during their menstrual period and excluded from worshipping YHWH within their own dwellings (see Sha 2018:234).

If Deborah happened to be menstruating woman, this could be a possible explanation why she conducted her court proceedings under the shade of her palm tree, which was likely located close to her home. By doing so, she could avoid any potential pain or discomfort that might have arisen from having to travel to a sanctuary. She was, thus, capable of carrying out her duties for YHWH while remaining in the comfort of her home surroundings (see 5.3.4). In the ancient Near East, menstruating women were typically sent to designated huts (Kruger 1998:302). It is documented that the gods of the ancient Near East found menstruating women repulsive, resulting in their exclusion from religious rituals (Philip 2006:6). In the mindset of the author/s of Judges, Barak's insistence on her presence in the battlefield indicated an anti-covenantal lack of regard for her gender and personal ease which is a male attitude that gradually worsens as Judges progresses (Jdg 11:34-40; 19; 21:12, 23).

a particular behaviour in others for he is able to convince the townspeople of Ophrah not to kill Gideon for destroying the altar of Baal (Jdg 6:30-31).

It is paradoxical that the kinship bond among the Benjamites reveals their unwavering allegiance to a faction of ruthless rapists and killers (involved in the mistreatment and death of the Levite's concubine) while the rest of the tribes are united in their striving for justice for the Levite's concubine. However, even the latter group errs when they mercilessly slaughter the Benjamites, and display unwise decision-making in the selection of wives for the Benjamite males that survived the war. Despite the existence of tribal kinship and unity between the different tribal groups the author/s conveys the idea that all is not as it should be within the Israelite society since 'everyone did as they saw fit' (Jdg 21:25) which did not bode well for the maintenance of the ethos of equality in the tribal community. In fact it was not a good augur for any type of Israelite relationship.

7.2.2 The wealth of the land

YHWH had promised the Israelites the land of Canaan, its wealth and prosperous cities (cf Dt 6:3; 26:9, 15; 27:3).

Households could operate within a cottage industry system (cf Jdg 14:12-13, 19; 5:30). Women did their own spinning and weaving at home which later became home shops that led to a specialized and industrialized industry (Gugliotto 2000:113). Meyers (2002:30) observes that weaving became a skill that not only met certain demands for household goods such as baskets, bed linen and clothing, but also served the larger Israelite society in the Iron Age I in its redistribution and exchange mode of economy (cf Sha 2018:341). The archaeological evidence for the manufacturing establishments appropriated by the Israelites points towards, for instance, a weaving and cloth dyeing industry at Debir (Tell Beit Mirsim) that flourished during the Iron Age II (cf Jdg 1:11-12; De Vaux 1997:77). Judges suggests prolific linen production activities in the days of Samson (cf Jdg 14:12; cf 7.4.1.1a). Judges 5:30 alludes to colourful clothing which indicates the existence of a substantial textile industry (see Kuntz 1974:162).⁵³³ All these articles could be presented at the Tabernacle as offerings in keeping with the covenantal traditions. The firstfruits of the crops were to be delivered at the Tabernacle in baskets (Dt 26:2). Baskets were important household items used for gathering crops, fruits and vegetables and for the storage of these products. Consequently,

⁵³³ De Vaux (1997:77) lists other industries such as bakery, metallurgy and pottery that attested to the names of the locations in Jerusalem where these activities occurred. It is likely that these crafts were established in cottage industries in private households during the pre-monarchy and that the commerce in these existed only on the local market (see De Vaux 1997:77). Pre-monarchic Israel lacked the centralized governance and developed organization system to attempt international commerce on the scale of the other ancient Near Eastern nations such as the Phoenicians (see De Vaux 1997:79). The gold booty in Judges 8:25 implies that Israel acquired some of its wealth from the successful military campaigns launched against their enemies. Dyed textile fragments with blue and red strips discovered at a copper mine in the Timna Valley dated to the 11th and 10th centuries BC disclose that an elite group obtained the colorful luxury items by means of distant trade (Suknik et al 2017:1-24).

when the Israelites presented their offerings to the Tabernacle, they could aid those in need of essential food and other items vital to their households. Unfortunately, due to their oppression at the hands of various enemy nations, the community's needs could not be adequately met. They were forced to pay tribute to their oppressors (Jdg 3:17) and experienced the devastation of their crops and land (Jdg 6:1-6), resulting in extreme impoverishment that disrupted their lives and instilled fear and terror that YHWH did not wish them to experience (see 4.2.2.3b-c).

Throughout this study it has been shown that the condemnation of the Israelites' idolatry and the subsequent punishment of the tribes by means of their oppression serve as a medium through which the author/s of Judges express their worldview and its covenantal tone. However, it is intriguing to contemplate the personal emotions experienced by the author/s when documenting the anguish endured by their fellow men and women. YHWH's distress over the suffering of His people (Jdg 10:16), as well as His unwavering compassion when rescuing them time and again (cf Jdg 2:18) are perhaps reflective of the author/s own sentiments.

As stated before, Deuteronomy mentions that the Israelites were to take over and inhabit prosperous Canaanite urban centres, well-organized, socially developed, and with lucrative industries as war prizes and rewards for serving YHWH (cf Dt 6:10; cf Dt 19:1).⁵³⁴ Regarding the redistribution and exchange mode of its economy, the early Israelites would have been no different from their ancient Near Eastern neighbours (Robertson 2005:196-210). In accordance with the ancient Near Eastern parallel,⁵³⁵ urban dwelling Israelites received the raw agrarian products from the farming households which they turned into the crafted products for trade and commerce that provided these Israelites with a livelihood while bring other city dwelling Israelite families a great deal of wealth. Judges indicates that there were city-dwelling Israelite families (cf Jdg 1:9-10, 20, 22-24; Jdg 9:2; 10:4; 18:31). Jair of Gilead and his thirty sons, for example, were in control of thirty towns (cf Jdg 10:4; see also 7.2.3.1b; 7.4.1.1b). As previously mentioned, one-tenth of the agricultural produce was designated to be given to the Tabernacle (cf Nm 18). If the surpluses of these resources were retained by wealthy families such as Jair of Gilead, it would have contributed to a shortage of provisions for the priests and other Israelite groups who were dependent on receiving these resources in the form of tithes. These actions directly contradicted the principle of equality that was

⁵³⁴ The Canaanite urban centres mentioned in Deuteronomy suggest that the Canaanite economy either recovered quickly from the mysterious calamity that led to the collapse of many of the major ancient Near Eastern nations towards the end of the Late Bronze Age, or it survived in a less robust form than in earlier periods.⁵³⁴ Finkelstein (1995:122) references the Arabian trade in frankincense for example with trading stations in Gaza as functional as early as the Iron Age I (cf Bienkowski and van der Steen 2001:24).⁵³⁴

⁵³⁵ In the history of the ancient Near East, civilizations experienced a certain level of development followed by ruin in a cyclical pattern that saw the rise and fall of these societies (Liverani 2005:4). Albeit on a microcosmic level a similar recurring display of societal progression and breakdown happens to the Israelites in Judges Is it therefore possible to conclude that the reasons for the occurrence of this pattern in the ancient Near East is similar to that of the Israelites: the disintegration of moral rectitude?

ingrained in the covenant, and therefore may have been embedded in the condemnatory attitude of the author/s of Judges towards the Israelites.

Other city dwellers could make a living from farming the land surrounding their cities. Judges indicates that there were city-dwelling Israelite families (cf Jdg 1:9-10, 20, 22-24; Jdg 9:2; 10:4; 18:31). The Levites were allocated 48 cities of which 6 were ‘cities of refuge’ (Nm 35:1-8; Dinger 2016:262) with pastureland for their cattle and other animals.

According to the author/s of Judges, the aforesaid were components of the life that YHWH had promised them. It was a life that the Israelites had willingly chosen (cf Jos 24:16-18; Dt 30:19; cf 2.3.1). It is clear that the author/s of Judges, anticipated that the Israelites would express gratitude and value the abundance of the land provided by YHWH by persistently serving their God so that it may go well with them. However, the reality was unfortunately quite the opposite (cf Jdg 2:1-5; 3; 4; 6:1-10; 10:6-14; 13:1; see also 7.2.1.1).

7.2.2.1 Wealth divided

The Israelites’ settlement of the highlands (12th century BC) coincided with the inhabitation of the coastal region Canaan by the Philistines.⁵³⁶ In the book of Judges, the author/s recount the story of the Israelites’ conquest and settlement of the land (Jdg 1; cf 4.2.1.1b; see also Footnotes 6, 220 and 221). According to the promise made by YHWH to their ancestors, the Israelites were meant to inhabit the entire land (Gn 13:14-17; 15:18-21). However, the Israelites had failed to fully conquer Canaan. In the perspective of the author/s of Judges, the presence of the Philistines and their dominance of the land’s resources (cf Jdg 14-16) meant that the Israelites were unable to fully enjoy the abundance of the land despite the wealth of some of the tribes. However, the author/s show that the Israelites only had themselves to blame since they had violated their covenant and disobeyed the instruction to fully occupy the land (cf Jdg 2:1-3; cf 2.2.1.1b; 2.2.2.1)

a. Effects of the incomplete land conquest

The author/s of Judges aim to communicate the idea that the Israelites’ failure to fully conquer Canaan (Jdg 1:19-35) resulted in prolonged interaction with the Canaanite nations (cf Jdg 3:5-6; also 4.2.1.1), which ultimately played a significant role in their decline into idolatry and ultimately oppression and penury. Judges 1 records the unsuccessful military campaigns of the Israelites and the resultant partial land conquest and settlement (see also 4.3.1.1). The Judahite tribe could not expel the Canaanites in the lowlands, and the Benjamites could not drive out the Jebusites in Jerusalem (Jdg 1:19, 21). Similarly, Manasseh could not destroy the inhabitants of Bethshean, Taanach and Dor, and so on, and their respective satellite towns (Jdg 1:27). The tribe of Ephraim could not expel the Canaanites in Gezer, and neither could Zebulun drive out the Canaanites from Kitron

⁵³⁶ Encyclopedia Britannica.com 2023. Philistine.

and Nahalol, nor could the tribe of Asher eject the inhabitants of Accho, Zidon, Ahlab, and so on. Naphtali and Dan also could not oust the Canaanites from the territories apportioned to them (Jdg 1:28-36). While their fellow tribesmen shared their territories with the Canaanites, the Danites never conquered their allotted territory – the coastal region – inhabited by Amorites (and the Philistines) (cf Jdg 1:34; 18:1; see Esse 1992a:497-490). Apparently the Danites' bid for a treaty with the Amorites was not successful (cf Jdg 2:2). Judges 1:34 states that nothing could quell Amorite hostilities towards the Danites and they eventually succeeded in driving the tribe from the coastal plain. In Judges 18, the Danites are still searching for a territory of their own which leads them to steal the household gods and priest of Micah (Jdg 18:17-20) and would eventually conquer the city of Laish and rename it Dan where they set up a sanctuary and Micah's household idol (Jdg 18:29-31).

The Israelites' lack of fighting power and expertise is one of the reasons given for the unsuccessful settlement of Canaan (Jdg 1:19; 3:2; Mann 2011:53, 55). The Canaanites possessed chariots fitted with iron which made them formidable (Jdg 1:19). However, Adeyemo (297:2010) points out that the Israelites had before confronted enemies with iron chariots. The Egyptians had iron chariots and their army was probably more advanced and well-organized than the Canaanites (Adeyemo 2010:297). However, with the LORD fighting for Moses, Pharaoh's chariots and horsemen perished in the Red Sea (Ex 14:23-31; Adeyemo 2010:297). The LORD could have easily defeated the Canaanites if the Israelites had remained faithful to His covenant. YHWH had after all promised to be their strength, to fight on behalf of the Israelites and to drive out the Canaanites (Ex 23:27; cf Jos 10:42; 23:3, 10; cf 2.2.5). However, tribal disobedience fueled YHWH's resolution not to grant the Israelites total victory over the Canaanite populations (Jdg 2:1-3; LaHaye and Hindson 2011:68-69). Their monotheistic aversions spelled dire consequences for the covenantal lifestyle of the early Israelites and their relationship with YHWH.

b. Sharing the land

Deuteronomy 2:23 and Joshua 13:3 indicate an earlier time period prior to 12th century BC for Philistine occupation of Canaan. According to the biblical timeline, at the time the Israelites entered Canaan, the Philistines had already established dominance over the land and sea trade routes across the Mediterranean and within local borders which made the land of Canaan extremely prosperous (Richards 2004:178; Golden 2004:97; cf Smith 2007:325). The land itself was fecund, as indicated before, and its produces contributed greatly to the economic wealth of the Philistines. Bountiful harvests of wheat and barley were gathered from the fertile plains of the coastal valleys where the grains were cultivated. Other agricultural yields came from vineyards and olive groves, namely the wine and oil productions (Golden 2004:97; Stager 1998:345). As previously mentioned, the Israelites were promised by YHWH that He would remove the Canaanite nations and other occupants from the land, allowing them to dominate and prosper (Ex 23:27-28). However, due to the Israelites' decision to coexist with the inhabitants of the land against the divine

command, they were obligated to share its resources with them (Jdg 1:19-36) which incurred YHWH's judgement against them in Judges 2:1-3.

At the beginning of Israelite settlement of Canaan the Philistine cities were appropriated by the Israelites along with their wealth⁵³⁷ (Jdg 1:18; cf Jos 13:3). The Book of Judges indicates that at least for a while the Israelites enjoyed the wealth of the southern coastal land before it was reconquered by the Philistines (cf Jdg 14-16). Deuteronomy 8:9 alludes to iron and copper mining activities as indications of the wealth of Canaan which most probably were taken over by Israelites.⁵³⁸ During the 'oppression' described in Judges 13:1 it is most probable that trade relations continued to exist between the Philistines and the Israelites.

The Philistine system of trade included agricultural products as well as minerals and it is particularly trade in the latter that the archeological evidence reveals, the Philistines engaged in with the Israelites. According to recent studies, the Israelites traded basalt (for the use of agricultural tools such as grinding querns) and another lucrative commodity, asphalt, with the Philistines (Connan et al 2006:1784-1785).⁵³⁹ The fact that the asphalt trade occurred during inimical times between

⁵³⁷ The territory of the Philistines was actually apportioned to the tribe of Judah (Jos 15:2, 11-12, 45-47). Although the cities of Gaza, Ashkelon and Ekron were conquered by the Israelites (Jdg 1:18), Judges also relates that the Philistines later ruled over Israel (Jdg 14:4) and must therefore have gained these territories. According to Le Roux (2015:np) this (once again) confirms the narrative as one of the oldest in the Book of Judges.

⁵³⁸ Copper mines have been discovered in the Timna Valley and at Beersheba in the Negev. In the Timna Valley, strata IV-III, belonging to the 14th-12th century BC, signifies that mining operations were under Egyptian control. A subsequent Canaanite stratum II has also been identified (Amzallag 2018:127). Copper from the Beersheba mines were used to trade with other areas. The copper was fashioned into cultic objects and idols elsewhere (Borschel-Dan 2020). In the Timna Valley, the Temple of Hathor and numerous cult artefacts belonging to strata IV-III as well as the Canaanite tent-sanctuary in the subsequent strata II indicate the rich association of copper with the numinous. Votive inscriptions from the Hathor temple build at mines in Serabit el-Khadim amongst others evokes the deity 'as the green (= copper ore)' (Amzallag 2018:127). Some believe that the craftsmen at Beersheba were part of an elite guild of workers in the growing social hierarchy (Borschel-Dan 2020). The Israelites, on the other hand, were prohibited from using copper in a similar manner, such as crafting idols, worshipping them, or engaging in their trade. Such actions would have been deemed abhorrent in light of Exodus 20:3-4.

Archaeology attests to the production and use of iron in the form of small tools such as knives and weapons (arrowheads) as well as agricultural tools made with a copper and bronze composition. In the material culture the widespread use of iron weapons and agricultural tools occurs in the 11th century (Gottlieb 2010:90). Gottlieb (2010:90) remarks that a number of the iron artefacts such as the ploughshare from Tell el-Fûl, a hatchet from Tell el-Far'ah as well as a sickle and ploughshare from Beth Shemesh are cautiously dated to the Iron Age I since the items belong to ambiguous stratigraphic and thus chronological settings (cf Silver 1983:17-18). Judges 1:19 refers to the use of iron in military campaigns before the 11th century. Iron was also used with other expensive materials for decorative purposes and became a highly prized item among the elite classes (Erb-Satullo 2019:562-563; cf Na'aman 1992:174-181; Weeks 2012:298). In the worldview guiding the author/s of Judges and as they so clearly indicate in the book there was no amount of Canaanite strength or weaponry including iron chariots that could stand in YHWH's way of saving His people as He had promised (see 2.5.5). The author/s of Judges explicitly demonstrate in the book that no level of Canaanite power or weaponry, including iron chariots, could hinder YHWH from fulfilling His promise to save His people (Jdg 4; 5; see 2.5.5). Ultimately, it was the idolatry of His people that posed a greater danger.

⁵³⁹ Connan et al (2006:1784-1785) reveal that asphalt had multiple uses inter alia waterproofing pottery, reed baskets, it was used in agriculture, in buildings, the making of jewelry, and so on. Asphalt at Philistine Tel Miqne-Ekron was excavated as lumps or coatings on pot shards. Connan et al (2006:1784-1785) states that the basalt was imported in the 12th century BC from the Golan in the north to Philistia through Israelite territory possibly by Israelite traders. The

the Israelites and Philistines (cf Jdg 14-16) indicates that salable commerce exceeded socio-religious and political hostilities (Connan et al 2006:1784-1785).

Judges 14-15 further suggests the presence of an intermediate phase between war and peace for both the Israelites and Philistines, which perhaps could be characterized as a state of *détente*. *Détente* is defined as ‘a lessening of tension or hostility, esp. between nations, as through treaties, trade, agreements, etc’ (*Détente* 2024. Collins Dictionary). It appears that Samson’s interactions with the Philistine women in Judges 14 and 16 hint at the existence of certain agreements between the two groups (Jdg 14; 16; cf Jdg 3:5-6). The covenantal stipulations, on the other hand, proscribed any type of relationship between the Israelites and the Canaanite nations. However, the state of *détente* was occasionally disrupted by acts of hostility when a vengeful Samson battled against the Philistines and ultimately demolished the temple of their god, Dagon.

c. Illegal treaties

The Israelites were forbidden from making covenants with the Canaanites (Ex 23:32; 34:12; Dt 7:2; cf Jos 9:7, 15; cf 2.2.1.1b; 2.2.2.1). Treaties made between parties of unequal status (a king with a vassal) within local borders or on the international front (Sulyok 2017:2) were often a sign of the pervasiveness of unequal systems of control and authority in the ancient Near East, between a powerful king and a weaker vassal. In this early form of fiefdom the vassal could easily be exploited since he remained bound to the king for protection against hostile factions and times of shortages. Ancient Near Eastern treaties were always cultic in nature as the treaty ceremonies and oaths had to involve the gods without whom the agreements could not be authorized and concluded (see also Chapter Two; Mendenhall 1954:49-76; Mendenhall and Herion 1992:1179-1180). These treaties allied the Israelites with the Canaanite gods.

Intermingling with Canaanites held certain advantages for the Israelites. From their more developed neighbours, the former nomadic Israelite community acquired city maintenance and land management skills and probably also martial skills (cf Jdg 3:2).⁵⁴⁰ But the Israelites most probably also assimilated other Canaanite practices. Faust and Katz (2011:232) mention that in addition to their advanced urbanism and multifaceted culture, Philistine society was organized along socio-

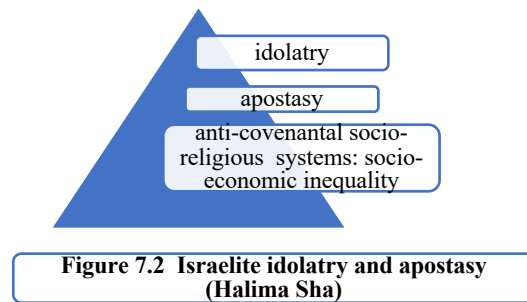
asphalt, imported between the 12th century and 7th century BC, came westward from the Dead Sea and similar to the basalt was transported through hostile Israelite territory. Judges indicates that although relations between the Israelites and Philistines were strained, tensions were more relaxed at certain periods in the pre-monarchy (cf Jdg 14-16) than at other times (cf Jdg 10); the former situation would have facilitated trade between the two territories as indicated above. Nevertheless, this act contradicted the covenant and instead highlighted the Israelites' defiance towards YHWH's command to fully possess the territory (see Jdg 2:1-3). It was imperative to avoid any form of coexistence with the inhabitants of the land, as it would inevitably lead to the temptation of idolatry and the assimilation of the Canaanites' cultic beliefs and way of life.

⁵⁴⁰ Over a century ago, Paton (1914:209) observed that the Israelites in all probability also adopted the language of the Canaanites in favor of their original Aramaic dialect. Paton refers to Hebrew as the language of the *Tell Amarna Letters* which is termed the language of Canaan in Isaiah 19:18.

economic hierarchical structures (see below). Philistine society was greatly ranked and divided into poor and lower classes and the upper tiers consisting of the noble and other elite ranks. Since the early Israelites copied the Canaanite lifestyle, it is probable that the adoption of the aforesaid socio-economic Canaanite practices led to some Israelite tribes being more affluent than others (cf Jdg 6:15; 8:2). In Judges, the wealth and ‘status’ of households such as Micah’s (cf Jdg 17:1-4) and that of tribal communities such as the Ephraimites (cf Jdg 8:2), as stated before, may have symbolized societal imbalances extant in the community.

d. Serving the Canaanite gods

With the Canaanite treaties came their cults and likely a seductive way of life which was centred on catering for the material needs of the Israelites that, apparently, benefitted certain groups more than others. Consequently, there are allusions to anomalous systems operative in the Book of Judges (Jdg 6:15; 8:2; 9:1-4; 10:4; 11:2-3; 12:8-9, 14) that include ranked social inequalities based on unequal wealth distribution. As implied in the texts these systems occurred during an epochal cycle of idolatry and apostasy which strongly indicates that there is a connection between these types of communal imbalances and covenantal infidelity (see Figure 7.2).



Given the foregoing, the following element created a context fitting for the development of wealth discrepancies: The Israelite innate propensity towards covenantal infidelity and attraction to the Canaanite gods (cf Jdg 2:16-19).

The raising up of Judges to deliver the Israelites from their idolatry indicate YHWH’s attempts to steer His people back to the covenantal lifestyle and practices (see 2.3.3; 3.2.2.1b; 6.3.4; 6.4.1-6.4.2).⁵⁴¹ Lindsey (1983:386) ascribes the ‘evil’ of the Israelites as ‘obviously their disobedience

⁵⁴¹ Soggin (1981:45-47); Walton, Matthews and Chavalas (2000:247); Amos (2020:238) provide details about the ‘deliverer’ Othniel (Jdg 3:9). Lindsey (1983:387); Dockery (2010:95); Younger (2020:151-153) report on Ehud. Soggin (1981:57-59) provides a description of Shamgar. Soggin (1981:102-161); cf Wiersbe (2007:443); Butler (2009:178); Chisholm (2013:298-300); Amos (2020:301-303) present information regarding Gideon. In Gideon’s time the Israelites have taken to temporary hiding in the mountains, caves and fortresses of the hill country. A number of fortresses have been discovered in the highlands of the Negev that supports the idea of fortified buildings offering a means of protection from invaders (Bienkowski and van der Steen 2001:24; cf Finkelstein 1984:189). Other judges were Jephthah (Jdg 12:7) and Samson (Jdg 14-16). YHWH also assigned Barak to deliver the Israelites from Canaanite oppression (see Soggin 1981:60-101; Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:249-252; cf Richards 2004:182).

to the Sinaitic Covenant, forsaking Yahweh to worship other gods' (cf Jdg 2:17, 19; cf Lewis 1979:28).⁵⁴² Despite the sporadic instances of deliverances, Judges overall tone is one of oppression and defeat (Smith 2018:3; see Table 2.2). The Israelites refused to let go of the Canaanite cults and associated lifestyle practises (cf Jdg 2:11-19, etcetera).

It is possible that the Canaanites invoked the treaties the Israelites had made with them during a period of Yahwistic worship which would catapult the tribes into another cycle of idolatry and oppression (Jdg 2:2-3). The fallibility of the Israelites' own hearts in upholding the covenantal lifestyle, however, must not be overlooked. This would have led them to serve the foreign gods for the advantages presented by the Canaanite treaties that they believed surpassed those of the Sinai covenant (Sulyok 2017:3-4).

The abandonment of the Sinai covenant and its code of ethics and social responsibilities towards others meant that the Israelites could incorporate those socio-economic hierarchies inherent in the Canaanite cultic and cultural lifestyle that they adopted. Consequently, the Israelites' worship of the Canaanite gods had a detrimental impact on the internal stability of the tribal society since, as stated before, tribal unity relied heavily on the Israelites' commitment to their distinct covenantal way of life. Richards (2004:178) observes that it would always be the Israelites' propensity to divert from their religion that made them weaker than their Canaanite neighbours. Modern society shows that the belief systems and ethics of a dominant group can be shared by the minority group (or integrated in their own religious and value structures) whilst the latter retain their own ethnic identity, language, and so on⁵⁴³ (Smolicz 1984:11). The man from the city of Bethel (Jdg 1:23-26) might have been part of a minority group or perhaps even a Hittite who possibly retained his ethnic identity in the larger Canaanite community. However, for the Israelites the risks of living among the existing (non-covenantal) dominant cultures were always greater than for other minority groups extant at that time and in the modern era. Divergences from their religion meant that their identity as YHWH's people potentially ceased to exist.

⁵⁴² The Hebrew term for evil עָוֹן – *ra'* (cf Jdg 2:11; 3:7, 12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1) denotes dissolute conduct or improper sacrifices made through idolatrous or syncretic worship. The author/s of Judges condemn the Israelites for engaging in anti-covenantal practices that were considered evil (cf Jdg 2:1-3; 3:17, 2, 4:1-3; 6:8-9; 10:10-14, etcetera). The Israelites demonstrated a persistent adherence to their evil customs and obstinate behaviour, despite the explicit censure of these practices as conveyed by the author/s of the Book of Judges (Jdg 2:10-19). Judges 2:19 notes that the Israelites 'refused to give up their evil practices and stubborn ways.' Among the aforementioned anti-covenantal practices included certain social imbalances in the Israelite community; the greed of wealthy groups (cf 8:2; 10:1-4) that probably led to the impoverishment of others (Jdg 17). Given the aforesaid, it can be argued that the condemnatory themes found in Judges (2:1-3; 6:8-10; 10:10-14) may be interpreted within the framework of social and economic disparity that was perceived as evil in the worldview of the author/s of Judges.

⁵⁴³ This is certainly pertinent to the Christian Coloured community, an ethnologically mixed minority people's group, that has retained their distinct ethnic identity while sharing the faith and values of the numerically larger white and black societies in South Africa. The same can also be said of the Muslim Coloured community in South Africa that has retained their ethnic and religious identity within the dominant Christian societies.

The emergence of socio-economic inequities within the Israelite society may have occurred autonomously, without external influences. Nevertheless, the strict adherence to the covenant would have effectively prevented these disparities from arising or eradicating them altogether. The rebellion of the non-priestly Levites, Korah, Dathan and Abiram in the Book of Numbers is a precedent for the desire and acquisition of wealth and status demonstrated by some Israelites in the Book of Judges (cf Jdg 8:2; 12:1). The disobedience of these rebels caused them to lose their freedom and ultimately their lives. It is only by YHWH's faithful promise and grace that the Israelites were spared the latter.

7.2.3 The meaning of freedom

The biblical prophets express a significant amount of criticism towards the threat of exploitation, which leads to a loss of freedom, caused by social and economic disparities (Bauckham 2002:10). Likewise, the author/s of Judges address the same concern through the theme of oppression and the sharing of the land with the Canaanite nations, which as stated before, YHWH had originally promised exclusively to the Israelites. The equitable distribution of the land among the Israelite tribes was a fundamental right that they possessed, ensuring their livelihood, as stipulated in their covenantal laws (see Bauckham 2002:10). In light of the aforesaid it can be said that the concept of freedom in Israel manifested itself through tangible means such as achieving economic autonomy and eliminating the fear of harm (Bauckham 2002:10-11; cf Jdg 6:1-6). It is important to acknowledge that this entailed the typical (benevolent) economic restrictions imposed by the legal system (the covenant) to prevent harm to individuals and their property. Bauckham states that the covenantal laws indicate that freedom was contingent upon tribal socio-economic rights. Economic restrictions put in place by the official religion and reinforced by the tribal economy (see below; see also 8.2.1; 8.2.1.1; cf 7.2.1) prevented the exploitation of the poor (Bauckham 1985:6).

However, the idolatry and oppression of the Israelites resulted in a sequence of events that created several detrimental economic constraints, ultimately stripping them of their economic autonomy. These limitations negatively impacted upon those (beneficial ones) imposed by the official religion and tribal economy. Bauckham (2002:10-11) asserts that the deprivation of economic autonomy rendered individuals susceptible to exploitation by others, frequently resulting in their eventual subjugation. The manifestation of this phenomenon – the loss of their economic self-sufficiency – is clearly evident in the Book of Judges, where the Israelites endure profound oppression at the hands of their adversaries. The oppression would have taken the form of harsh labour (Ex 1) and the relinquishment of their agricultural produce in the form of tribute and other taxes (Jdg 3:17), as stated before. The people endured harsh treatment (Jdg 4:1), intense fear (Jdg 5:7), deprivation of their land, livestock, and crops (Jdg 6:1-6), limitations on their personal mobility (Jdg 5:7), and constraints on their farming endeavors (6:11), which essentially affected their means of sustenance. These economic limitations were detrimental to the principles of equality embedded in their

covenant as they denied economically weaker tribes the right to enjoy the fruits of their land and labour and personal safety.

Bauckham (2002:11) further observes that maintaining a certain level of economic equality was crucial in order to prevent the wealthy classes from oppressing the less fortunate (Bauckham 2002:11; see below). The imposition of economic restrictions by the Midianites may have resulted in an unexpected turn of events, allowing the affluent Israelite classes to intensify the oppression of the less privileged. Judges states that the Israelites were severely impoverished by the invasion of the Midianites (Jdg 6:6). However, the Angel of YHWH finds Gideon labouring in a wine press, threshing wheat (Jdg 6:11). Presumably, Gideon's family possessed sufficient wealth to hire men or had enough servants to protect their harvest fields and conceal the wheat within the winepress. Unscrupulous families, on the other hand, might exploit the dire circumstances of starving families by selling their wheat at exorbitant rates. The military campaigns led by Gideon (Jdg 8:2) and Jephthah (Jdg 12:1) also presented an opportunity for the wealthier group of Ephraimites to exploit the less affluent Gideon and Jephthah, assuming that they would submit to their authority and dominance as a more prosperous tribe. Gideon acquired a substantial amount of gold plunder through warfare, enabling him to construct an ephod. It is possible that he desired to replace the altar of Baal with a sacred object that would generate income in offerings for his family and those associated with the (syncretic) cult at Ophrah as well as reinforcing his standing in the community as a mighty warrior (cf Jdg 6:11). The income of cult offerings was lost when Gideon demolished the cult site, marked by the presence of the altar of Baal and the Asherah pole. All the aforementioned incidents were based on the acquisition of wealth and social standing which ultimately had the potential to be detrimental to those from whom it was taken.

Given the foregoing it is evident that the author/s' ambition for upholding the covenant is also intertwined with their desire to preserve of the economic liberty of their fellow men and women in keeping with the covenant. The aforementioned represents the aspiration of YHWH for His people, which, as stated before, the writer/s ironically juxtapose by emphasizing the hardship and suffering endured by the Israelites in Judges 6:1-6, for instance. Therefore, according to the authors of Judges, the ultimate source of liberation for the Israelites lies in their unwavering belief in YHWH and their adherence to His covenant, while the opposite is the oppression mentioned earlier (cf Jdg 2:1-5). The fundamental principle of equality embedded in the covenant advocates for freedom for all Israelites, but as previously stated, faith in YHWH is the wellspring that enables them to truly experience it. Consequently, no individual should be exploited, as it contradicts YHWH's values of equality. Those individuals such as orphans and widows as well as resident foreigners who do not have economic autonomy are thus protected by the covenantal laws (see Bauckham 2002:9-11) in the ways described above (see 7.2.2). Subsequently, all Israelites and resident foreigners must not be exploited 'since it was precisely from oppression as landless aliens in Egypt that God redeemed Israel' (Ex 23:9; Lv 19:33-34; Bauckham 2002:11). In addition such

exploitation and landlessness would undermine the promise of YHWH to the patriarchs that the land is an eternal inheritance.

Hence, based on the mindset presented by the author/s of Judges, under the beneficial kingship of YHWH and observance of His laws, an individual's equality is defined as the freedom they experience, which is encapsulated by their rights as outlined below:

- the freedom to acquire and possess land and its resources (cf Jdg 1:15),
- to ability to supply life's basic needs (cf Jdg 6:6),
- freedom from oppression and exploitation (cf Jdg 6:15),
- the right to a family life (cf Jdg 11:37),
- the right to defend oneself, family and others when endangered (cf Jdg 4:21; 9:53), and
- enjoyment of the pleasures of life (cf Jdg 3:11, Bauckham 1985:6).

YHWH's kingship grants all Israelites equal freedom in life as far as it pertains to the points delineated above. However, these qualities of YHWH's kingship are not always reflected in Judges. Nevertheless, in the profoundly hierarchical societies of the ancient Near East (the Canaanite systems mentioned above) this is a novel concept (Bauckham 1985:6).

7.2.3.1 Equality and the rule of the king

In this section the attitude of the ancient Near king towards human rights and equality will be compared with that of the ideals of YHWH for equality in the Israelite community. This will provide an understanding of why the author/s of Judges ardently promoted Yahwism.

a. The ancient Near East

Wallenfels and Sasson (2000:86) comment that the ancient Near East was unfamiliar with the idea of human rights. People lived their lives never entirely autonomous of the power wielded over them by 'the gods, king, the state, the temples, the elite or a social class above one's own' (Wallenfels and Sasson 2000:86; cf 4.2.2.3a; 7.4.1.1a-b; 7.4.1.2d). Within this rigid hierarchical structure people could be considered to be commodities, as demonstrated by the slave trade (cf 7.4.1.1.b). They could just as easily be sold and bought as the produce of the land and the wares of the merchant (Monroe 2005:162).⁵⁴⁴ In light of the aforesaid, economic equality under the rule of the king and the elites was not a part of the daily existence of the lived reality of the ordinary Canaanites and similarly the lives of the idol-worshipping and oppressed Israelites as depicted in Judges.

⁵⁴⁴ Monroe also catalogues slaves, expert artisans and wives as gift-exchanges between royal families as evidence of the lack of regard and rights of people. The brutal treatment of Samson's wife by the Philistines and the subsequent killings of both her and her father demonstrate how people were also helpless, disempowered pawns in the machinations of those in positions of authority (Jdg 14:15, 20; 15:6).

In the ancient Near East the only form of governance was kingship (Dalley 2000:49). As the god's representative the king took on the responsibility of overseeing the welfare and prosperity of the people and cities, maintaining societal harmony and protecting the weak in society (Dalley 2000:49; Beckman 2005:346).⁵⁴⁵ Hammurabi's laws and the financial relief laws of successive kings did not guarantee that these laws were enforced in general nor did they uphold and address the causes and injustices of the vulnerable (see Robertson 2005:207). In fact, rulers did subject their lower-class citizens to abuses. How else could their power and status and wealth be preserved if not at the impoverishment of the weak and the powerless (see Robertson 2005:207)? Thus, as stated before, equality in the ancient Near East societies is unlikely.

The lower-tiered groups in society are equipped only with enough resources to maintain a workforce healthy enough for the gods, king and the elites which simultaneously serve to deprive the poor worker classes of their meagre resources in the form of offerings made to the gods (Snell 2010:4; cf 4.2.2.3a; 7.4.1.1a-b). In return, the common people received the 'pleasure' of participating in the ritual ceremonies and festivals (the harvest festival of Baal in Judges 9:27) for example, see also Sha (2017:211-218) that were, in a sense, ploys by the elites to keep the lower classes 'happy' and cared for by catering to their carnal natures and giving them a false sense of freedom and control over their lives. Robertson (2005:206) describes the bawdy cultic festivals funded by the Egyptian temples and officials in which the devotion of the masses to the gods was exploited through drunken merriness to bolster the 'psychological' ties between the elites and the subordinate classes.⁵⁴⁶

b. YHWH

Considering the foregoing, a human king, therefore, was not advisable for the Israelites (cf Dt 17:14-20; cf 7.2.3.1) The Israelites were required to establish a governing body of elders, a circle of leaders that included judges, prophets and priests. This council was responsible for ensuring that administrative, religious, and judicial matters were conducted in line with the covenant and with justice, mercy, and wisdom (cf Dt 16:18-20).⁵⁴⁷ Deuteronomy 17:14 and 1 Samuel 8:10-20

⁵⁴⁵ Royal inscriptions and annals from Mesopotamia and Egypt are sources that offer insight into the nature of ancient Near Eastern monarchy. In the Sumerian king's list, for instance, the divine origins of the monarchy are indicated (Liver and Sperling 2007:163-169). McKenzie [sa]; Smith (1982:18-38) provide an expanded view of the subject of kingship in the ancient Near East and the Old Testament

⁵⁴⁶ The cultic festivals and their regularity (rewards for the commoners) are stated in a prayer by a Hittite king to the god Telepinus in which the king mentions a festival of the month, the new moon festivals, and summer and winter and spring as well as a festival of entreaty that are more numerous than any other land (Goetze 1969b:397). The cultic festivals were fundamentally occasions of rampant food and wine overconsumption in simulation of the banquets of the gods (Speiser 1969:69) and the drunken merriment of the gods (Biggs 1969:606). The festivals did indeed provide alleviation from the long hours of labour. However, the poor and working class returned to the same arduous life when the festivals were over and in which their basic human rights were denied.

⁵⁴⁷ In my master's dissertation, I have discussed a theocratic and particularly a heterarchical Israelite social organization which granted women (in their households) the same authority as men (in the public domain) during cycles of faithful adherence to the covenantal lifestyle. Now, I wish to expand the idea of a heterarchical Israelite society as an

explicitly ascribe the demand for a human king, later, by the Israelites, to their desire to emulate the ‘foreign nation’ (cf Jdg 2:1-3; Jackson 2000:149). Accordingly, the king will take their sons to ‘make them serve with his chariots and horses’ and also run in front of the chariots; that is ‘conscription’ (1 Sm 8:11; Jackson 2000:149). The king may likewise demand workers for ‘administrative, agricultural, manufacturing and domestic work’ (1 Sm 8:12-13; Jackson 2000:149). The king will ‘take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive groves and give them to his attendants’ – ‘confiscation’, he will take ‘a tenth of your grain and of your vintage’ and livestock – ‘taxation’ for the benefit of his civil servants (1 Sm 8:14-15, Jackson 2000:149). The king may also demand servants and farm animals for labour and enslave the Israelites (1 Sm 8:16-17; Jackson 2000:149).

Bauckham (1985:6) argues that the perils of kingship rule are communicated in Samuel’s message: ‘you shall be his slaves’ (1 Sm 8:17). Samuel argued that the people’s desire for a human king ‘like all the nations’ would place them under conditions of rule similar to the oppressive tyrannical authority that typified monarchy in the ancient Near East (Bauckham 1985:6). Bauckham (1985:6) observes that the political contracts entered into with the Canaanites were absolutely in violation of the codes of equality inscribed in the covenant (Bauckham 1985:6). In the worldview of the author/s of Judges, these anti-covenantal treaties allied the Israelites with the Canaanites, their systems of rule and governance as well as a burgeoning hierarchical social structure that posed a great threat to the covenantal laws and their ethos of equality (see above, 7.2.2). Hence, the perspective guiding the writer/s of Judges can be comprehended through the lens of the author/s criticism of the worship of idols by the Israelites, which included these opposing Canaanite systems that aimed to prioritize specific groups over others (see also below).

7.2.3.2 *Unequal social structures*

Embedded in the text of Judges, is the absence of rigorous compliance with the covenant in the Israelite communities which gives rise to adverse socio-economic structures that were probably influenced by comparable systems extant in Canaanite culture (see 7.2.3). This effect can be attributed to the Canaanite treaties (see 7.2.2.1) and the adoption of the Canaanite deities (see 7.2.2.1d; Jdg 2:1-3; 6:13; 8:2).⁵⁴⁸ The treaties mentioned above had profound and far-reaching consequences for the Israelites, making it challenging for the author/s of Judges to effectively

arrangement that not only developed to ensure the survival of the Israelite communities on the highlands but also as part of the approved covenantal lifestyle. A heterarchical system of governance also ensured the equality of wealth distribution as all participants within the Israelite economy were regarded as equal and therefore had an equal right to all resources. This system would have held the approval of the author/s of Judges.

⁵⁴⁸ Some families were well-heeled such as the family of Micah and his mother and certain Israelite leaders (cf Jdg 10:3; 12:8-9, 14) while others less so. This could also be the result of geography since the land was divided into different geographical regions and thus the economy was divided (Nam 2020:177). This may suggest that some tribes were economically stronger than others and thus the socio-economic landscape differed from tribe to tribe (Nam 2020:177). The theory put forward by Nam is that the tribal economy was localized and not ‘formalized/official economies’ such the great city states of the ancient Near East.

counteract their influence. These treaties, as indicated before, catered to the need of the Israelites to worship the Canaanite deities, a need which seemingly outweighed their devotion and allegiance to YHWH (cf 2.2.2.1).

Cultic objects found in workplaces such as in the kitchens of Iron Age houses, storage bins and courtyards demonstrate the idolatry of the early Israelites (Nemet-Najat 1998:92; Willett 2001; Meyers 2005:29-35; 41-45; cf Albertz and Schmitt 2012:80-84).⁵⁴⁹ Canaan had sufficient resources for all tribes. It is plausible that the Israelites may have harboured insufficient trust in YHWH and did not fully rely on His commitment to bless them with prosperity and abundance. Consequently, they may have sought to acquire the wealth of Canaan independently, thereby explaining the establishment of treaties with the Canaanites and the adoption of their gods. The establishment of socio-economic disparities among the tribes may have been influenced by additional factors.

According to some, equality tends to disintegrate as a group grows bigger and progresses towards economic prosperity and surplus (Flannery 1998:xviii; Holladay 1998:368-398). Land and resources may be acquired and allocated disproportionately by group members who value their own needs and personal or familial status as more important than that of the collective (see Taylor 2013:51; see also below). This may have been the case when Achsah required additional land from her father which benefitted her family and the clan she married into more than others (see Jdg 1:14-15).

Bloch-Smith and Nakhai (1999:76) observe that ‘rare imported vessels’, evidence of ‘metallurgical specialization’ at certain sites and a number of inscribed arrowheads⁵⁵⁰ (see also Cross 2003:52; 1980:1-20; Holladay 1998:377; see Figure 7.3) as well as ‘seven inscriptions’ support the existence of affluency and literacy in some families and people (cf Jdg 8:14, 24-26; 10:3-4; 17:1-4).

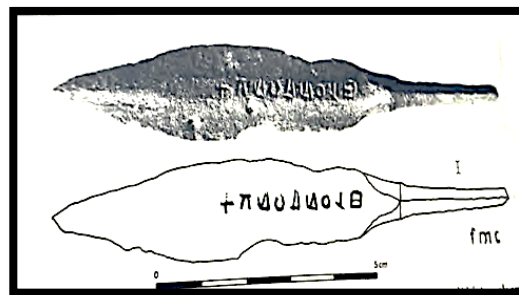


Figure 7.3 Incribed arrowhead from 11th century BC Judah (Holladay 1998:377)

⁵⁴⁹ Although many of these items were discovered at Israelite Iron Age II sites, the idolatry of this era was a transferred one, from the Iron Age I. See Willet (2001); Albertz and Schmitt (2012:75-84, 87-91) for a description of these cultic objects and the sites where they were uncovered.

⁵⁵⁰ The bronze arrowheads are inscribed with the names of military men (Cross 2003:52). Accordingly, Cross considers these arrowheads as designating a military elite (see also Cross 1980:1-20).

The material evidences reveal that certain individuals and families possessed more resources, arable land and water being of prime importance (cf Jdg 1:14-15; 10:3-4; 12:9, 14; see Simkins 2004:4). Faust concurs that the archaeological record demonstrates that Israelite society was not unstratified or truly egalitarian (Faust 2013:45-49, 62-63; 2004:177; cf Bloch-Smith and Nakhai 1999:76). The presence and quantity of grain silos associated with Iron Age I households reveal the ability for amassing agrarian surplus. This evinces that some households probably accumulated an inordinate amount of wealth, as stated before, that distinguished them from poorer ones (Holladay 1998:377-378). It was precisely to prevent the aforesaid situation that the covenantal laws and tribal economy had economic restrictions to ensure that resources are shared among the tribes (see 7.2.3). While YHWH promised abundance to His people, they were also expected to exercise moderation (cf Dt 17:14-20). As previously indicated, in the mindset of the author/s of Judges, the ultimate goal of the Israelites was to be devoted to YHWH and serve Him as His representatives, rather than accumulating vast wealth or satisfying their own selfish desires (see 2.2.2.1). Excessively wealthy households would have faced severe condemnation from the author/s of Judges for their greed in hoarding their surplus instead of making it accessible to the larger society (cf 7.2.1; 7.2.3).

a. Avarice

Nakanose (2004:37-38) remarks: ‘There can be little doubt that agricultural production varied according to local conditions since all villages were not equally endowed with techno-environmental and societal advantages. ‘This probably set the stage for the emergence of gaps in economic power among the village communities and/or the tribes’ (cf Jdg 6:13; 8:2). According to Nakanose (2004:38), the emergence of these ‘gaps’ should also be considered in the context of trade (see 7.2.3). The local and regional commerce of affluent villages experienced an increase in income due to the marketing of agricultural surpluses, including olives and olive oil, as well as grapes and wine. However, the archaeological evidence suggests that the early Israelites successfully transformed arid terrain into productive agricultural fields (Scheepers 2010:281-301; cf Callaway 1992:125-130). In the mindset informing the author/s of Judges, YHWH had after all promised His blessings of abundance to His people. Since the Book of Judges encompasses the author/s belief in the supernatural and miraculous, the author/s expected that the tribesmen and women would trust YHWH to supply them with the means to enhance the fertility of the land. It is, thus, very likely that YHWH would bless His people because of these harsh conditions in the highlands by giving them the skills and fortitude to till the land (Scheepers 2010:281-301). As a result, less wealthy communities had the same opportunities as affluent ones to acquire technological expertise and abilities that could improve productivity. While these less affluent communities may not have produced as much surplus as wealthier groups, they still enjoyed a sufficient level of prosperity to sustain a livelihood of relative abundance (cf Jdg 8:2; see below).

According to Nakanose (2004:37), the greed of rich communities indicates the growing presence of societal imbalances that created a gap for the destabilization of the tribal economy and covenantal lifestyle. The Ephraimites, for example, utter grievances against Gideon (Jdg 8:1-3) and Jephthah (Jdg 12:1) because they did not receive a share of the war booty gained from the Midianites and the Ammonites respectively.⁵⁵¹ The Ephraimites complained to Gideon that they had not been called up to fight against the Midianites which meant that they could not share in the war booty (Jdg 8:2; Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:256). Judges 8:2 clarifies that the Ephraimites were motivated by greed and their desire for a bigger part of the war. Gideon states: ‘What have I done now in comparison with you? *Is not the gleaning of the grapes of Ephraim better than the vintage of Abiezer?*’ (Jdg 8:2). Judges 8:3 elucidates that the Ephraimites did receive the gains from the war against the Midianite military leaders, Oreb and Zeeb: ‘God gave Oreb and Zeeb, the Midianite leaders, into your hands. What was I able to do compared to you?’ Walton, Matthews and Chavalas (2000:256) interpret the text: Gideon was able to allay their animosity by remarking that the Ephraimites enjoyed greater abundance from the land than Gideon’s own tribe and that they were able to overpower the leaders of the Midianites which was much more than Gideon could ever do. Walton, Matthews and Chavalas (2000:256) further state that the military activity of the sort conducted by Gideon could be expected to yield available territory that would previously have been controlled by the Midianites. The Ephraimites did not want to be left out should there be apportionment of additional territory. It is reasonable to assume that Gideon’s military actions will release territory that the Midianites would have previously held under control. If new territory was divided up, the Ephraimites did not want to be left out (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:256). While Gideon was able to appease the Ephraimites, the same complaint raised with Jephthah leads to civil war (Jdg 12:1-6). Ephraim had not received any of the lands taken from the Ammonites, although their allotted land was located across the Jordan from the territory of the Ammonites (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:264). Micah’s cupidity for capital and its accumulation by dishonest means reflect one way in which an individual could amass wealth. This is not to say that other people could not have gained wealth through mere hard work.

b. Social strata

The author/s of Judges’ subtle critique of wealthy factions can be observed in their narratives, where they compare the less affluent and extremely poor members of Israelite society. For instance,

⁵⁵¹ The Ephraimites complained about not being called to fight against the enemy. This might sound strange since a possible tribal reaction would be to avoid becoming embroiled in a war as indeed certain tribes did in the previous war against the Canaanites (Jdg 4-5). Judges 6:35 describes the tribes of Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun and Naphtali being called to take up arms against the Midianites. Further in Judges 7:24, Gideon does summon the Ephraimites to war against the Midianites. See also Judges 5:14 in which passage, Deborah narrates that only some of the Ephraimites joined in the battle against the Canaanite forces. It is possible that only some Ephraimites were involved in the battle while the rest refused or ignored the call to arms in the war against the Midianites. However, Judges 7:24 does state *all* the Ephraimites took part in the battle against the Midianite leaders Oreb and Zeeb. Some commentaries from the 19th centuries and before state that the Ephraimites complaint as originating from pride.

Judges 6:13 and 8:2 highlight varying levels of prosperity among affluent tribes, specifically contrasting Gideon with the Ephraimites (see 7.2.3.1a). Despite Gideon's assertions that his clan is 'the weakest in Manasseh' and that he himself is 'the least' in his family (Jdg 6:15), Judges 6:27 records that he had a sizable number of servants – more than ten – which suggests that he was a respectably wealthy man. However, the Ephraimites is shown to be wealthier and for this reason is arrogant and greedy enough to attempt to exploit even the Gideon's clan (cf Jdg 8:2).

Jephthah's lower socio-economic status is juxtaposed with the judges who preceded him, such as Jair of Gilead (Jdg 10:4-5), his half-brothers as well as the elders of Gilead. The many sons of Jair of Gilead and his numerous donkeys indicate his wealth status. The thirty sons riding on thirty donkeys are shown that Jair could afford to marry more than one wife. In the ancient Near East and in early Israel riding donkeys was a sign of nobility or a high socio-economic standing. If Jair possessed excessive riches, as suggested by the text, it would have contradicted the covenant laws for leaders, which prohibited the accumulation of wealth among other things (cf Dt 17:14-20; cf 7.2.2; 7.4.1.1b). It is probable that Jair and his household employed a sizeable workforce of servants and helpers in a large living compound in the town of Kamon where Judges (10:5) relates he was buried. It is likely that slaves or debt-slaves (see 7.4.1.1b) assisted in the management of the household. The presumed wealth of Jair may be revealing of the Israelites' adoption of the prevailing societal norms (of the Canaanites) along with other revealing facts that are mentioned subsequently: The wealth of Micah which may have been acquired via deceptive means is set by the author/s of Judges against the poverty of the Levite in Judges 17 (see 7.3.1.1). Furthermore, the disempowerment of the concubine, the girls of Jabesh Gilead, and the girls of Shiloh is counter-balanced by the power and authority of the men who exploit and abduct them in the respective narratives.

The social ranking system referred to in the Book of Judges may have comprised (particularly in an idolatrous cycle): wealthy landowners among clans and tribes (cf Jdg 6:15; 8:2 17:6; 19:1); the privileged priests at Shiloh (cf Jdg 21:27-28); the elders that formed an elite class of literate religious and law members; merchants and workers in skilled trades in the cities; the military men (cf Jdg 7:1-25); farmers (cf Jdg 13); the nomad/landless and the poor (cf Jdg 17:7-13); and foreigners (Golden 2004:134; cf Bloch-Smith and Nakhai 1999:76).⁵⁵² Leadership and military positions may have led to the acquirement of elite status within the associated social classes (Jdg 10:1-4; 12:8-14; Holladay 1998:379-380; cf Cross 2003:52). Wealthy and powerful families could control the labour and agricultural market to maintain their wealth and positions of power whilst the priests

⁵⁵² The lack of Iron Age I burials may reveal that poor people were interred separately in small unpreserved grave sites while the affluent may have been buried in (mostly undiscovered) rock chambers analogous to the rock tombs discovered at 8th to 7th century BC Khirbet el-Qom (Golden 2004:134).

and elders controlled the social and religious practices to maintain their authority in the community (Holladay 1998:378; Simkins 2004:4).

As indicated before the lifestyle of the Canaanites particularly that of their affluent and powerful elites was probably envied by certain Israelites who desired rise to similar circles (see Dt 28:1-68; see below). Economic abuses and exploitation at the hands of the rich and powerful families deprived other households of their rights leading to their impoverishment, as previously indicated (Dt 28:16-18). Simkins (2004:4) remarks that ‘it is not uncommon for a kinsman to exploit his own kin for his personal or patrimonial advantage.’ Holladay (1998:378) describes the early Israelite community (Iron Age I-II) as one that ‘evolved into a society with wealth, rather than class distinction.’ As mentioned previously, the provisions within the code of law for the offerings of the poor are predictive of future social inequality based on the uneven accumulation of wealth (see Lv 5:7, 11) and resultant development of a master-servant relationship in Israel (see Ex 21:2-11; cf Jdg 17).⁵⁵³

The subsequent segments will analyze the actions of an apparently poor Levite and the gender-based injustices perpetrated against a woman who was deprived of her rightful authority and respect. The actions of the Levites in Judges 17 and 19 would have epitomized a way of life that opposed the covenant, where individuals acted according to their own desires, a lifestyle that the author/s of Judges sought to vehemently eradicate by consistently striving to restore the covenant and its principles.

7.3 SOCIAL INJUSTICE

7.3.1 The Levites

7.3.1.1 *The Levite in Judges 17: a paradigm of social inequality in Judges*

Perhaps not on the same grand scale as the proposed Canaanite priests at the Shechem Temple (cf Jdg 9:27; see Figure 7.4), a Levite becomes a religious member of the household of Micah (Jdg 17:7-13 see Figure 7.5). His rise to priesthood would have been considered a sacrilegious act by the author/s of Judges, firstly, because priests came solely from the Aaronic lineage and secondly, syncretism was outlawed by the covenant (cf Ex 20:4). In Judges 18:30, the Levite is identified as Jonathan, a descendant of Moses from the clan of Gershom and therefore, belonged to a special tribe of people, to whom no territory but only cities were allocated (Nm 35:1-8; see 7.2.2).

⁵⁵³ Golden (2004:134-135) comments on the various social classes indicated in the Old Testament.



Figure 7.4 Artist impression of the Shechem Temple (Baloch 2017)

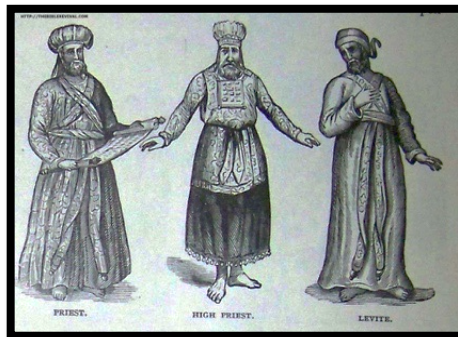


Figure 7.5 The Levites (The Holman Bible 1890)

The Levite tribe was elected for sacred duties in the tabernacle at Shiloh (see further below); however, as stated before, only men from the Aaronic line could serve as כֹּהֲנִים (*kōhānīm* – priests) (Nm 3:2-4, 10; 18:1-7). The Levite, therefore, assumes an illicit religious status; כֹּהֵן (*kōhēn* – priest) in Micah’s domestic shrine (Jdg 17:10-11; 18:4; see Wong 2006:90).

Men born into the clans of the Levite Kohathites, Gershonites and Merarites, were elected to serve the priests as helpers (Nm 3:5).⁵⁵⁴ The non-*kohanim* Levites were also tasked to oversee and guard the tabernacle and its equipment and internal articles (Nm 18:2-4, 6, 21). Between the ages of twenty-five and fifty the Levites were eligible for service at the tabernacle (Nm 8:24; cf Nm 4:3, 21, 30; cf 2 Chr 31:17). The Levite, in Judges 17, is described as a נָעָר – *na‘ar* (young man or servant) (Jdg 17:7). It is most probable that *na‘ar* is used in Judges to denote the position of the Levite as a young assistant to the *kohanim* in Shiloh. Conventional interpretations of the word assign a humble status to the *na‘ar* in Israelite society. An analysis of the term in the Old Testament and its Ugaritic equivalent has led MacDonald (1976:147-149) to conclude the opposite: that it denotes someone of elevated status in Israelite society.

Macdonald (1976:147) renders conventional translations of *na‘ar* as a young person of menial position as ‘inadequate’ producing a ‘false impression of the person involved’ (see MacDonald

⁵⁵⁴ Numbers 3:14-37 and 4:1-45 provide a detail account of the various responsibilities of the Levites.

1980:39:71).⁵⁵⁵ Accordingly, the Levite is someone of high standing in the community and any association with the elite group to which he belonged enhanced one's position in society. The Levite in Judges 17 evidently is suffering economic duress for he accepts Micah's offer for employment. Has he been reduced to an inferior status within his own group or has he been expelled from it? Nevertheless, Micah hires the Levite to be his priest for having a Levite albeit a poor one officiating in his shrine would promote his standing in the community and somehow legitimise his house sanctuary (see also MacDonald 1976:154). The presence of a 'legitimate' Levite priest would thus attract devotees and naturally Micah would benefit economically from their offerings made to his shrine. It is likely that the author/s of Judges presents the unequal socio-economic relationship between Micah and the Levite as a reflection of the wider community, a sign of social imbalances operative in a divergent Israelite society (cf Jdg 17:6) that Israelites may have inherited upon their worship of the foreign gods. Perhaps the Levite is part of a generation who is not fully cognizant of who YHWH is and their own identity in relation to the covenant God of the Israelites. The author/s of Judges might have ascribed the aforesaid situation to the neglect of the priests to fulfill their (teaching) duties that could have played a role in why a generation 'grew up who knew neither the LORD nor what he had for Israel' (Jdg 2:10; cf 2.2.2.1). The author/s of Judges, in addition, perceived that at the lack of a strong and wise leadership could be the reason 'why everyone did as he saw fit (Jdg 17:5; 21:25).

The air of mystery surrounding the Levite further deepens upon the discovery that he comes from Judah in Bethlehem which is not one of the allocated Levite towns (see Jos 21:1-41). The question persists as to why he is seeking accommodation and employment despite being a member of an esteemed cohort of individuals (see the aforementioned). This is an uncommon situation for a Levite. The Levites were not allocated land for YHWH was to be their portion and inheritance, that is, the Levites were to receive the tithes that the Israelites offered to YHWH at the tabernacle (Nm 18:20-21). Therefore, at the sanctuary in Shiloh, all the needs of the Levite would have been met (Wong 2006:90). Alternatively, for a livelihood, he could have farmed the land around the Levite cities. According to Numbers, within the territories of the eleven remaining tribes, the Levites were apportioned forty-eight walled cities and land around the cities for their livestock (Nm 35:1-8). Accordingly, the Levites' livelihood that was derived from the obligatory tithes and the farming of the land near their allocated cities would have been secure (cf Lv 27:32-33).

It is conceivable that the Levite served as a traveling ancillary priest or teacher of the law. Judges indicates that people worshipped at household or domestic shrines as well (cf Jdg 6:25-26; 8:27; 17:5 and 18:30-31). Given that the Levites served as the priests' helpers (Nm 3:5-7) it is

⁵⁵⁵ MacDonald (1976:147-170) discusses the various meanings of *na'ar* in the Old Testament and a discussion of his idea that *na'ar* was applied to a (young) man of noble lineage (cf MacDonald 1980:39-71).

conceivable that they travelled to these remote outposts and read the law in the modest house shrines dedicated to YHWH in place of the priests themselves (see also Wright 1985:248).

Mickelson (2011:183) asserts that the Levite in Judges 17, certainly was a traveller who became a priest in Micah's household shrine. Smith (2018:196) believes that because Micah had a priest but there is no mention of an altar, sacrifice, or incense in honour of these domestic gods, it is likely that Micah initially meant for his images to be used in divination rather than worship (see also Younger 2020:422-423). Since the Levite was connected to the priesthood at the Tabernacle perhaps in Micah's mind the Levite could be useful as a diviner? The Danites consulting the Levite to divine the outcome of their journey (Jdg 18:5) may provide collaboration for Smith's opinion.

Nevertheless as part of the literate population of early Israel, the Levites (cf Jdg 17:7-11; 18:3-6, 15, 18-20; 19; 20:4-7) probably assumed itinerant positions as instructors and readers of the law and to provide an interpretation of it (Trotter 2001:42-43). These tasks of the Levites may be assumed from possible parallel practices in a later period in the history of the Israelites. Trotter (2001:43) reports on the portrayal of 'priests, Levites and other royal official as instructors authorized by Jehoshaphat travelling through Judah teaching from the book of the law' (2 Chr 17:7-9). Trotter (2001:43) observes that it is doubtful that this description of itinerant legal professors represents an actual historical event from the ninth century BC. He continues by saying that the role of Levites as law instructors is only a Second Temple phenomenon. However, considering the fact that the Levites were the assistants of the priests and roughly fifty percent of the early Israelites lived in rural areas, in tiny villages or hamlets around where the farmers 'established fields and grew their crops and orchards,' the Levite could have been an itinerant teacher of the law (Gibson 2007:471-472; see also above).

For some enigmatic reason the Levite accepted an illegal priesthood position in an idolatrous בֵּית אֱלֹהִים (*'ēlōhīm bêt*), a shrine of gods. Micah's house was possibly in Bethel or in the general area of the city (Hamlin 1990:146). The use of the term *beth elohim* or house of gods may be deliberate to indicate the idolatry in one of the Israelites' cultic cities.

In the agreement between Micah and the Levite, Wong (2006:90) observes that the Levite betrayed 'an honor that once distinguished his people from the rest of Israel:' their dedication to YHWH when their fellow Israelites worshipped the golden calf in the desert (Ex 32:4, 8; see Macdonald (1976:154). What could have reduced the Levite to such grave unfaithfulness that he would take up a position as a priest in a syncretic house shrine? It either reflects the Levite's own state of idolatry and recklessness, signs of the times he lived in (cf Jdg 17:6), desperation for an income upon the neglect of priesthood and helpers at Shiloh or his expulsion from the Levite class. All of these reasons are possible as the covenant lifestyle collapsed. An example of the refusal to assist the Israelites with the basic necessities of life is the refusal of Gideon's request for provisions by

the leaders of Succoth and Peniel (see also 7.4.1.1b). It is thus more likely that the Levite becomes Micah's priest to escape penury.

The Levite, prior to the encounter with Micah, was a roamer probably for quite some time (see above). Have the priests at Shiloh continued to enjoy the prestige and privileges that coincide with their positions and disregarded their Levite helpers? Priests and judges were not beyond moral flaws in their character and judgement as Samson and later the sons of the priest Eli demonstrate (Jdg 8:17; 11:34; 14-16; 1 Sm 2:12-17). The result is the exploitation and neglect of the ordinary Israelites by those in power and as indicated by the roaming Levite. These Israelites may have expelled from their own circles as they were viewed as an unacceptable member and, subsequently rendered homeless (cf Jdg 17:7).

The astonishment of the Danites at hearing his voice and their intense questioning indicate that the Levite is an acquaintance (Jdg 18:3). It is probable that they met him during his time served at the tabernacle which further emphasizes the atypical situation of the Levite. Be that as it may, it is clear that he has not received his share of the prescribed tithe or any provisions from farming which brings him to the door of Micah's idolatrous household (Jdg 17:7). It is ironic that the employment of the Levite leads to the establishment of an idolatrous shrine that became 'one of the major rival shrines to Yahweh's central sanctuary in Shiloh' (Boda and Schwab 2017). The Danites would come to appropriate 'Micah's unorthodox, whimsical priest' and the prohibited cultic objects and utilize them in the improper cult shrine that they establish as a rival to the sanctuary at Shiloh (Jdg 18:17-20; 30-31; Fee and Hubbard 2011; Pressler 2002:236). Micah's idolatrous shrine symbolizes the fragmentation of the religious life of the early Israelite (Pressler 2002:236).

According to Pressler (2002:236) Micah's idolatrous shrine symbolizes the fragmentation of the religious life of the early Israelites. Similar to the Danites, the Levite is evidently seeking a fresh start in life. It is therefore quite ironic when the author/s of Judges recounts that, in his pursuit of a new and more fulfilling life, the Levite agrees to become a priest in a shrine that symbolizes the fractured state of the Israelite community's religion. However, both the Levite and the broader Israelite society share one commonality: they are disconnected from the life that YHWH had originally intended for them.

The non-priestly Levites served the community, inter alia, as educators of the law (see Figure 7.6). Their teachings served as mnemonics to assist in the remembrance of the laws and loyalty in the worship of YHWH.



Figure 7.6 A Levite reading the Law (1873 illustration) (Foster 1880)

The oracles delivered by the Levite to the Danites (cf Jdg 18:6) were probably deceptive since only a legitimate priest could divine an outcome according to the approved methods (cf Jdg 1:1-2; 20:26-28; cf 5.3; 5.4.1-5.4.2). The statement in Judges 17:6 is very pertinent to the actions of Micah and the Levite. The author/s of Judges narrate that the Levite and his male descendants were priests of the Danite tribe until ‘the time of the captivity of the land’ (Jdg 18:30). It appears that the Levite ultimately discovered a position of wealth and prestige in his life. Nevertheless, the author/s of Judges reveal that he persisted in utilizing the idol Micah had created while the house of the LORD was in Shiloh, suggesting that despite his favorable circumstances, his life remained separated from the one true God due to his syncretic practices.

7.3.1.2 *The Levite in Judges 19: a paradigm of evil and social injustice in Judges*

Similar to the Levite in Judges 17 and 18, the one in Judges 19 is a roamer. Judges 19:1 tells us that there was no king in Israel. Similarly, Judges 17:6 and 21:25 state that Israel was without a king and further specify that everyone did as they pleased. Judges 19:1 provides a background for the events that follow: acts of lawlessness, immorality, social injustice, and wickedness, the rape and death of the Levite's wife.

It is challenging to pinpoint the precise nature of the relationship between the Levite and his concubine in Judges 19. Judges 19:1 narrates that the Levite ‘took a concubine from Bethlehem in Judah.’ Exum (1993:177) mentions the peculiar absence of a first wife in the narrative. A primary wife’s infertility (if the Levite had one) would have given the Levite a lawful reason to take a concubine as a (secondary wife) (Marsman 2003:140-141; cf Wright 1992:761-769). According to Klein (1989:162-163), the Levite probably could not afford the dowry for a wife. ‘He pretends to be more affluent than he is.’ He married the concubine for ‘sexual gratification or housekeeping (or both)’ (Klein 1989:162-163). The idea that the Levite might have loved the concubine is refuted by the horrible conclusion of the narrative.

Judges 19:2 states that the woman was unfaithful and left him to return ‘to her parents’ home in Bethlehem.’ Szpek (2007) remarks that as a member of the priestly lineage, the Levite’s life had to be impeccable. The term ‘unfaithful’ in Hebrew, which is זָנָה (*zānā*), carries the connotation

of engaging in fornication, being a harlot, or playing the harlot. This word is commonly used in the Bible to refer to both physical unfaithfulness and idolatry (as seen in passages such as Genesis 38:15; Exodus 34:15; Leviticus 17:7; Deuteronomy 31:16, and Joshua 2:1; see Blue Letter Bible 2024). The Arabic equivalent of this word, *zānā*, shares the same meaning as its Hebrew counterpart (see Blue Letter Bible 2024. *zānā*). However, the Septuagint states that the concubine ‘became angry with him’ (see Tribble 1984; cf Burney 2004:459; Boling 1992b:1107-1117).⁵⁵⁶ It seems that the second translation is better suited for the given circumstances. On the other hand, *zānā* could also be interpreted as idolatry, suggesting that the concubine had engaged in an unlawful religious practice. In either interpretation, the woman is spared and allowed to continue living.

Stone (2009b) remarks that the concubine left her husband for an unspecified reason. According to Deuteronomy 22:21, the penalty for adultery is stoning to death. However, the Levite did not punish his wife as was his right by law. This means that she was not guilty of adultery. Klein (1989:163) suggests that the reason might be that he would have been left without a wife ‘for whatever reason.’ His needs were more important than YHWH’s laws (Klein 1989:163). Exum (1993:177-178) also believes that the concubine could not have been promiscuous for her husband would not have gone back to woo her. Stone (2009b) presents the idea that due to the fact that men typically initiated divorce, her decision to leave her husband led to the perception that she was a prostitute. Webb (1225-1226), on the other hand, argues that the use of *zānā* is metaphorical rather than literal. Fewell (1998:81; cf Lockyer 1967:188) supports the notion that her departure may have been a result of pre-existing abuse in the relationship prior to Judges 19:25-29 (cf Frolov 2013:325). It is possible that the husband displayed an overall lack of care and concern towards the concubine.

Neither the Levite nor the concubine are named. Unlike the Levite who was an honoured member of society, the concubine’s social status is ambiguous (Szpek 2007; Tribble 1984:74). Tribble (1984:74) finds her to be an inferior and unequal individual, ‘virtually a slave.’ It is probable; however, she was a secondary wife with certain rights (Stone 2009a; cf Cundall and Morris 2011:1428-1429; Szpek (2007) concurs and points to Judges 19:4, 7, 9 as evidence that the concubine was a second wife (cf Fewell 1998:81). The concubine was presumably a free and autonomous woman asserting her right to walk out on her husband and audacious enough to venture back to her father’s house even if her actions in the mindset of the author/s of Judges would have viewed as a slight against the covenantal lifestyle that demanded faithfulness towards family members. Nevertheless, she appears more courageous than the Levite at the end of the story. Both the Levite and the concubine are victims of the times they live in; both are acting against the covenantal values. The husband particularly fails to demonstrate the essence of the covenantal virtues such as protection, compassion, and selflessness.

⁵⁵⁶ See University of Pennsylvania 2009. Judges.

By all appearances, the husband might simply have been uncaring for letting the concubine leave him. O'Connell (1996:261) does not believe that the Levite necessarily had the welfare of his wife on his mind when he went to retrieve her for he did not 'explicitly address her until she is violated...' The man seemed to be more concerned about his own suffering when he spoke to the tribes (Jdg 20:4-7; cf Klein 1989:163; cf Exum 1993:183). He let her go without holding her back – maybe because he was in the wrong. If she had left him in anger, as some believe and as indicated in the Septuagint (Trible 1984; cf Boling 1992c:1107-1117), he did not retaliate in kind probably because he either did not care or did not believe that she would actually leave him.

The broken relationship between the concubine and the Levite typified the shattered state of the covenant. The absence of an intermediary between the husband and wife or a counsellor may signify the absence of YHWH from the lives of the Israelites in the wider society (cf Jdg 4:5). The Levite decided to make amends with his wife by himself and win her back after four months (Jdg 19:3). O'Connell (1996:261) asserts that the Levite might have been ignorant about her whereabouts and only found out later from her father, which explains the four months of separation. Webb (2012:1226) describes his reasons for reclaiming his wife as 'honorable' and 'serious.' He brought with him two donkeys and a servant on a mission that was judiciously organized and undertaken (Jdg 19:3; Webb 2012:1226). His intention was to speak kindly to her at her father's house (literally to her heart) – a sign that he might have caused her to leave him (Webb 2012:1226).

The wife apparently was keen on a reconciliation and she allowed the Levite into the house (Jdg 19:3). The father-in-law also welcomed the Levite (Jdg 19:3-4). He extended the customary hospitality to his guest but overextended his hospitality which caused an unfortunate delay in the return of the Levite and the concubine (Szpek 2007; cf Bellis 1994:309). They finally leave at the end of five days (Jdg 19:8-10).

The couple would spend the night in the Benjamite town of Gibeah, where they made a stopover en route home (Jdg 19:13-15). They sat in the city plaza, waiting for someone to take them in. They had some trouble finding shelter to stay for the night until an old man finally took them in (Jdg 19:16-20). During the evening meal, the old man's house was surrounded by a group of wicked Benjamites who demanded to have sexual relations with the Levite (Jdg 19:22).

However, the old man offered his daughter and the Levite's concubine instead. The Levite did not raise an objection against this abhorrent suggestion (Jdg 19:23-14). Stone (2009b) observes that for the owner of the house and the Levite, the sexual abuse of a man was more dishonourable than that of a woman (cf McCarty 2015:145-147; cf Exum 1993:182; cf Brettler 2005:83). There is no response from the wife at the old man's proposal. Perhaps she is silent not wanting to draw unnecessary attention to herself (Exum 1993:184). Perhaps the concubine was silently hopeful that her husband would have the courage to venture outside himself when the Benjamites rejected the old

man's proposition (Jdg 19:25). Unfortunately the Levite grabs her and forcibly tosses her outside to be sexually assaulted throughout the night. Tribble remarks that she was 'expendable to the demands of wicked men' who were given 'a license to rape' her (Tribble 1984:74).

McCarty (2015:145-147) remarks that the 'unspeakable tragedy' of her being raped repeatedly until daybreak would not have happened if these were homosexual men (cf Exum 1993:182). The concubine died of her injuries sustained at the hands of a lustful gang of evil men. There is no mitigation for their evil because their depravity cannot be explained within a historical context of reference (McCarty 2015:145-147). Her husband cut up her body into 12 pieces and sent them throughout the land to the 12 tribes. The resulting war that broke out kills the majority of the Benjamite women and many men (Jdg 20:47-48). There is no explanation for the cowardice and reprehensible action of the Levite.

Like the Levite in Judges 17, this Levite shows the moral bankruptcy caused by idolatry and disobedience that probably led to the idea that the woman's life was inferior and less valued than his. There is no real justice for the murdered wife of the Levite, since the Levite and the old man themselves remain unpunished.

7.4 THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST: BLUEPRINT FOR ISRAELITE INEQUALITY

7.4.1 Introduction

This section aims to provide an analysis of the socio-cultural circumstances marked by oppression and inequality that characterized the lives of the ordinary Canaanites. The purpose is to shed light on the lifestyle and practices that the Israelites might have experienced under the oppressive rule of their enemies. It is ironic that the early Israelites would enter into treaties with the Canaanites (kings) which subjected them to the lifestyle described below. It soon became clear to the Israelites that the Canaanites did not have any intention of upholding their treaties to which the perennial oppression of the Israelites in Judges attests.⁵⁵⁷ Judges describes the misery and oppression of the Israelites as a result.

7.4.1.1 Hierarchies

a. Burgeoning socio-economic hierarchy

⁵⁵⁷ Hittite kings present a parallel for breaching treaties in the ancient Near East. Textual evidence shows that these kings would without hesitance break a treaty when other more significant concerns dwarfed the advantages of a treaty agreement (Sulyok 2017:4). Based on the abundance of available sources, Sulyok (2017:3) concludes that treaty violations were consistent problems during the Bronze and Iron Ages. This situation may also provide insight into reasons why the Israelites constantly broke the Sinai covenant. Sulyok (2017:3) references the earliest recorded incidence of the breach of a treaty as the *Treaty of Eanatum of Lagash* and *Enakale of Umma* (ca 25th century BC) recorded on the Stele of the Vultures, broken soon after it was made.

Serving the Canaanite gods (cf 7.4.1.2d; 7.4.3) granted the Israelites the added authority to instill adversarial socio-economic systems within their communities since the gods that they now served promoted hierarchical systems within the divine realm and the world of humans. The *Enūma Eliš* depicts higher ranked and lesser ranked gods and related power within the pantheon (Dalley 2000:260-261) that was replicated in the domain of humans (Liverani 2005:11; McMahon 2005:27-28). The variations in house sizes and their configuration at Khirbet Raddana, a Central Highlands village that was settled from the early 12th-mid-11th centuries BC seem to indicate that a social hierarchy existed within the village (Nakhai 2001:172-173; cf Jdg 6:15).

Stern (2000:205) notes that the Philistines had a (burgeoning and) complex socio-economic hierarchy (see also 7.2.3.1). The accumulation of wealth within the society was mostly concentrated among the ruling class and the elite (see also (see Snell 2020:4; see below). This is in stark contrast with the covenantal laws that prescribed the equal distribution of resources and wealth (YHWH's abundance) across the tribes (see 7.4.1.1b).

Other industries also had elitist connotations (see also 7.2.3.2b). The weaving and cloth dyeing industries, for example, not only secured wealth for their producers and traders but also the best and finest cloth was utilized by the wealthy and importantly for clothing the statues of the gods (Quillien 2014:271-272; see 7.2.2).⁵⁵⁸ As status symbols these luxury items communicated the prosperous lifestyles of people and the favour of the gods (cf Jdg 5:30). The fine linen garments mentioned in Judges 14: 12, 19 were exclusively worn by the wealthy, as opposed to the common folk who typically donned clothing made from sheep and goats wool and hair (cf 7.2.2..⁵⁵⁹

The hierarchical socio-economic structures of Philistine society was typical of all nations in the ancient Near East. It is highly probable that the Israelites, who participated in the customs and religious practices of the Canaanites, would have been impacted by these societal systems (cf 7.2.3.2b). They may have either intensified the pre-existing structures or further complicated the structures that were established through the covenant laws. It is possible that greed of the Ephraimites (Jdg 8:2; 12:1) and the attitude of Micah towards the Levite may hint at the aforesaid (cf also Jdg 10:4; 12:9, 14). Considering the abovementioned it becomes evident that upon their settlement in the land, the Israelites encountered the affluence of the land and also a burgeoning social and economic hierarchical system in place. However, instead of dismantling these hierarchical structures and instituting a structure in accordance with guidelines of the covenant, the Israelites kept them in place similar to their complete appropriation of the Canaanite high places that incurred the wrath of YHWH (cf Jdg 2:1-3). In the worldview of the author/s of Judges, the Israelites

⁵⁵⁸ Numerous cottage industries such as weaving and textile production that relied exclusively on the input of women are well confirmed at Phoenician sites such as Sarepta, Sidon and Byblos (Woolmer 2022:76). Woolmer reports on a funerary inscription uncovered from the tophet at Carthage that shows women could attain professional status and amass wealth on their own.

⁵⁵⁹ Cf Miriam Feinberg Vamosh (2013).

were to possess the affluence of Canaan and at the same reject any anti-covenantal system that nefariously subjugated and enslaved people and communities.

Meyers (2006:245-255) has proposed a heterarchical organizational system for the early Israelites (see also Gottwald 2001:171, 301; Benjamin 2015:55-56) which ensured that positions of authority to women alongside men albeit in different ways. Consequently, this study suggests that a heterarchical Israelite society would have safeguarded the survival of the Israelite communities residing in the highlands. As an integral aspect of the endorsed covenantal way of life, such a system would have evolved from the principles of equality ingrained in the covenant. A social strata among the Israelites was discussed previously (see 7.2.3.2b). If the Israelites had adhered strictly to their covenant obligations, they could have prevented the negative impact of social stratification among their people, ensuring that no single group of Israelites would dominate over another.

b. Domination

The wealth of the ancient Near East was continuously in the possession of the influential kings and the elites who could use their affluence and power as a means to dominate the poor and the weak (Robertson 2005:196; cf 4.2.2.3a-b; 7.2.3.1). The author/s of Judges describe a similar domination of the Israelites at the hands of various kings Cushan-Rishathaim, king of Aram Naharaim (Northwest Mesopotamia) (Jdg 3:8), Eglon, king of Moab, who together with the Ammonites and Amalekites attacked the Israelites and conquered Jericho (Jdg 3:12-13) and Jabin, king of Canaan who ruled in Hazor (Jdg 4:2). Other nations who dominated the Israelites were the Midianites (Jdg 6) and the Philistines (Jdg 10:7; 13:1) who ruled in Timnah and Ashkelon (Jdg 14); Gaza (Jdg 16:1). Judges indicates that the Israelites could also 'rule' over their own. As previously stated, Jair of Gilead and his sons controlled thirty towns in Gilead (Jdg 10:4; 7.2.2; 7.2.3.2b), an excessive number of cities for a single family to have access to and govern. It is also very possible these thirty town were settlements of Jair (as the text also indicates) that he founded for each of his thirty sons and their households (Jdg 10:4). The fact that the narrative mentions the sons riding on donkeys (see also 7.2.3.2b) is indicative of an elite status. The author/s of Judges prescribe such domination of one group (foreign or Israelite) over another group of Israelites (cf Jdg 8:2; 12:1) to the disobedience of the Israelites and the flaunting of their covenantal lifestyle as previously indicated (cf Jdg 2:1-3; 3:7, 12, 4:1-3, etcetera). It is very possible, as stated before, that these were structures that the Israelites adopted from their Canaanite neighbours living in close proximity to them and sharing the land with them (cf Jdg 1:19-36; 9; see 7.2.2.1b; 7.4.1.1a)

In the cities, diverse socio-economic and communal standards were created as wealth flowed into the urban areas (cf 7.2.2). Robertson (2005:196) comments that cities were the 'pre-eminent' foci for political governance, commercial undertakings and the administrative centres for the surrounding villages (cf Stone 2005:154). In the urban centres some of the elite socio-economic classes created by the influx of products from the countryside and mining areas (cf 7.2.2) included the

‘scholars and bureaucrats’ who because of their reading and writing skills occupied a superior station in life afforded to them by their close association and employment in the formidable palace and temples (Robertson 2005:196). The city of Debir (formerly known as Kiriath Sepher) was called the ‘city of books and scribes (Jdg 1:11) may have been home to a ‘guild’ of scribes that occupied a prominent place in society. Judges 8:14 indicates that the Israelites possessed writing skills since it is assumed that Gideon could read the names of the elders of Sukkoth that the young man in the narrative had written down for him. It is assumed that the elders and officials of Succoth the administrators of the city and part of the elite group and in control of its (food) resources (cf Jdg 8:5-6, 14).

Van de Mieroop (2016:155) notes that the elites had a ‘high culture’ and that ‘perhaps’ they ‘strove for a fashionable lifestyle that was shared among themselves’ and ‘that distinguished them more from their own populations than from their equivalents elsewhere.’ Van de Mieroop describes the existence of a strict social hierarchy in the ancient Near East that comprised the free people living in the local communities and the dependents of the palace.

People completed various work projects to maintain their cities, in the royal palaces and at the temples (Zaccagnini 1983:245-265). Royal and temple administrative authorities demanded that villagers whose lands were under their control, hand in a portion of their harvests as tax, provide the palaces and temples with their livestock and perform obligatory labor services (see also Berman 2008:4-5; cf Vengeyi 2013:50).

The work people performed determined their economic prosperity and personal freedom (cf 7.2.3). However, affluence and personal autonomy did not always go hand in hand. The Levite of Judges 17:7-10 seems to be independent yet destitute (see 7.3.1.1). The concubine of the Levite in Judges 19, too, appears to be autonomous but financially dependent on her husband or father (cf 7.3.2).

Although the dependents of the palace were not free and did not possess their own property, when wealth was taken into account as a measure of social standing, they were frequently in a much better position than the free people (Van de Mieroop 2016:155). The greatest degree of social stratification occurred in the palaces. The serfs who worked the agricultural lands were at the bottom of the social scale. The more specialised skills conferred a higher prestige to the palace staff with administrators, scribes, cult workers and skilled craftsmen all occupying their specific positions (Van de Mieroop 2016:155) as well as the class of astrologers that were associated with the royal court. Van de Mieroop further states that the recompenses given to palace workers were dispensed in several forms: supplies for the lesser levels and ‘payments and the usufructs⁵⁶⁰ of fields for the

⁵⁶⁰ ‘The right to the use and the profits of something to belonging to another’ without destroying it (The Free Dictionary 2022. Usufruct).

higher ones.’ The palace employees may fund their sacrifices and offerings for the cult from these payments that further highlighted the different class structures in ancient Near Eastern society.

Similar to the great royal palaces, the temples managed personnel to uphold the temples and tend to the land and gardens in their possession (see Garcia 2016; Johnston 2004:325). At the Shechem sanctuary of Baal-*berith* (Jdg 9:4, 27, 46) before its destruction by Abimelech (Jdg 8:52) the priests would have managed an extensive workforce. The temple was similar in style to the monumental temples or *migdal* uncovered at Megiddo (Lundquist 2008:51; Hundley 2013:109; see Stager 2003:26-29).⁵⁶¹ At the massive fortress temple, priests, scribes and educated scholars conceivably formed an elite class. The work of the temple personnel and their taxes and temple offerings provided the prestigious religious class with a lavishness lifestyle and individual freedom (see Johnston 2004:325; cf Ataç 2019:509; Pruß 2020:19-31).

Other classes (among the free people) were formed by the food specialists, craftsmen, potters, metalworkers and textile workers (Warburton 2005:175) who created the saleable food products and other (luxury) wares for the merchant classes to trade and sell. The affluence and opportunity in the cities created avenues for the any resident fortunate enough to acquire wealth such as merchants; some, the latter texts indicate, were not always honest in their entrepreneurial dealings (Monroe 2005:160-161).

Slaves too, those with a specialist skill such as craftwork, had the potential to become rich and naturally purchase their freedom. Archaeological evidence shows that variances in wealth and power were extant in cities (cf Jdg 10:4). Stone (2005:148) indicating a variation in the distribution of wealth across the social classes (cf Monroe 2005:158; cf Jdg 10:1-4; 12:8-14). Warburton (2005:171) states that novel prospects for wealth accrual were generated by pottery that transformed the way people stored their agricultural products and burgeoning sedentary lifestyles and thus were created new elite social groups (cf 7.2.1; 7.2.3.2b) As these new elite classes emerged so too did the opportunities to exploit the less affluent. Interest rates on loans, for example, could be exorbitantly high and the consequences for non-payment steep (cf 7.2.3).

Another example is debt-slavery which was a practice demonstrated by a borrower who was unable to refund a loan on barley that had interest rates of thirty three and even fifty percent, which put his family and himself in bondage to a creditor (Robertson 2005:205; see Chirichigno 1993:53-54; Matthews 1994:126; Wells 2005:191-192; Greengus 2011:126).⁵⁶²

⁵⁶¹ Lundquist (2008:51) observes that the important Canaanite cities of Hazor, Megiddo, Shechem and Gezer are mentioned in the texts of Late Bronze Age Egypt, in the *Execration Texts* and *Amarna Letters* as well as in New Kingdom Egyptian historical documents. The most principal city was Hazor with a long and prominent history dating to 2000 BC that is mentioned in the 17th century BC *Mari Letters* (Lundquist 2008:51).

⁵⁶² Slavery and debt slavery also existed among the Israelites. Covenantal laws safeguarded their rights. Israelite debt slaves were to be released after six years (Ex 21:1-10). Foreigners could be forced into compulsory servitude (see Jdg

7.4.1.2 *Land and labour*

As stated before, the land allocated to the different Israelite tribes was equitable (cf Jos 13:1-22:34). However, the author/s of Judges narrate the failure of the Israelites to completely conquer Canaan (see 7.2.2.1) which meant their loss of the land to the Canaanites and sharing cities such as Jerusalem (Jdg 1:21), Beth Shan, Dor and Megiddo (Jdg 1:27) as well as possibly Shechem (cf Jdg 9) with the Canaanites. It was likely impossible for the Israelites to replace the existing social and economic structures in these cities and establish their own governance. Consequently, the Israelites were unable to abstain from participating. This had the potential to bring much wealth and status to certain Israelite groups (cf 7.2.3.2b). As this study consistently indicates, the author/s of Judges relate the disapproval of YHWH and His judgement against the Israelites due to their failure to fully conquer the land (Jdg 2:1-3; see also 2.2.1.1; 2.2.2.1), the result of which led to all sorts of abnormalities and covenantal irregularities within the society of the Israelites (cf 7.3).

An elite class of landowners, the king and members of the royal court and important officials, emerged (in the ancient Near East) that owned a large percentage of rural land (see Kugler and Hartin 2009:31; cf Ellickson and Thorland 1995:370). In fact, the kings and gods lived lavish lifestyles provided for by the proceeds from the land that they owned in the countryside (Beckman 2005:346). Eglon's palace was multi-roomed (Jdg 3:20). The many chambers of the temples and royal palaces included workshops for the manufacture of opulent goods, the preparation of choice food and storage rooms. The kings lived like the gods. The minor landowners who were already existing at a subsistence level were forced to sell their ancestral land (to the elite class of landowners) because of crop failures and rising indebtedness and compelled to become tenant farmers or debt slaves (see above) (Robertson 2005:199-200; cf Vengeyi 2013:49-51).⁵⁶³ As these families lost their kinship ties to their lands their socio-economic position was transformed from 'independence' to 'dependence' (Robertson 2005:200; cf Berman 2008:4-5).⁵⁶⁴ Is this what happened to the Levite in Judges 17 (cf Jdg 7.3.1)?

1:28, 33, 35). God knew that these were practices that the Israelites would institute. The covenantal laws therefore were protective towards slaves. The Israelites' attitude had to be based on mercy and the desirable tenet to follow was to extend mercy towards all people in their community since the Israelites were themselves delivered from slavery once by the mercy and grace of YHWH (Dt 5:6; Jos 24:17; Jdg 6:8). Fair and equal practices towards all citizens in the ancient Near East such as in the ancient Egyptian, Old Babylon and Hittite societies were advocated as well as the defence of the poor and weak (Robertson 2005:206). The difference between benign and equal social laws and practices towards the poor and slaves in the ancient Near East and among the Israelites is that the Israelite violation of these laws were in effect breaching the covenant itself and thus incurring the curses of the covenant.

⁵⁶³ Naturally the conditions described above would have created dissatisfaction on the part of the disenfranchised, landless and indigent villagers and conflict between the rich and the poor (landowners and villagers) or at the very least the threat of dissension. If the gaiety, leisure time, the flow of free food and wine (and beer) of the cultic festivals did not adequately appease the masses (see above), the kings could pass edicts that lessened the economic burden carried by the poor (see Robertson 2005:206). However, Robertson also states that these measures such as the release of debt slaves and cancellation of debts were 'resisted by the wealthier citizens deprived of repayment.'

⁵⁶⁴ Robertson (2005:196-210) describes the 'social tensions' that existed between the lower and upper socio-economic groups in the ancient Near East.

Ideally, the covenant protected Israelites from a similar fate since they had inalienable land rights to the land which was collectively owned and managed by the tribes, and resources which were equally shared. However, as pointed out before the incomplete land conquest altered the Israelites' entitlement, leading to multiple troublesome issues they were faced with as recounted in Judges (cf Jdg 1:19-36). Shechem, for example, was allocated to the Kohathite clan from the tribe of Levi (Jos 21:21). Judges (9:4) reveals that the temple Baal-*berith* was still in existence presumably for a time before its destruction by Abimelech. If the Kohathites had taken up residency in Shechem, they would have shared the city with the original inhabitants of the city and thereby were exposed to their cult and culture (cf Jdg 9:27).

People in the ancient Near East, however, did own private property or their houses, orchards and vineyards in the ancient Near East. Ellickson and Thorland (1995:337-348) note that even the poorest person could own a house and a plot of land. The residence of Delilah, perhaps a modest dwelling (Jdg 16:9) could have been owned or rented by her.⁵⁶⁵ Textual evidence from Ugarit appears to support the existence of privately owned properties in 1400-1200 BC (Ellickson and Thorland 1995:336-338). Apparently, Achsah's land was private property (Jdg 1:15; cf Nm 27:1-11).

Ordinary Canaanite people laboured for the gods, the king and elites and it was their duty to serve them wholeheartedly (see Chirichigno 1993:81; MacDonald 2008:162). Life was hard for the cultivator, the trader and all manner of workers who were not royal or part of an elite group. The farmer worked the lands of the gods, king and elites,⁵⁶⁶ the craftsmen created their products of earthenware and metal and the merchant traded these items for their livelihoods (cf 7.2.2; 7.2.3.2b; 7.4.1.1a).⁵⁶⁷ Judges records the suffering of the Israelites, their resources which went as tribute to their overlords (cf Jdg 3:15, 17; 4:1-3) and their unproductive labour (Jdg 6:1-6) under the oppression of their enemies.

⁵⁶⁵ Ellickson and Thorland (1995:369) report that the renting of land and houses was common in Mesopotamia. A lease contract for an Old Babylonian house reads: 'Mashqum, the son of Rim-Adad, has rented for one year from Ribatum, a hierodule of Shamash. As the rent per year he shall pay 1-1/2 shekels of silver, with 2/3 shekel of silver received as the initial payment on his rent' (Ellickson and Thorland 1995:370).

⁵⁶⁶ And then had to pay taxes. They paid taxes in the form of livestock (Podany 2022:273). A list of taxes paid by people in the province of Larsa in the time of Hammurabi can provide an analogue for taxes paid in later years. At that time people also paid taxes in the form of barley and silver and those who could not afford to paid taxes in the form of the products from their garden and orchards – garlic, onions, dates, and the products from their herds such as wool and animals (Podany 2022:273). The king as the gods' agent accepted these on behalf of the gods.

⁵⁶⁷ An Egyptian satire (1350-1200 BC) eloquently describes the life of the ordinary people in different vocations as miserable and enervating (Wilson 1969b:432-434). An itinerant merchant is depicted in the following manner: '... sails downstream to the Delta to get trade for himself. When he has done more than his arms can (really) do, the gnats have slain him, the sand flies have made him *miserably miserable*. Then there is *inflammation*' (Wilson 1969b:433). The same text depicts the arduous existence of a tenant farmer: 'Wearier is he than a *wayfarer* of the Delta. Yet he is a picked man: his safety is a safety from lions. His *sides* ache, *as if heaven* and earth were in them. When he goes forth *thence from* the meadows and he reaches his home in the evening, *he is one cut down by traveling*' (Wilson 1969b:433).

The abundance and wealth of Canaan (cf Dt 6:10; cf Dt 19:1; Nm 13:27) would have been enjoyed mainly by the rulers, royals and other elite groups such as the priestly classes (Ellickson and Thorland 1995:371). Living in the ancient Near East destined families to a high degree of controlled realities pertaining to culture, state/community regulations (Peled 2020) and naturally to lives regulated by the divine will of the gods as well as their rituals. The existence of wealth and poverty among the Canaanites is demonstrated by the numerous luxury and precious objects discovered at Tell Azekah and the evidence of malnutrition in the skeletal remains of individuals uncovered (see Kleiman et al 2019:40, 47-50).⁵⁶⁸ In a prayer to the gods offered by a Hittite king, the king mentions the silver, gold and precious stones that signify the wealth of temples and the land (Goetze 1969b:397).

Since the early Israelites shared in the cult and culture of the Canaanites (Jdg 2:10-19; 3:5-7; 4:1-3, etcetera), it may be inferred that they also shared in the ordinary Canaanite citizen's hardships. Did the Israelites, by any chance, believe that their situation would be different from that of the ordinary Canaanites? The author/s of Judges, however, held a different perspective. One can only imagine the disappointment felt by the Israelites when the Canaanites violated their treaties and subjugated them (cf Jdg 2:1-3; cf 7.2.2.1c). The author/s recount that the Israelites endured years of servitude under oppressive regimes (eighteen years under the Moabite king, Eglon [Jdg 3:14], twenty years under Jabin [Jdg 4:3], and forty years under the Philistines [Jdg 13:1]). Why did they not immediately cry out to YHWH but wait until a significant amount of time had passed under despots such as Eglon, king of the Moabites?

The obesity of the Canaanite king, Eglon (Jdg 3:22; see also 3.2.3.1) and his spacious abode that was probably well defended (cf Jdg 3:19-20) indicates a life of abundance and indulgence in comparison with the ordinary people of Shechem who huddled together and hid in the towers of the temples for lack of protection when Abimelech went to war against them (cf Jdg 9:42-46).

Life for the ordinary Israelite man and woman, too, was one of arduous work as indicated above. Analysis of the bone disorders of female skeletal remains (at Gezer) show evidence of the long hours of toil over grinding stones and ground looms. The skeletal remains also reveal that women

⁵⁶⁸ Kleiman et al (2019:47-50) report on the skeletal remains of four individuals were found in the ruins of Tell Azekah. Two of the individuals identified as young males show chronic ailment or extended malnourishment. The older individual display signs of hard physical labour (Kleiman et al 2019:47-49). The remains of the third and fourth individuals were identified as female (Kleiman et al 2019:49-50). The third individual (19+years), shows evidence of anemia similar to the first individual indicating the presence of a long-term illness or starvation during childhood. The evidence shows that this individual in addition suffered a life of arduous physical activity. Probable signs of osteoarthritis in the remains of the fourth individual who was between 15-17 years old, also reveals a life of difficult physical work (Kleiman et al 2019:50). The possibility exists that the young individuals belonged to the poor working class or that they might have been slaves considering the severity of their physical work and the longevity of childhood nutritional stress.

suffered from arthritis in the neck because of the large bundles of wood they carried and signs of wearing on ankle bones from squatting at hearth fires (Ebeling 2010:137; Vamosh 2013a; Sha 2018:291). Macalister (1912a:62-63, 67) during an excavation at Gezer in the early 1900s exhumed approximately 200 bones of adult individuals. A number of the bones showed in particular ‘the anterior astragalar notches at the ankles associated with squatting.’ The skeleton of a female displayed ‘lateral curvature of the spine; disease of the articular processes of the third and fourth neck vertebrae’ (cf Sha 2018:291). Throughout this investigation, it has been clearly outlined that according to the perspective of the author/s of Judges, these circumstances would have arisen due to the lack of commitment to the covenant by the early Israelites (see also below).

a. The fears of the people

Failed crops were one of the greatest fears of agrarian people. The Israelites would not suffer these disasters if they followed their covenant faithfully. However, Judges shows that the idolatrous Israelites (cf Jdg 6:6), along with the ordinary Canaanites did not have the same assurances. If the land did not yield its required harvests, Israelite and Canaanite families were both doomed to disaster as they would have to face food shortages and ultimately starvation in the most extreme circumstances (cf Jdg 6:6). Since the gods governed all aspects of life, it was believed that only their divine benevolence could secure the fertility of the land, and all involved with it. For this reason, the fertility gods, Baal and Asherah, would be vigorously pursued with prayers, rituals, incantations and offerings by their devotees to bestow their bounty upon the land (cf Jdg 6:25-26). Margolies (2000:144) relates that during an ancient ritual the Canaanites ‘boiled a young kid in the milk of its mother’ and while prayerfully petitioning Baal, dispensed the contents into the ground for the land to be made fertile by means of this act of piety. This might be a reason why the cooking of a young goat in its mother’s milk is forbidden in the Old Testament (cf Ex 23:19; 34:26; Dt 14:21; see also Soza 2009:21). The Ugaritic texts reveal that this was an ancient Egyptian and Canaanite fertility rite (Shechter 2014:38-39). The liquid that resulted from boiling the kid in its mother’s milk was sprinkled over Egyptian and Canaanite fields after the autumn harvests to invoke the gods for an abundant crop in the subsequent year. In this magic rite the milk symbolized a fertility potion, its magical quality thus securing the fertility and abundant yields from the trees, gardens and orchards on which it was sprinkled. According to another interpretation the milk represented the milk that was given to newborn gods breastfed by the goddesses Athirst and Rahmay (Shechter 2014:39). MacArthur (2005:118), however, comments that the Ugaritic text is damaged and does not distinctly state mother’s milk.

The Ugaritic texts reveal that sacrifices and votive offerings were made to entreat the gods for well-being and the overall welfare of people (Smith, MS 2020:6) that was undoubtedly intertwined

with the procurement of the fertility of the land for farming communities.⁵⁶⁹ Animals, birds and agricultural produce as well as the products prepared therefrom, for example, loaves of bread, cakes, wine and incense were included in the sacrifices made to the gods (cf also Jr 7:9, 18). In the material culture the indications of child sacrifice at Ashkelon and Amman demonstrate the common practice of human offerings to the rapacious gods (Smith, MS 2020:7, cf 4.4.6.6; 7.2.3).

Another situation most feared by agrarian families was one that would see them deprived of their land. Dishonest and rulers greedy for land had to be avoided or appeased (Ellickson and Thorland 1995:345; see also above). Later Israelite rulers were not above this type of behaviour (cf 1 Sm 8:14; cf 7.2.3.2b). Pestilence would have been another dreaded crisis for it could plummet a household into destitution. The multitude of Midianites who invaded Israelite land were described as swarms of locusts (Jdg 6:5) alluding to this type of pestilence that could devastate harvests as well as the curse of locusts devouring the land as punishment for transgressions (Dt 28:38). Damaged land and crops were considered to be the result of curses or a deity dissatisfied for one reason or another such as the sins of a family member.⁵⁷⁰ An unexpected calamity that may befall a settlement and destroy it would also have been feared. A sudden cataclysm struck the agricultural community at Tell Azekah (sometime around the 12th century BC) and buried it deep in layers of destruction debris (Kleiman et al 2019:40). News about the disaster would have spread like wildfire throughout the region and people probably lived in fear that a similar mishap might happen to them. In the descriptions above, one may find a parallel for similar Israelite practices and beliefs in Judges for which the author/s of the text severely condemned them.

b. Divine protection

People need protection from a recurrence of the cataclysm that happened at Tell Azekah. The Book of Judges reports on the people killed in the fire set by Abimelech that destroyed the temple fortress of El-Berith (Jdg 9:46-49).⁵⁷¹ People considered divine protection to be essential for a secure life. Figurative amulets of the Egyptian phylactic deities Pataikos, Bes and Amun dated to 1292-1075 BC were found at Tel Azekah (Kleiman et al 2019:50). The amulets were used as apotropaic devices, to ward off evil such as, perhaps, the abovementioned catastrophe. Bes in particular was a

⁵⁶⁹ A king may also express fears about the longevity and fertility of the royal family, the people and the land. In prayer a Hittite king entreats his god Telepinus for the longevity and fertility of the royal family and the land and its people (see Goetze 1969a:397).

⁵⁷⁰ As I have indicated before the ancient Near East nations had a system of values and ethics. Although many of their rituals were abominable and degraded, the ordinary person was imbued with what constituted sin and justice according to their cultural traditions similar to the Israelite. The *Code of Hammurabi* advocates justice for the orphan and the widow (Meek 1969:178) similar to the Old Testament (Dt 10:8; 14:29; cf Is 1:17). In a Hittite Prayer, a god, Telepinus, is described as the defender of the orphan, the widow and the oppressed (Goetze 1969a:397). Still, in the biblical worldview the ancient Near Eastern ethics fell short of YHWH's highest ideals and standards for humanity (cf Ex 20:1-26).

⁵⁷¹ Similarly, Luke 13:4 mentions the eighteen men killed by the Tower of Siloam when it collapsed and fell on them. The fact that the Lord mentions it indicates that people were talking about it and blamed the deaths of the men on their awful sins.

popular fertility god in the ancient Near East. The god functioned mainly as the protector of pregnant women and children but also represented the erotic aspects of the Canaanite fertility rites which explains his devotion also among the Israelites (in later generations) (Dever 1984:25; cf Meyers 2005:29-35). Kleiman et al (2019:50) reports that some of the amulets were discovered along with numerous beads next to the skeletal remains of two people at Tel Azekah. Although Kleiman et al (2019:52) are uncertain about the precise use of the amulets, as I have previously mentioned, the amulets would have functioned as apotropaic devices. Kleiman et al mentions that the adoption of Egyptian amulets occurred from the Middle Bronze Age in the area (of Tel Azekah). Middle Kingdom sources describe the rituals that involve incantations and the threading of amulets, beads and seashells together into necklaces to function in this form as divine protective influences. It can be inferred that the same function would have been ascribed to the use of the amulets found at Tel Azekah (Kleiman et al 2019:52, Koch et al 2017:11-19; see Figure 7.7).



Figure 7.7 Scarabs and figurative amulets from Tell Azekah (Koch et al 2017:18)

It would have been quite common for people to wear amulets on their person and also to position them on the walls of houses (Budge 2001:19) as well as positioning sacred figurines in various rooms in domiciles, particularly at entrances, to ward off malevolent forces (Willett 2001; Meyers 2005:29-34) that may come their way through, for instance, the curses and magic practices of their enemies. When the situation required it, these rites of purification involved more elaborate ceremonies such as the blood of a sacrificed animal to invoke divine protection. The condemnation of the author/s of the Book of Judges of the Israelites in Judges 2:1-3 should also be seen in light of the Israelites' participation in such idolatrous and anti-covenantal rites that they would have deemed as evil and which would have deeply offended YHWH. The author/s of Judges consistently show that it is only their faith in YHWH and obedience to His covenant that redeem and protect the Israelites from the mindset of fear and curses that was prevalent in the Canaanite cultures as described above. The Israelites did not have a need for magic rites and special apotropaic devices to shield them from any harm. YHWH Himself had promised to protect and redeem His people and as the author/s of Judges reveal He was faithful to His promise.

c. Rituals of redemption

Like the early Israelites (Dumbrell 2002:36), the Canaanites would have regarded redemption (deliverance from ill health and adverse situations) as a divine act of mercy.⁵⁷² The Canaanites understood that to appease the gods, the blood of a sacrificed animal had to be offered as propitiation. MacDermot (1971:68-69) remarks that among the Canaanite tribes all land, desert and fertile, was thought to be occupied by demons. The *Baalims*, also known as ‘Lords of the Land,’ controlled the fertile regions; they could either be beneficial to those who farmed the land or unfavourable to nomads due to the harshness of the environment (MacDermot 1971:69). MacDermot states that during the transition to agricultural life, animals were slaughtered and their blood was spilled on the ground to appease the demonic forces and ensure the fertility of the soil. Thus, animal sacrifice was a method utilized by the (Canaanite) tribe to negotiate with demonic entities, secure material advantages for the tribe, and maintain these advantages (MacDermot 1971:69). The Israelite burnt offering in which a sacrificed animal is completely consumed by fire on the altar covered a multitude of sins (see Chapter Eight). Textual evidence from Ugarit and Alalakh (Caquot and Sznycer 1980:17-18; Selman 1995:97; cf Clemens 2001:6; Buck 2020:154-155) as well as from the Hittites confirm the practice of animal sacrifice (McMahon 2003:265:267; Johnston 2004:338; Ökse 2015:127; cf Collins 2002:236-237) to entreat the gods for kindness, leniency and forgiveness of sin, cleansing and all manner of favours. Egyptian texts describe a ritual for food offerings to the gods (Wilson 1969a:325).⁵⁷³ Hittite purification rituals (Goetze 1969a:346) purified the land and the farmer, and all attached to him, from demons and curses. These rites included the use of herbs, honey and oil (precious items to a poor family; cf Ahituv 2007:763), the sacrificial scapegoat and offerings of food such as bread and cheese. Canaanites in the tradition of the ancient Near East probably sacrificed animals considered not acceptable in the Yahwistic religion, such as game (deer and gazelle), certain rats, seafood and donkeys (at Mari) (Scurlock 2002:392; cf Price 2020:65).

In the Yahwistic religion, only certain clean animals, such as cattle, sheep, and goats, were allowed for (burnt) sacrifices, along with a grain offering of fine flour mixed with oil, depending on the ability of the offerer (Nm 28:11; Larkin 2008:161; cf Jdg 2:5; 6:19; 13:19; 20:26; see also Chapter Eight). The altar of Baal at Ophrah indicates that animal sacrifices were made to Baal since these practices were ubiquitous in the ancient Near East (Kapelrud 1995:183). Other idolatrous and syncretic Israelites such as Micah and his household (Jdg 17:5) and the Danites (18:31) probably also incorporated Canaanite sacrificial practises in their religious systems.

The early Israelites would have faced condemnation for their involvement in these forbidden rituals, as stated in the description above. The author/s of Judges would have been deeply horrified by the Israelites’ participation in these rites (Jdg 3:5-7, 12; 4:2; 6:1-10; 10:6; 13:1) for in their mindset,

⁵⁷² Sachs (1969:332) describes a Babylonian text in which a supplicant entreats the god Bel (Marduk).

⁵⁷³ This ritual was mainly used in food offerings to the dead (Wilson 1969a:325).

instead of being a people holy and dedicated to YHWH, the Israelites were seen as part of the very cults that He despised and sought to eradicate from the land, (Ex 23:24; Jdg 2:2; 6:25-26).

d. Of gods and kings

The absence of grandeur in the Tabernacle and other significant structures built by the early Israelites, in contrast to the lavish Canaanite buildings and sanctuaries, perhaps serves as a critique against the excessive wealth of the gods and the elites, which the culture of YHWH sought to eliminate among the Israelites.

In ancient Babylonia the gods and goddesses resided in and ruled from the massive and opulent temples 'like earthy monarchs and owners of the land' (Beaulieu 2005:55). Indeed, the requirements and desires of the Hittite gods were considered to be equal to those of the nobility and other elite groups and denoted as such in a Hittite text (Beckman 2005:346). Maladministration of wealth occurred at the hands of the king and elite classes (Stone 2005:141; cf 7.2.3.1a). Bad kings are reported to have ruled from Sumer to the neo-Babylonian empire (Grillo 2018:33). The abuses of the king happened under the control of the gods served and texts indicate that they were administering the abuses and oppression of the weak in their own circles. As mentioned before, in Judges, Jabin is a Canaanite king who ruled in Hazor, and Sisera is the commander of his army who had nine hundred iron chariots and had 'cruelly oppressed' the early Israelites 'for twenty years' (Jdg 4:2-3). Perhaps in this way Jabin could frighten his own people into submissiveness.

The opulence of the temples of the gods (see Goetze 1969b:397), the rich adornment of their statues, and the lavish meals offered to them stand in stark contrast to the poverty and hunger that would have been experienced by their disempowered and oppressed worshippers (Kleiman 2019:47-50; see above). Beckman (2005:346) describes the gods as pampered by their priests who donned the cult statues in luxurious clothing and piled their altars with luxury items including food (cf 2.2.3.1d; 2.2.5.8; 3.3.2.1a; 3.3.5.1; 3.3.6; 3.3.6.2; cf Footnote 36 and Footnote 146).

The early Israelites worshipped the foreign gods, and it can be imagined that economic care of the poor was reassigned to the extravagant care of the gods that they served. The inordinate amount of silver and probably other luxury goods given to the gods as offerings (see for example Judges 9:4 and 17:3-4) could have been spent on providing aid for the impoverished – a sign in itself of the Israelites' covenant violations (cf Dt 15: 4, 7-8).

7.4.3 Blueprint of the gods

As this chapter has so far illustrated, it is frequently the powerless and weak that suffered the adverse consequence of socio-economic and political inequality in the ancient Near East (cf Jdg 6:13; 19:25-28). The aforesaid was considered a curse in the worldview of the author/s of Judges.

Imprinted on a tiny *clay tablet* 3500 years old, a Canaanite captor leads away a naked and gaunt prisoner to an unhappy fate (see Figure 7.8; Schuster 2020a). In the image the captive man is restrained in a painful manner. His nudity symbolizes his humiliation and defeat permanently memorialized on the tablet. The *ancient tablet found at Tell Jemmeh* depicts the master-slave/servant relationship prevalent in Canaanite cultures.⁵⁷⁴ As indicated before in this chapter, the existence of similar social developments, such as the discrimination against and domination of one group over another, is indicated in the Book of Judges as well (cf Jdg 3:8, 12-14; 4:1-3; 6:1-10; 10:6-10; cf also Jdg 17; 19) was probably modelled on the social class divisions extant in Canaan and the rest of the ancient Near East (cf 7.2.3.2; 7.3; 7.4.1.1).



Figure 7.8 Clay tablet of captor and prisoner (Schuster 2020a)

In modernity, ancient hierarchies are ascribed to the outflow of evolutionary processes as civilizations arise and develop. To reiterate (see above) in the Book of Judges, the development of varying and unequal Israelite class systems was adoptive behaviour; the result of Israelite interaction with the Canaanite treaties and the adoption of their cults and culture (cf Jdg 2:12; 3:5-7).

Archaeology provides evidence for the intermingling between the Judeans and Edomites and other groups in the Beersheba Valley (after the pre-monarchic period) that reflect the intermixing in earlier periods (cf Jdg 1:29-36; 3:5-6) (Golden 2004:135). Another instance of intermixing of Israelite and Canaanite cultures is reflected in the new Philistine culture that arose when contact between the Philistine and their original homeland weakened. The novel Philistine society was infused with Canaanite, inland Israelite and Phoenician customs (cf Jdg 13-16; cf 7.4.1.1). The red

⁵⁷⁴ In the ancient Near Eastern world this type of power relationship arose from taking captive and enslaving the citizens of conquered cities such as probably the hapless and starving man depicted on the clay tablet. Perhaps the captive was an important man delegated to an inferior status by being taken as a war captive. Or he might have been a once wealthy farmer who became impoverished and sold into slavery. It is also possible that the tablet, used as a stamp, was made to display the power of an important and authoritative person and to serve as a reminder of his control over his subordinates. The identity of the men in the image probably will never be known. The tablet displays the custom of the time, that of the power of one over another. The tablet is dated to the Late Bronze Age and was found in the ancient Canaanite city of Yerza. For a more informative account in which the captor is purported to be a soldier see Schuster (2020a).

burnished pottery assemblage that replaced the Bichrome Wares were of a style that attests to the influences of Israelite and Phoenicians pottery types (Golden 2004:135).

In the ancient Near East hierarchical structures are set in place as by divine decree. The lesser vulnerable gods may demur but are on the whole resigned to their fate for they too must follow the destiny decreed for them. So too, are their oppressed and exploited human devotees resigned to their hapless lives since paradoxically they are blessed for emulating divine behaviour in whatever form it may appear. The gods decreed human fate and it was deemed immutable.

In the Ugaritic *Baal Cycle* the divine realm of Mount Saphon is divided along hierarchical power structures that included frequent violent militaristic control mechanisms.⁵⁷⁵ The (lesser) gods may be rendered subservient and suffer abuse, they can be disempowered and their wealth appropriated (Smith 1994:266, 288, 132, 136).⁵⁷⁶ Is it, therefore, incredulous that earthly ancient Near Eastern societies paralleled those of their gods? The emissary of Yamm delivers this message to the Ugaritic pantheon (see also Chapter Two): ‘Give up Baal that I may humble him, The Son of Dagan, that I may possess his Gold’ (Smith 1994:267).⁵⁷⁷ The goddess Anath claims: ‘I have smitten for silver, have (re)possessed the gold of Him who would drive Baal from the heights of Sapanu’ (Pardee 1984:253; Smith 1994:293-294).

In light of the above, the acquisition of capital, typified by silver and gold, lies at the heart of divine warfare as these precious metals reflected the god’s status as ruler of the pantheon and naturally of his human votaries (Smith 1994:294).⁵⁷⁸ Consequently, wealth, that served as a potent sign of divine kingship, gave rise to deadly power struggles and mistreatment, and oppression and humiliation of others in the texts of the *Baal Cycle*. The divine hierarchical structure thus created in the realm of the gods provided Canaanite monarchs and other influential citizens the legitimacy to dehumanize and misuse the ordinary person at all levels in their societies (see Chavalas 2005:35; cf Liverani 2005:13; Orlin 2007:18; see 7.4.1.1-7.4.1.2; cf Jdg 19). In the ancient Near East, the domination of one over another existed; the kings and elite classes, therefore, for the acquisition of wealth, power and authority as kings and rulers followed the path of the gods. The ordinary classes, the worker people, craftsmen and artisans, the peasantry and slaves and everyone else who could be of pecuniary benefit were commodities: like gold, oil and wine, they were resources to be acquired, exploited and possessed by the rich and powerful.

⁵⁷⁵ A powerful god such as Baal could be a vassal of another. The earthly king: Shupilulkumash, the Ugaritic king, is the *ardu* (slave[vassal]) of Nigmaddu (Smith 1994:308). The servitude of the less powerful worshipper and citizen, therefore, would be unquestionable.

⁵⁷⁶ Smith (1994:136), however, argues that the word translated as abuse might not be a correct translation.

⁵⁷⁷ Smith (1994:293) points out that as gold was the most highly priced metal in Ugarit it ‘represented an appropriate item of booty.’

⁵⁷⁸ The gods are not above avarice and the exploitation of their counterparts. These divine attributes represent are in stark contrast to YHWH’s generous grace.

Among the Israelites there had to be no sign of the aforesaid because the equality and benevolence of YHWH which are inherent in the divine nature was inscribed in the covenant and to be emulated by His people.

In the political sphere, affluent and high-status Canaanite ruling classes were created by Egyptian capital investments in the Late Bronze Age in Canaan, in order to obtain unprocessed reserves of oil, wine, lumber and slaves. This is one situation in Canaan that led to the great socio-economic disparities between the wealthy elites and the impoverished citizens in the land (Noll 2013:204).⁵⁷⁹ As indicated before, like the gods in the texts of the *Baal Cycle*, the exploitation of the powerless and weak individual provided the prestigious ruling classes with a workforce including servants and slaves as a means of freedom from arduous toil, to take care of them and to enjoy a luxurious lifestyle.

Town planning of Philistine cities reveals elite districts of the affluent usually situated on the acropolis, the highest area of the city, where conceivably the administrative centre was also located, such as on the acropolis at Tel Miqne-Ekron and Ashdod (Golden 2004:136). Golden (2004:137) provides more details on the emergence of a rich upper Philistine class during the prosperous Iron Age and the Philistine high culture as demonstrated in the material remains of Canaan. For example, expensive jewelry and caches of silver dated to the 7th century BC display the wealth of certain individuals (Golden 2004:137). In the archaeological record, wealthy groups are separated from poverty.⁵⁸⁰ Dated to the 9th century BC an *inscription on an incense altar found at Khirbet al-Mudayna* indicates that it was presumably made for an affluent Moabite woman from an important and influential family since only the rich could afford to show their religious devotion in this manner (Boertien 2014:141).⁵⁸¹

7.4.4 The value of human life

The social and economic status of the gods varies within the realm of the divine. Their significance and position in the pantheon were intricately tied to their specific roles within the divine family, which determined their authority and power (see 3.3.1-3.3.2.1; 3.4.4.2; cf 3.6.1.1). Similarly, the importance of ancient Near Eastern people, their status and value in life, was closely associated with their occupations and tasks in life. In the ancient Near East, this setting created a social organizational system in which some jobs were favoured over others and deemed more important

⁵⁷⁹ Noll (2013:138-139) describes how the kingdoms in Canaan and Syria survived the socio-economic difficulties at the end of the Late Bronze Age. To my mind, the ruling classes would have fled with their wealth to more stable areas.

⁵⁸⁰ Noll (2013:204) mentions that in the Iron Age II, archaeological evidence such as Phoenician influenced ivory carvings show the affluency of the wealthy ruling elites. Although the material remains are few, there are indications of Israelite socio-economic stratification in the Iron Age I (Bloch-Smith and Nakhai 1999:76). As previously stated the Book of Judges also mentions wealthy individuals.

⁵⁸¹ Finkelstein and Silberman (2002:190-191) provides more information on Khirbet al-Mudayna. See also Liverani (2014a:134).

(7.4.1.1b). In view of the abovementioned, social stratification in all its variations, wealth and income, social status, education, nature of work and standard of living, characterized the socio-economic and religious régimes of the ancient Near East that was brought about most importantly by the religious worldview indicated above (see 7.4.1.1a; see also Kiuranov 1982:1-100). If the Israelites had adhered to a heterarchical social structure they need not have suffered similar attitudes and practices in their community (7.4.1.1a) since YHWH valued all people equally as shown in Judges.

7.4.4.1 YHWH's love vs the love of the gods

The value of human life is evident from the moment of creation in Genesis. YHWH created the man and woman and their descendants as equal partners and rulers of the earth (Gn 1:26-28). YHWH considers all human life sacred and extends towards people only the highest standards of His goodwill and love, ethics and divine nature within a relationship of mutual devotion and love (cf 2.2.3.1c-e). Humans, after all, were created to experience a relationship with their creator YHWH that is depicted by their mutual characters, love and intimacy of soul (Harland 1996:175-176). These divine elements and divine restoration after the 'fall' lend an incomparable spiritual meaning to the Israelite worship system and related mindset that is not found in the Canaanite cults (cf 2.2.3.1d). In light of the aforesaid:⁵⁸²

- As indicated before, all human life is imprinted with the image of God. The Israelites were to be His representatives in Canaan (McDowell 2016:34).⁵⁸³
- YHWH bestows His *hesed*, His mercy or lovingkindness on all Israelites – He promises to protect and bless His people with His bounty and a future.⁵⁸⁴ YHWH extends His justice

⁵⁸² The gods do regard human life as valuable (cf 2.2.3.1d). This may be portrayed in the way they create people (see Dalley 2000:15-17). The gods expectorating on the amalgam of clay, flesh and blood from which humans are made (Dalley 2000:16) depicts their attitude towards people as lowly beings. In ancient Egypt texts, gods were also created from the spit of Amun (Wilson 1969c:3) which in my opinion indicates their inferior status to Amun. In many (modern) societies expectoration may be a sign of contempt and it seems among the ancient Near Eastern gods as well. Baal spits in anger at the divine assembly (see Ginsberg 1969a:132). Spitting into the mouth of a sacrificed animal symbolized the transference of the curse of quarrelling into the mouth of the animal where it will remain contained. This rite was part of a cleansing ritual against domestic quarrels (Goetze 1969b:350). To spit in someone's face was an ancient Assyrian gesture of disrespect (Ginsberg 1969b:429). In an incantation from Uruk, spittle is associated with anger (Rosenthal 1969:659). In light of the abovementioned connotations, it appears that spitting was perceived in negative terms. What does this imply regarding the status of man when the amalgam of clay, flesh and blood from which he is made is spat upon by the gods (Dalley 2000:16)?

⁵⁸³ The sacred rank and role of humans as stated in Genesis (Gn 1:26-28) and the status of YHWH as the one true God is reversed in the cults of Canaan in which many gods were worshipped (cf 2.2.5.8). In the Canaanite *Cycle of Baal* texts and the *Enūma Eliš* for example, the gods are established in their sovereign positions as rulers of mankind and the earth. Genesis states that this status was originally specific only to humans (cf 2.2.5.8). It is a divine position derived from being created in the image of YHWH and one that arose from the divine mandate in Genesis 1:26-28 (McDowell 2016:34).

⁵⁸⁴ The attitude of the gods towards people was different. Shiduri, the alewife or tavern keeper exclaims to Gilgamesh:
The life that you seek you never will find: when the gods created mankind, death they dispensed to mankind, life they kept for themselves.

to all His people.⁵⁸⁵ It is an attribute that is expressed through His *hesed*. YHWH's *hesed* for the early Israelites is expressed in His passion for the Israelites (see Arnold 2022; cf 2.2.3.1d; 3.4.6-3.4.6.4).

- YHWH desires all people to live lives of peace, prosperity and happiness and to experience these aspects of life within a loving, devoted relationship with Him. This sets people free from the enslavement, deception, the confusing and questionable morality of the gods and the sense of futility and death that they bring to the human soul (see 2.2.5.8).

YHWH calls His covenant with the Israelites a 'covenant of love' (Dt 7:9, 12; see 2.2.5.1; cf 2.2.1.3d; 8.4.3.1). Carnal love played an important role in the ancient Near Eastern cults and was associated with the worship of fertility and prostitution in the ancient Near East (Williams 2001:72-73; cf Webb and Oeste 2019:115-117; cf 2.2.3.1d). In the Akkadian literature known as 'Ishtar Will Not Tire,' the sex goddess Ishtar is depicted as having limitless sexual stamina for gratifying men with her sensuous pleasures (Webb and Oeste 2019:115). Among the earliest iconographic imageries in the ancient Near East feature numerous nude and erotic images that accentuate the physical aspects of life within the ancient Near Eastern secular and worship systems (see Figure 7.9; Bahrani 1993:12-13). The biblical worldview always objects to the prominence of sexuality in the ancient Near East. YHWH never engages in sexual behaviours ! (see above, Walls 2016:274). Bahrani (1993:13) observes that sex was unhindered in the ancient Near East where it is indulged in free of any ethical or cultic sanctions (see Figure 7.9).

But you, Gilgamesh, let your belly be full, enjoy yourself always by day
and by night!

Make merry each day, dance and play day and night!

Let your clothes be clean, let your head be washed, may you bathe in
water!

Gaze on the child who holds your hand, let your wife enjoy your repeated
embrace! 'For such is the destiny [*of mortal men,*] (George 1999:124).

See also the similarities to Ecclesiastes 9:7-9. See Forti (2021:522-523) and Spronk (2009:149).

⁵⁸⁵ In a broken treaty between Egyptians and the Hittites, divine punishment was not incurred on the Hittite king, Muršili II who broke the treaty but on the entire Hittite people (Podany 2014:94). Šuppiluliuma, the father of king Muršili II, had broken the oath with Egypt and send infantry to attack 'the border of Egypt in the land of Amka' (Podany 2014:94). Podany comments that the punishment for this violation 'came directly from Egypt.' When the (Egyptian) prisoners of war were carried off to Hatti, the prisoners of war introduced the plague into Hatti, and from that time people have been dying in Hatti (Podany 2014:94). Podany asserts that Muršili II believed that the Hittite storm god brought it about in vengeance for his father's impious action. Orlin (2007:89) comments that 'many treaties could be and were broken in the political arena' (of the ancient Near East). Walton and Walton (2019:106) observe that rebellion occurred when a vassal kingdom violated a treaty. In the tradition of the ancient Near East, the gods would have been called upon to enforce the penalties of the broken treaty since the treaties were witnessed by the gods (Walton and Walton 2019:106; cf Abusch 2002:30). The injustice of an entire nation punished for the violation of their king, who remains unaffected by divine wrath, is conspicuous.

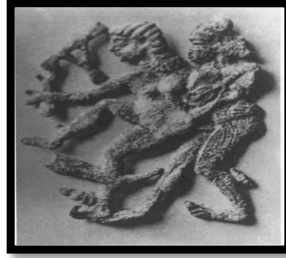


Figure 7.9 Plaque of copulating man and woman. From Assur dated to 1243-1207 BC (Bahrani 1993:14)

The covenantal stipulations places certain prohibitions on sexual intimacy. Sex in the biblical worldview is a sacred union between husband and wife. The Hebrew word for sexual relations in Genesis 4:1 is *yāda* which is also used to describe knowing YHWH in Judges 2:10 suggesting the sanctity of marital relations.⁵⁸⁶ Sex was considered an act of civilization (Bahrani 1993:14), that is, it was held to lead to the advancement of people. However Judges 2:10 alludes that knowledge of YHWH via His sacred covenant leads to the success and continuance of the Israelites. The behaviour of the ancient Near East gods is the archetype to whom their human worshippers conform. Subsequently, their sensuality is ardently emulated in the fertility cults.⁵⁸⁷

The ancient Near Eastern gods also defied the sacred order in Genesis (Gn 1:28), for all humans to procreate, by inhibiting propagation among certain sectors of society, for example, enforcing celibacy on some female priestesses and making eunuchs of certain priests (Tetlow 2004:248; cf Dalley 2000:9; Moss and Baden 2015:33). In another flouting of the biblical God's command to fill the earth, the gods apparently have humans contained in certain places (in cities) in order to control people and ensure they never aspire to rule by turning the majority into a workforce that has to eke out its existence in order to survive. Many human children are born but few survive with just enough to provide workers that will serve the gods' and the human elites' needs.⁵⁸⁸

⁵⁸⁶ The many wives of Gideon for example, were certainly not covenantal but possibly a consequence of his adoption of a syncretic cult as indicated by Judges 8:22-35. This situation is such a puzzling mystery since Gideon had face to face interaction with YHWH. He had firsthand experience of a visitation by the Angel of the LORD, a miraculous sign performed by the Angel in Judges 6:20-22; he also witnessed another miracle in Judges 6:36-40 and had various dream messages. Judges 8:19-23 indicates that he had sons and, coming from idolatrous Ophrah, it is possible that this background and the influence of a Canaanite wife or wives were behind his making of the ephod in Judges 8:27? The mother of Abimelech was from Shechem and possibly Canaanite and would have brought her cult with her (cf Jdg 3:5-6).

⁵⁸⁷ Warfare is another common occurrence among the gods whenever their power structures are under threat. Destruction of human life is also their first inclination, when they are annoyed (Dalley 2000:228). Warfare is the means whereby empires expand in the ancient Near East and power is accumulated by kings through the subjugation of other rulers in accordance with the divine will of their gods.

⁵⁸⁸ Ancient Near Eastern texts narrate that when people began to outnumber them, the gods decide to destroy them through alternating phases of disease, plague, starvation and floods (Dalley 2000:9, 20-27). People began to outnumber the gods in the areas in which both lived which posed a threat to the gods as rulers of the earth (cf Ex 1:7-10). In the *Atrahasis*, divine rulership is threatened by the swelling numbers of people. People started to not venerate the majority of gods and goddesses, preferring to worship a single god, Adad. This meant that offerings and sacrifices went to Adad alone which seemed to increase the god's authority and power whilst lessening that of the other gods

In the ancient Near East, such as in the Egyptian text of the Middle Kingdom (2000 BC), the creator-deity fashions ‘all men equal in access to the basic necessities of life’ (Wilson 1969c:7):⁵⁸⁹ ‘I (the creator god) made the great inundation that the poor man might have rights therein like the great man. ...I made every man like his fellow’ (Wilson 1969c:8). These are however merely words from the god. If a large proportion of the populace is underprivileged (which is always the case in societies with wide economic and social discrepancies), suffering ill-health from inter alia nutritional stress (see below) and if they are without the means to access even the most basic of resources, how then can people have the socio-economic equality that will allow them too to live a life of success, happiness and abundance like the ‘great man’ in the text above?

7.5 CONFLICTING WORLDVIEWS

7.5.1 Representations of two conflicting worldviews

In this section two religious worldviews will be compared, the one presented by the author/s of Judges and the one followed by the Canaanite cults, which were commonly embraced by the early Israelites. The objective is to demonstrate why the author/s considered the Yahwistic worldview as a superior religious belief. According to this worldview, the crucial element of equality that humans have strived for throughout history, but mostly failed to achieve, can be best attained through faith in YHWH and adherence to His covenant.

7.6.1.1 *Deborah and the mother of Sisera*

Deborah and the mother of Sisera are symbolic of the two differing religious worship, lifestyles and associated worldviews. Within the covenantal culture of YHWH which He had created for His people, the author/s of Judges portray Deborah an independent and authoritative woman who is the leader (judge) of Israel, a lawgiver and a prophetess (Jdg 4:4; Sha 2018:176-182). Deborah possesses an unprecedented level of authority and status within the prevailing cultural ideology of the idolatrous Israelite and Canaanite society. The prophetess of YHWH holds court under a palm tree further denoting her status as an approved prognosticator of YHWH (Niditch 2001:180; see Herion 1992:160; see also 4.3.1.2b).

Deborah is a confident and authoritative ‘mother in Israel’ who rose up against the enemy of the Israelites, the Canaanite army under the command of the military general Sisera (Jdg 5:7; see also 3.2.2.1b). Despite her marvelous achievements Deborah’s biggest acclaim is that she is an obedient follower of YHWH in a time of Israelite idolatry (cf Jdg 4:1-7).

and at the same time diminishing their food supplies and depriving them of other possible sources of wealth (see Dalley 2000:21).

⁵⁸⁹ Wilson (1969c:7) describes the Middle Kingdom as an epoch in which justice in society and the natural rights of the people were accentuated by apparently the higher classes.

The mother of Sisera is a wealthy woman of noble birth (Niditch 2001:182). The number of chariots at the royal court or a noble or a privileged household was an indication of the status and wealth of the king or wealthy family. The 900 chariots owned by Jabin demonstrate the immense wealth of the king of Hazor. The impressive number of chariots is indicative of their funding and control by a wealthy aristocratic class that indicate Sisera and his mother's noble backgrounds (see Liid 1992:133-134.⁵⁹⁰ Sisera's mother, naturally, would have been a polytheist. She is depicted as an 'anxious mother' (Boling 1992a:114) seeking reassurance from a courtier who is described as 'the wisest of her ladies.'

In the song of Deborah, the mother of Sisera, accompanied by her ladies in waiting, is watching at a lattice window, crying and waiting for the return of her son (Jdg 5:28-29; Elkins 2006:185; Niditch 2001:182). The 'wisest of her ladies' in assures her mistress that her son is probably late because they are dividing up the spoils of war (Niditch 2001:182). However, despite the mother's anticipation of receiving and wearing the expensive garments acquired as spoils of war (Jdg 5:30; cf Jdg 8:26) she senses that something might have gone awry. Indeed, she does not know that YHWH has brought about the war victory for the Israelites. Niditch (2001:182) remarks that among the spoils of war listed by the mother of Sisera are 'women booty' but the mother is unaware that no Israelite women are to be raped. The Israelites would win the war. Niditch (2001:182) notes that ironically it is Sisera himself who 'has been despoiled at the hands of a warrior woman [Jael] practising the art of tricksterism' (insertion mine).

It seems that her courtiers, particularly 'the wisest of her ladies,' who is specifically mentioned, offer the mother little solace. The term שָׂרָאִי (śārāī) in Hebrew, when translated as 'lady' in the context, signifies the status of a princess,⁵⁹¹ further suggests that Sisera's mother is of noble descent. The Hebrew word חַכְמָה (hākāmāh) used for wise is derived from the Hebrew root חָכַם (chakam). This term signifies the act of providing wise counsel, similar to that of a wise woman (cf 2 Sm 14:2; 20:16). It also carries the implication of a class of learned men (and women) including astrologers and magicians⁵⁹² which were associated with a royal court (cf 5.4.4). Judges 5:29 seems to indicate that 'the wisest of her ladies' might belong to a class of highly-born 'wise' woman or perhaps belonged to a class of diviners that practised astrology. If this is the case, the author/s of Judges may be highlighting the contrast between the divination abilities of the wise woman and the prophetic skills of Deborah by means of the term 'wisest of her ladies.' The possible war predictions made by the 'wisest of her ladies' turned out to be unsuccessful, while

⁵⁹⁰ Liid (1992:133-134) mentions that the discovery of the tomb of a Middle Bronze III Hyksos aristocrat buried with his chariot and horses at Tell el- 'Ajjul, indicates the presence of a wealthy nobility who ruled Tell el- 'Ajjul in that period. In addition, a cache of gold jewelry discovered at Tell el-'Ajjul also confirms that the area was ruled by a wealthy aristocracy of feudal lords.

⁵⁹¹ See Bible Hub 2024. śārāī.

⁵⁹² See Bible Hub 2024. chakam.

Deborah's prophecy of a victorious war campaign was fulfilled. It is thus very likely that Deborah may be using the term 'wisest of her ladies' in a slightly mocking manner.

Deborah held court under a humble palm tree (Jdg 4:4). Being a member of the prosperous Ephraimite tribe and holding the esteemed positions of leader and prophetess, she could have been a woman of great wealth. In the dominant cultural ideology, Deborah's status would have set her apart from the ordinary people and thus her public appearances would have been frowned upon by the elites. The interests of elite Canaanite women were directed at the environment within her household. Their concerns might have been similar to those expressed in the letters of the women of Kaniš (ca early 19th century BC) regarding their daily lives (see Michel 2014:205-212; cf Melville 2005:222).⁵⁹³ Nevertheless, due to her devotion to God and His covenant, Deborah regarded herself as no different from the common Israelites (cf Dt 17:14-20). Her courage and care for the Israelites in the wider society are clearly displayed when she agrees to accompany Barak, who refuses to go without her, to the battlefield, a domain traditionally reserved for men. As Israelites' leader she is used to giving orders and having them obeyed. However, she is humble and selfless enough to acquiesce with Barak's demand. Deborah comprehended that the failure to enter and emerge victorious in the war would result in an extended period of intensified anguish for her fellow Israelites. Deborah's commitment to YHWH and her willingness to save her people extends to every corner of the land. Judges 5 reveals that she expected all the tribes to join in the war.

In contrast, the self-centredness of Sisera's mother becomes evident as she contemplates the spoils of war. Her sole concern lies with her own well-being and that of her son. It is possible that the mother of Sisera held a position of great authority within the household and would have been an important personage in the royal court at Hazor (see Melville 2005:222-223). However, despite her efforts in utilizing offerings, cult magic and incantations, she remains powerless in influencing the outcome of the war campaign and rescuing her son. By contrast, Deborah, a mother in Israel, was successfully able to save her 'sons' as guided by YHWH. This is evident in Judges 4:14, where Deborah confidently instructs Barak, "Go, for this is the day that the LORD has given Sisera into your hands. Has the LORD not gone ahead of you?"

⁵⁹³ The highborn women of Hazor only appeared outside the privacy of their residences for purposes of travel, a social call or a visit to the temple. During these travels the women would have been veiled and in the confines of a covered chariot that kept them concealed from the eyes of the public. In the supplication of king Mursilis to the god Telepinus, the king mentions the celebration of cultic festivals by the women of the royal household (Goetze 1969b:397). Royal and other elite women did not appear in public to join the festive crowds of the masses as this would have reflected very poorly on their status and most importantly that of the king or the patriarch of the family (Melville 2005:225). Marsman (2003:325-381) provides more information regarding noblewoman in the ancient Near East (cf Melville 2005:222). Melville observes that elite women of all eras and, in particular, the wife of the king or his mother assumed essential administrative positions. It is not possible to determine the extent of their authority, whether they were official or occurred on a personal level as well as the limitations of these roles set by their gender, but women of privileged position held more authority and experienced more freedom than lower born women (Melville 2005:222).

7.7 CONCLUSION

The socio-economic imbalances alluded to in Judges would have been, in the author/s' worldview, considered as evil since they undermined the ethos of equality encoded in the Sinaitic Covenant and concomitant value that YHWH places on all people. These societal inequities therefore would have been an underlying motif in the messages of critique delivered against the Israelites (cf Jdg 2:1-3; 6:8-10; 10:10-14) which also, paradoxically, showcased the covenantal and monotheistic perspectives of the author/s of Judges.

Multiple factors played a role in creating the socio-economic imbalances referenced in Judges 6:13; 8:2 (cf Jdg 10:3; 12:9, 14). The incomplete conquest and the Canaanite treaties may have played a major role in assisting the Israelites in establishing hierarchical systems of wealth discrepancies within their community. However, the author/s of Judges never exonerate the Israelites from their own responsibility and participation in creating these imbalances. In the author/s worldview, the Israelites' wilful abandonment of YHWH (Jdg 2:10) was a notable manifestation of their opposition to the covenant which would have enabled the Israelites to deliberately adopt the stratified socio-economic systems that were prevalent among the Canaanites.

During cycles of idolatry, and, in particularly, the times of oppression enumerated in Judges, the lives of the Israelites may not have been any better than the arduous lives of the ordinary working class and poverty-stricken Canaanites described in this chapter. The oppression, poverty and fear that were aspects of Canaanite life discussed in this chapter (see 7.4.1.2a-d) would have characterized the lives of the Israelites (cf Jdg 2:10-19; 3:7-8, 12-14; 4:1-3; 6:1-6, etcetera). The rejection of the covenant led to other abnormalities, the penury and syncretism of the Levite in Judges 17 (see 7.6.1) and the atrocities allowed by the Levite in Judges 19 (see 7.6.2).

Nevertheless, the author/s consistently advocate the concept of covenantal restoration (Jdg 2:1-3; 6:8-10; 10:10-14). This is evident when they describe YHWH's displays of compassion towards His oppressed people (Jdg 2:19 and 10:16) and His raising up judges to deliver them. Consequently, the Israelites' deliverance and eventual restoration to YHWH and the covenantal lifestyle all form part of the author/s approach to rectify socio-economic disparities in the tribal community

CHAPTER EIGHT FESTIVALS, PRIESTS, AND PEOPLE

8.1 INTRODUCTION

Little is known about the priesthood, their ritual practices and the Tabernacle in Judges. However certain narratives do offer glimpses into the aforesaid themes (Jdg 2:4-5; 6:11-20; 13:3-20, etcetera). With the aid of Deuteronomy as well as other Old Testament books this chapter will delve into the world of sacred rituals (the fifth element of Zevit's [2002:74-75] categorization of sacred space; see also Table 4.1) and sacred people and the ordinary Israelite devotee that would have worshipped YHWH in the cycles of peace and covenantal restoration in Judges (Jdg 3:11, 30; 5:31, etcetera).

This chapter thus primarily aims at launching an investigation into the people and practices that defined sacred space and which filled the world of the early Israelites. Such an investigation will also assist in providing an illuminated understanding of the worldview of the author/s of Judges who were ardent defenders of the covenantal lifestyle.

In accordance with their covenant stipulations, the early Israelites had to undertake three annual pilgrimages to the Tabernacle at Shiloh. The tribes had a distinctive priesthood as well as distinguishing rituals that set them apart from their ancient Near Eastern equivalents. The aforesaid themes will be discussed. Archaeology and parallel ancient Near Eastern texts may also serve to broaden the discussions.

8.2 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF RELIGIOUS FESTIVALS

8.2.1 Prologue

Nakhai (2011:348-349) wonders if the three annual festivals were consistently celebrated throughout the entirety of 'Israel's history.' She continues by saying that it is not well understood how pilgrimage benefitted the ordinary people. Judges may provide some answers to the abovementioned questions.

The Book of Judges suggests that there was a significant likelihood of pilgrimages to the Tabernacle being discontinued during the cyclical periods of idolatry and oppression described in the book. Deborah mentions the abandoned highways 'in the days of Shamgar' and 'in the days of Jael' (Jdg 5:6). The Hebrew word for highway is *orāḥōwṭ* (אֲרָחוֹת) with the meaning of a well-trodden road also a caravan.⁵⁹⁴ The term *ḥāḏālū* (חָדָלוּ) in Hebrew translates to 'abandoned' and is derived from the root *chadal* (חָדַל), which means to cease. Given the foregoing, the text in Judges 5:6-7 suggests that due to a decline in population, there is a restricted number of travellers or

⁵⁹⁴ See Bible Hub 2024. Judges 5:6.

caravans traveling along the mentioned highways, resulting in a cessation in travel and trade which apparently is foreseen in Leviticus.⁵⁹⁵ Leviticus (26:22) refers to the empty highways resulting from a decrease in the Israelite population, while Isaiah (33:8) also touches upon the theme of deserted highways. Isaiah provides an explanation for this phenomenon, attributing it to a broken treaty which serves as a recurring theme in the Book of Judges (cf Jdg 2:1-3). Turmoil in Israelite society as a result of their broken covenant most likely disrupted the three annual pilgrimages to the Tabernacle which the texts above seem to indicate came to an end (cf 4.2.2.3c).

Perennial idolatry also had an adverse effect on the three annual pilgrimages. The author/s of Judges voice a continuous expression of disapproval towards the idolatry of the Israelites, who worshipped the different gods of the Canaanites (Jdg 2:10-19; 3:5-7, and so on). During a period of idolatry, only a minority of Israelites who were devoted to YHWH would have journeyed to Shiloh to commemorate the three yearly pilgrimage feasts at the Tabernacle. The majority of the Israelites would have diverted their agricultural produce and other offerings away from the Tabernacle to the temples (cf Jdg 9:27), (shrines at the) high places (cf Jdg 25-26), syncretic house shrines (Jdg 17:5) and (tribal) sanctuaries (Jdg 18:31; cf 4.2.2.3b).

As the Israelites' main religious centre, the primary purpose of the Tabernacle was to serve the religious needs of the Israelites. It did, however, also have significant socio-economic functions that were indispensable to the tribal community and economy: as far as social advantages were concerned, the festivals reinforced the ordinary people's sense of self as individuals and as a community when they gathered together as the people of YHWH at the Tabernacle (cf 3.2.2.1b).

Economic advantages of the three annual pilgrimages included meeting the needs of the Israelites' for vital resources (cf 7.2.2). Nakanose (2004:35) remarks that in order to guarantee that everyone in the population had secure access to a sufficient standard of living, the community (or tribal) economy controlled the production and distribution of essential resources. The earliest Israelites did this by making the best use of and preservation of their meagre material resources (Nakanose 2004:35). Nakanose goes on to say that the needs of the 'communal economy' determined how 'surplus' was used. The customary method of 'storing surplus, socializing and consuming the surplus' took place via 'cults festivals and sacrifice' at the Tabernacle which were vital to the maintenance of the tribal economy. In this way the tribal economy eliminated waste and the misappropriation of material resources (Nakanose 2004:35-36; cf 7.2.2; cf 7.2.3.1a).⁵⁹⁶ The discontinuation of the three annual festivals resulted in the non-delivery of crucial food resources to the Tabernacle. This would have a negative impact on the livelihood of the priesthood, as they relied on these agricultural resources. Furthermore, the scarcity of essential resources for redistribution

⁵⁹⁵ See Bible Hub 2024. Judges 5:6.

⁵⁹⁶ As explained in Chapter Seven the generation of surplus led to the potential to the accumulation of wealth among the Israelites as well as greed, created opportunities for the exploitation of the less wealthy communities by more affluent ones (cf Jdg 8:2).

within the community would result in the suffering of the less fortunate. However, most importantly, the cessation of the three annual pilgrimage festivals indicated a fractured relationship with YHWH, and it is likely the disgrace associated with this broken bond that the author/s of Judges are primarily focused on. Everything else could be restored if only the Israelites reestablished to their relationship with their Covenant God.

It is likely that during times of peace and covenantal restoration (see Table 8.2), the three annual festivals would have been celebrated in Shiloh by the majority of the early Israelites if they were devoted to YHWH (cf Jdg 19:18 and 21:19). Although the Tabernacle is only briefly mentioned in Judges (18:31; 19:18; cf Jdg 21:19), this does not detract from the strong covenantal tone of the author/s of Judges embedded throughout the text (cf Jdg 2:1-5; 3:7; 4:1; 6:8-10, 11-19, and so on). Although the author/s do not indicate, it was a covenantal tone would have been more pronounced during times of peace since now it was enjoyed by (many) faithful Israelites.

The author/s record that the Israelites experienced lengthier periods of peace compared to periods of idolatry (see Tables 2.2 and 8.2). Although there appears to have been a syncretic household cult among the Israelites (cf Jdg 17:5; 18:31), it is also probable that a significant number remained loyal to mono-YHWH. However, the author/s do not provide much information about what transpired during these peaceful times. It is possible to gather insights from Deuteronomy and other preceding texts regarding how the faithful Israelites worshipped YHWH. It is clear, however, that the sustainability of extended periods of peace relied heavily on the presence of a prosperous economy, which in turn required the Tabernacle to operate effectively. As previously mentioned, the tribal economy was intricately linked to the proper functioning of the Tabernacle.

The aforementioned discussion highlights the significance of maintaining the covenant within the Israelite society for the function that the festivals played in bringing the people together around a shared religion and identity, and the crucial socio-economic benefits that these festivities offered to the community and the lived experiences of each individual.

The festivals of YHWH bestowed upon the Israelites specific life ‘rhythms,’ ensuring them a divine assurance of YHWH’s sacred promise of protection and abundance. Each of YHWH’s festivals was linked to a unique sacred narrative that directed individuals towards their covenantal God, molding their existence, and fortifying the religious perspective embraced by them and the author/s of Judges. What the author/s of Judges is advocating for is the reinstatement of the covenantal ‘rhythms’ that governed the lives of the Israelites, which would bring them back to the land and align their religious and daily existence with the intended plan of YHWH.

8.2.1.1 Agrarian rhythms

The agrarian existence of the early Israelites was governed by the daily agricultural rhythms of the rising and setting of the sun (King and Stager 2002:42-45, 62). These diurnal farming rhythms

were divided into agrarian seasons that were activated and completed by the Israelites' religious festivals. In the biblical worldview, the daily and seasonal rhythms of agriculture were predetermined by the divine. The signs that marked their sacred times, days, and years were introduced into the cosmos shortly after YHWH formed the earth (Gn 1:14-17). The tripartite symmetry – the celestial calendar, the Israelite calendar, and the agrarian calendar – that exists between the earth below and the skies serves as additional support for the holiness of YHWH's festivals. The celestial/cosmic calendar describes the movements of the celestial bodies across the sky upon which was based the Israelite lunisolar calendar which in turn guided the 'agricultural-festival' calendar.⁵⁹⁷ Subsequently, the early Israelites were following calendrical rhythms that in the biblical worldview were regarded as religious tasks which were essential to the productivity of the community (see Lefebvre 2019:39).

The Israelites' idolatry had severe consequences for the productivity of their community and keeping their festival calendar. In the religious mindset informing the author/s of Judges the idolatry of the early Israelites upturned the sacred order and balanced rhythms of life that YHWH had established for His people via His covenant (cf Jdg 3; 4; 6, etcetera). The Midianites' dispossession of the Israelites of their land by their occupation and devastation of the tribes' farming land (Jdg 6:3-5), disrupted their farming activities and only impoverished the tribes in a material and spiritual sense. It was a divine transgression to fail to till the soil or to destroy its fruitfulness (cf 4.2.2.3c). The labour of the Israelites and the productivity of the land served to honour YHWH to whom belonged the people (the stewards of YHWH's land) and the land itself in accordance with the Abrahamic (cf Gn 12:7; 15:17-21; 17) and Sinaitic Covenants (Ex 19:5-6; Jos 24). Leviticus 25:23 reads: 'The land must not be sold permanently, because the land is mine and you reside in my land as foreigners and strangers. Throughout the land that you hold as a possession, you must provide for the redemption of the land.' Judges describes the desperation of the Israelites when they cry out to YHWH for help. YHWH responds by initiating the war campaigns described in Judges in order to redeem the tribes' land (Jdg 7:1-25; cf Jdg 3:7-10, 12-15, 31; 4:1-3, etcetera) and reestablish the sacred order of their lives. As stated before (see 8.2.1), the author/s of Judges do not reveal much about the periods of covenant restoration (Jdg 3:11, 30; 5:31, etcetera). Judges 17-18, however, shows syncretic and idolatrous activities. Nevertheless, the Israelites presumably went back to farming and adhered to their 'agricultural-festival' calendar.

a. The Gezer calendar

As mentioned before, the annual Israelite calendar and the agricultural-festival calendar were inextricably associated with each other and were centred on the seasonal agricultural activities of farming and herding (King and Stager 2002:42-45, 62). Discovered in 1908, the 10th century BC

⁵⁹⁷ My term.

*Gezer Calendar*⁵⁹⁸ is an inscribed limestone tablet that lists the twelve months in which different agricultural activities took place in (early) Israel – ‘sowing, harvesting and the processing of flax and barley’ (Rollston 2010:29; 2012:32-40, 66-68;⁵⁹⁹ cf King and Stager 2002: 42-45, 62; see Figure 8.1). A festival at the end of one of the months on the tablet is also mentioned.⁶⁰⁰ De Vaux (1997:493), however, identifies the feast on the *Gezer Calendar* as the Feast of Weeks. King and Stager (2002:42-45, 62) describes the *Gezer Calendar* as providing a look into a lifestyle that was governed by ‘natural rhythms’ of the earth. This is likely how life was during times of covenantal restoration.

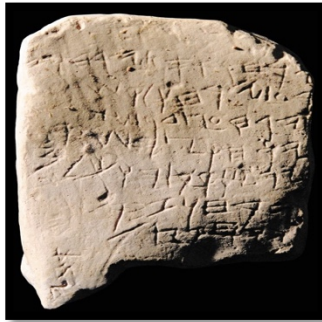


Figure 8.1 The Gezer Calendar (Rollston 2012:32-40, 66-68)

Albright’s translation of the seven lines on the Gezer Calendar tablet reads as follows: His two months are [olive] harvest [his month is idiomatic in the Hebrew Bible, cf 1 Ki 5:7]; his two months are grain-planting: his two months are late planting; his two months is hoeing up of flax; his month is barley harvest; his month is harvest and festivity; his two months are vine-tending; his month is summer-fruit (Albright 1943b:22-23; Rollston 2012:32-40, 66-68; cf also Macalister 1912b:25-27; Talmon 1963:177-187; Wright 1955:50; Borowski 2003:27). The *Gezer Calendar* is an agrarian timekeeping device that kept early Israelites closely tied to the cadences of earth and sky (King and Stager (2002:42-45, 62) which would culminate in the festivities of gratitude celebrated at the Israelite sacred spaces such as Shiloh.

b. Agricultural-festival calendar

⁵⁹⁸ The *Gezer Calendar* was considered to be the oldest Hebrew writing until the discovery of a clay tablet at Izbet Sartah that contains Hebrew writing. The Izbet Sartah inscription contains 80 Hebrew letters organized in five lines that has been dated to the end of the 11th century BC about 100 years earlier than the Gezer Calendar (Oldest Hebrew Letters Found Near Tel Aviv 1976. BAR 2(4), 6; cf Robinson 2012:32-30, 66-68).

⁵⁹⁹ Rollston, however, does not believe that the script of the *Gezer Calendar* is Hebrew but suggests it to be Phoenician. Koller (2013:179-193) suggests that the language is closer to Aramaic than it is to Hebrew.

⁶⁰⁰ For more information regarding the *Gezer Calendar* see Macalister (1912a:54; 1912b:24), who discovered the tablet, Albright (1943b:16-26); Wright (1955:50); King and Stager (2001:88); cf Wirgin (1960:9-12), who believes the *Gezer Calendar* to be an apotropaic device to protect the agricultural seasons from harm and Talmon (1963:177). See also Albright (1969a:320) for a translation of the *Gezer Calendar* inscription.

During times of peace and covenantal restoration it is likely that agricultural-festival calendar required a collective mentality where everyone cooperates to ensure its maintenance and smooth function. We see how the religion of the Israelites served to strengthen that communal spirit by establishing an inextricable association between everyday agricultural and religious events (see the description of the *Gezer calendar* in 8.2.1.1a). When the bread (Jdg 6:19) and grain offering (Jdg 13:19) are made to the Angel of YHWH the narrator/s of Judges likewise convey this mindset.

Lefebvre (2019:39, 109) remarks that the ‘festival calendar’ was not a worship ritual separated from (pre-monarchic) daily lives ‘but a rhythm for worship that helped regulate both risk spreading and the labor optimization for national fruitfulness.’ As said before, the annual pilgrimages and feast ensured that everyone in the community had safe access to a decent quality of living by means of receiving the surplus that were delivered to the Tabernacle in the form of tithes (see 8.2.1.1; cf 7.2.2, 4.2.2.3b). The festivals brought about shared religious experiences creating a societal spirit that fostered mutual associations and bolstered the tribal economy (see also 8.2.1) and perhaps even created an informal people’s network. Such an unofficial people’s network would be able to fill the void in the absence of a strong, stable and wise leadership and render assistance in times of crises (see also 8.2.1).⁶⁰¹ Nevertheless, Judges reveals a society that was deeply fractured, resulting in the limited influence that any people’s network might have had on the broader community (cf Jdg 19).

The agricultural-festival calendar was also symbolically connected to the cycle of birth and death, that were another integral part of the agrarian lifestyle in Canaan. Lefebvre (2019:26-27) observes that these festivals usually had sacred layers related to them, which may have differed among the ancient Near Eastern nations, but centred on the one common theme of ‘death and new life’ (cf McKenzie 1952:124-125). These were sacred stories of ensuring continual fertility of land by means of mimetic festival rites that repeated the divine death and rebirth of the associated deities (McKenzie 1952:124-125). However, the monotheistic religion of the early Israelites removed the agricultural festivals from its ancient Near Eastern polytheistic and fertility-related setting. The

⁶⁰¹According to Mayes (1975:53), Judges 7:2 indicates the existence of the amphictyonic tribal arrangement of the Israelites. However, Judges 5 and 6 indicates that not all the tribes participated in war campaigns. Gideon, was able to assemble thirty-two thousand men (Jdg 7:2). Previously in Judges 6:34-35, he had called to arms the Abiezrites who were joined by Asher, Zebulun and Naphtali. As in Judges 5, not all the tribes join him and perhaps a people’s network made up of fighting men could assist. According to Meyers (2006:248) the gendered division of labour that existed in early Israel allowed women from nearby households to toil together and arrange themselves in an ‘informal social network’. This ‘informal social network’ helped with communal maintenance and households supporting each other. Meyers provides archaeological evidence for the division of labour based on gender by citing as an example the positioning of installations and equipment in the (communal courtyard) for the baking of bread. Here women could gather and work together and, in this way, form an informal women’s social network (Meyers 2006:248; see also Sha 2018:327-329). Idolatry and (anti-covenantal) Canaanite cultic influences (cf Jdg 3:5-7; 4:1, etcetera), degraded morality (cf Jdg 8:2; 9:5 11:2; 19; see Chapter Seven) and tribal disunity (Jdg 5) had led to communal fragmentation (cf Jdg 17:6; 21:25; cf Jdg 18:1; 19:1). An unofficial people’s network would also have been beneficial to the community and could be utilized to support the community in the times of crises described above.

three annual festivals were sacred times of thanksgiving dedicated to YHWH to commemorate the LORD's blessing of the fertility of the land and His abundance.

8.2.2 Sacred stories and religious festivals

8.2.2.1 *Israelite*

Although associated with the fertility of people and the land, YHWH was not a god of fertility (Bulkeley 2011:11-36, 77-100; see also 3.3.2). YHWH did not need the intimacy of a goddess consort that could be reminiscent of human reproduction (McKenzie 2009:110; cf 2.2.3.1d). It was only after their familiarity with the Canaanite cults that the idolatrous Israelites started to regard YHWH as a god of fertility (McKenzie 1952:125). According to McKenzie (1952:125) it is no longer possible to claim that YHWH originally was a mountain god or a storm god without a fertility purpose and that the nomadic Israelites had no need for a god of agriculture. Good (1996:166-167) states that the Israelites possibly acquired their harvest festivals from the Canaanites. De Vaux (1997:494) is more assertive in his statement that the Feast of Weeks was adopted from the Canaanites. McKenzie asserts that any assumption about YHWH should come from (early) Israelite traditions and contends that the spring and autumn festivals were older than the intrusion of the Canaanite cults on the (early) Israelite religion. The Israelites 'attributed fertility to YHWH simply and without reflection' and only after their introduction to the Canaanite cults did they consider YHWH as a fertility deity (McKenzie 1952:125).

The early Israelites were among the ancient Near Eastern nations who wished to partake in the divine power of life (Lefebvre 2019:27-28). YHWH alone was considered the provider of life, well-being, and success. By means of the festival calendars the early Israelites could worship YHWH who alone produced abundant harvests and a prosperous society (Lefebvre 2019:27-28; cf Jdg 21:19). As mentioned before, the festivals of YHWH were sacred rites that celebrated the power of YHWH to provide abundance for His people. Therefore, the Canaanite festival rites, with their emphasis on fertility and sexuality, would have been eschewed by the unadulterated followers of YHWH (Good 1996:166; cf McKenzie 1952:125; Lefebvre 2019:30; see below, 8.2.2.2a).

The sacred narrative of the early Israelite festivals also spoke of the sovereignty of YHWH and His supremacy over the Canaanite deities. Van Gemeren (1984:412) remarks that Passover, for instance, was a revelation of YHWH's power and victory over the gods of Egypt (cf Laffey 1989:309; Turner 1989:121). In addition, YHWH's festivals was a disclosure of His benevolent nature and disposition towards humanity. In the Israelite religion, human sacrifice was replaced with that of an animal with all its deep symbolic meanings.⁶⁰² Zerafa (1964:236) relates the

⁶⁰² Zerafa (1964:236-237), however states that the expiatory sacrificial rites are not grounded in the replacement of an animal for a human life but on the conviction that, particularly, the blood of every sacrifice assuaged the wrath of God. Zerafa continues to say that there were no real expiatory rituals in Mesopotamia since the Babylonians and Assyrians counteracted evil with magic rites. Nevertheless, the religious rites and laws as expressed in Deuteronomy

prevalence of human sacrifice among the Canaanites, a practice that was never accepted by unadulterated Yahwism (cf Ahituv 2007:763).⁶⁰³

8.2.2.2 *The ancient Near East*

The ancient Near Eastern nations acknowledged the ‘life-giving principles in nature’ (Lefebvre 2019:27). The god Enlil, the primordial⁶⁰⁴ storm god in the ancient Near East, brought forth the lifegiving spring winds, containing the fertilizing rains that ensured abundant plant growth as well as the damaging storm clouds with their destructive floods (Rochberg 2005:319). However, Enlil is also ‘immanent in the storm itself’ (Rochberg 2005:319). Likewise in the Ugaritic texts Baal bears the epithet ‘rider upon the clouds’ to indicate his nature as a storm god (Herrmann 1999b:704; McKenzie 1952:124-125; cf 6.3.7).⁶⁰⁵

and elsewhere in the Old Testament present the only proper and acceptable models for the worship of YHWH, considered the true God, and sacrificing unto Him. The magic rites of the Mesopotamians would have included the use of blood since blood was the substance of life as evinced in the use of blood to create people (the use of the blood of Tiamat by Marduk to create humans in the *Enūma Eliš*) (Keener and Walton 2019). The prevalence of human sacrifice in Canaan, as noted above, in my opinion is based on offering their blood as a symbol of life to the gods (cf Ahituv 2007:763). In light of this, substituting animals with people presents a benevolent way of sacrificing unto God.

⁶⁰³ Ideally, it was only the Israelite God that could take life (Ex 12:12) and it is YHWH’s supremacy that also transcended nature, while Enlil and Baal actively participated with nature to bring about the rains for abundance harvests (see 7.2.2.2a), YHWH acted external to the environment in order to generate the rainy winter season (Sweeney 2012) and could affect nature at will according to His will. This He did when He, for example, caused a heavy rainstorm in the wadi of Kishon near Mount Tabor that granted the Israelites victory over the army of Sisera (Jdg 4:15; 5:21; Frymer-Kensky and Tamber- Rosenau 2021). Ancient Canaan experienced a cyclical rain pattern and suffered water scarcity because of a lack of sufficient rivers and springs in the land.⁶⁰³ Gales and terrifying thunderstorms were common (Deist 2000:122-123). No doubt the Canaanite inhabitants ascribed these displays of nature to gods, the storm god Baal for example. Farming required hard work to make the inhospitable soil receptive to plant growth. Still the Israelites depended on YHWH to fulfill His promise to provide them with health for work and rain for their harvests.

⁶⁰⁴ Enlil was the most ancient of the storm gods in the ancient Near East as attested to in the texts (Rochberg 2005:319). The later derivations of Enlil in the appearances of the storm gods, Marduk (and Baal [see Smith 2002:76; Fant and Reddish 2008:83]) share the same powers of Enlil, to bring forth the rains that made the land fertile and ensured plant growth (Rochberg 2005:319).

⁶⁰⁵ YHWH bears the epithet of *lārōkēb bā ‘ārābōwī* (Ps 68:4) that is frequently translated as ‘rider through the steppe’ (literally: he who rides through the steppe) which was based on the Hebrew *‘ārābōt* for steppe or desert (Herrmann 1999b:703-704). The *NIV* translates *lārōkēb bā ‘ārābōwī* as ‘him who rides on the clouds’, the *KJV* as ‘him that rideth upon the heavens’ and the *NASB* [and *ASV*] as ‘Him who rides through the deserts.’ The latter two translations are closer to the Hebrew meaning of the phrase. Herrmann (1999b:704) comments that *rōkēb bā ‘ārābōt* [rider through the steppe] is believed to mirror the Ugaritic appellation *rkb ‘rpt* (‘Rider upon the clouds’) customarily given to Baal. Herrmann explains that because YHWH is described in verse 33 of Psalm 68 as the ‘Rider in the heavens, the heavens of old’, the word *‘ārābōt* is thought to mean ‘clouds.’ Herrmann (1999b:704-705) discusses the possible meanings of *‘ārābōt*. He concludes that ‘in the context of Ps 68, the word *‘ārābōt* ‘makes good sense when translated as steppe or desert’. Herrmann adds that the ‘choice of the word *‘ārābōt*’ should be seen as a conscious attempt to distinguish YHWH from Baal by adopting the Baal appellation and entirely transforming the meaning when applied to YHWH’ (Herrmann 1999b:705). A parallel change is to be found in Psalm 68:7: ‘When you, God, went out before your people’ a modification of Judges 5:4a: ‘When Lord went out from Seir’ and Psalm 68:7b: ‘when you marched through the wilderness’ that was adapted from Judges 5:4b: ‘when you marched from the land of Edom.’ The change of the Ugaritic word *rkb* into the Hebrew term *‘ārābōt* ‘fits this pattern of modification’ (Herrmann 1999b:705).

However, the author/s of Judges would have discredited this perception. While Enlil and Baal actively participated with nature to bring about the rains for abundance harvests, YHWH acted external to the environment in order to generate the rainy winter season (Sweeney 2012) and could affect nature at will according to His will (see Jdg 4:15; 5:21; Frymer-Kensky and Tamber-Rosenau 2021).

The gods and their rejuvenating power to restore the earth to fertility (birth) after the winter seasons (death) were revered with offerings, hymns, and festive celebrations. The festivals dedicated to Baal were done to commemorate Baal's victory over his enemy Mot, the god of death (see Wake-man 1973:106-117).⁶⁰⁶ Lefebvre (2019:27-28) notes that the 'Baal Epic' presents a narrative context for the seasonal 'changes and harvests.' Lefebvre (2019:28) adds that other early calendars display an analogous pattern. Each nation wove their own sacred story into the fabric of their seasonal and festive calendars. Sumerian, Ur, Babylonian, and Egyptian festive calendars centred on the story of a god's death and rebirth (McKenzie 1952:124-125).⁶⁰⁷ Lefebvre references the Egyptian festivities that commemorated the death of Osiris at the hand of Seth and the god's rebirth as Horus. The Osiris rituals occurred in tandem with the flooding of the Nile River which restored fertility to the farm fields every summer (Lefebvre 2019:28).

a. The festivals of Baal/Asherah

In the (Ugaritic) Canaanite religion, Baal as the storm god together with his consort Athirat or Asherah brought about the fertility of the land, family, and animals (Duguid 1999:112; Smith 2002:76; Fant and Reddish 2008:83; cf Jdg 3:7; 6:25-26).⁶⁰⁸ The storm god, Baal, associated with agriculture (Na'aman 1999a:143) was perceived to provide the land with the rains needed for the land to flourish (Fant and Reddish 2008:83; see also 3.6.1.1c). The (grape harvest) festival in Judges 9:27 which was dedicated to Baal comprised the sacred banquet mentioned in the narrative that was initiated by sacrifices and rituals of appeasement and which also involved sacred sexual rites (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:182; De Vries 1997a:80; cf Patai 1990:39; Martins 2015:50; Van Der Laan 2015; Smith 2018:118). Smith (2018:118) states that this Shechem feast was held in honour of 'one of the Baal gods.' It is possible that the god was Baal-*berith* that was

⁶⁰⁶ In the battle between the two gods, Mot at first vanquished Baal and confined him to the netherworld (Lefebvre 2019:27). While Baal is restrained in the netherworld, the land suffered a severe lack of rain and hence joins Baal in his death. Baal, however, defeats Mot, escapes from the netherworld and restores rain to the land (Lefebvre 2019:27).

⁶⁰⁷ The sacred story behind the Sumerian festival calendar centred on the death and rebirth of the god Dumuzi (Shalem and Ziffer 2015:460; Lefebvre 2019:28). The calendar of Ur attributed the seasonal changes to a contest between the sun god Utu and the moon god, Nanna (or Sin/Nannar) (cf 5.4.5.4a; Lefebvre 2019:28).

⁶⁰⁸ Baal is styled as a rain, lightning or storm god in the Ugaritic text discovered at Ras Shamra in Syria (see Duguid 1999:112; Smith 2002:76; Fant and Reddish 2008:83 See also De Vries (1997a:80) who describes the consort of Baal as Anath. The sensual practices involved in the worship of these deities may explain why the Israelites time and again abandoned their faith in YHWH to serve these gods (De Vries 1997a:80; see also Sha 2018:195; Fant and Reddish 2008:83). De Vries (1997a:80) describes ritual practices involved in the worship of Baal (cf Ornan 2010:121).

either influenced/ associated by the Israelite God of the Covenant who was featured there in terms of the patriarchs and the renewal of the covenant by Joshua (Jos 24; cf 2.3.1; 2.3.4.2a).

Multiple gods could be worshipped in Canaanite temples and it is possible that Baal (as *Baal-berith*) and his consort Asherah were both worshipped at the feast held in the temple in Judges 9:27 (cf Jdg 6:25-26; 10:6; cf 3.4.4.2a-b). Judges 3:7 states that the ‘Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD,’ they forgot YHWH and ‘served a multiplicity of gods designated as Baals and Asherahs’ (Nelson 2018:56).⁶⁰⁹ As indicated before, the death and resurrection of the god of Baal, a distinctive feature of the Canaanite cult, provided the sacred basis for the harvest festivals in Canaan (McKenzie 1952:124). To reiterate, the fertility god (Baal) is killed by his adversaries symbolized by the destructive forces in nature. The burial of the god is associated with the sowing of seeds (McKenzie 1952:125). The god is resurrected ‘to enjoy the sexual union of his consort – Anath (and Asherah) at Ugarit, Ishtar in Mesopotamia’ (insertion mine, McKenzie 1952:125) and in the Book of Judges, Asherah (cf Jdg 3:7; 6:25-26).

b. Worship of a goddess

A second distinguishing aspect of the Canaanite cult was the powerful presence and role of the fertility goddess/es (cf Jdg 3:7; 6:25-26; McKenzie 1952:125; Dever 2005:101).⁶¹⁰ Asherah embodied life and reproduction, which were elemental features in women’s (and men’s) daily realities (Paz 2007:115). Snakes and at times birds (symbols of reproduction, life and in the case of snakes, healing [cf Nu 21:6-8; King and Stager 2001:84]) often accompanied Ugaritic and Canaanite goddesses⁶¹¹ (Münnich 2008:42; Willette 2014; see Figure 8.2 with doves sitting atop an Iron Age

⁶⁰⁹ Nelson (2018:56) observes that biblical narratives refer to Asherah as both a deity (1 Ki 15:3; 18:19; 2 Ki 23:4) and as a noun used to indicate ‘a wooden cult object’ (see 2.3.4.3b; 3.3.2.1; 3.6.1.1e; 4.3.1.2b; see also Footnote 213). These (Asherah) poles were built as part of sanctuary installations that were connected to an altar, for instance, in Judges 6:25-30. Nelson (2018:56) notes that Judges 3:7 utilizes a feminine plural form for Asherah instead of the customary masculine plural and questions if this was done to suggest that these Asherahs are to be regarded as female partners of the analogous male Baals or to accentuate the fact that ‘they are definitely false gods’ and not simply cult objects. Nelson adds that ‘the verb serve requires a personal object’ and indicates that the Asherahs ‘are indeed gods here, and not just wooden poles.’

⁶¹⁰ In the *Ugaritic Baal Cycle* text, it is the goddess Anath who initially defeats Mot and facilitates Baal’s release from the netherworld and reappearance – the growth of plants and eventual harvests – on the land (Smith 1994:105). The combination of fierce warrior and sexuality attached to goddesses would have presented a powerful allure to their devotees. In the Ugaritic text the name Asherah originally consisted of a longer designation: *Rabbathu’athiratu yammi*’ which means either ‘The Lady Who Traverses the Seas’ or ‘The Lady Who Treads on the Sea [Dragon]’ (Albright 1994:121). It is particularly the latter appellation that would add to her character as a warrior goddess. Primarily Asherah is known as the mother goddess as the designation: ‘*Qâniyatu’elîma*, indicates (Albright 1994:121). Once again it is clear that the qualities of warrior and sexuality made the fertility goddess Asherah (and her festivals) a powerful contender to the worship of YHWH among the idolatrous early Israelites as indicated in the Book of Judges (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:182).

⁶¹¹ In addition, Baal as a fertility god was associated with snakes which were regarded as a symbol of wisdom, generations, longevity, and immortality (Witcombe 2000; Münnich 2008:42). Münnich (2008:41-42) describes a broken Baal figurine, that once stood on a bull, found in the proximity of the sanctuary in Gezer. A bronze serpent, dated between 1100-900 BC was also discovered at Gezer in the same vicinity as the Baal figurine. Münnich states that the artefact demonstrates Baal’s connection with snakes. Baal worship is also associated with bloodletting which his

shrine model from the Levant)⁶¹² were esteemed by women as part of their syncretic religious and daily lives. In a shop uncovered in ancient Ashkelon the bones of small birds were found, an indication that birds were sold to the people for inter alia sacrificial purposes or for use during other festival rites (King and Stager 2001:191).⁶¹³



Figure 8.2 Asherah house shrine (Willette 2014)

Analogous to the veneration of Baal, the worship of Asherah was associated with sex rites in particular female reproductive functions (Martins 2015:50; cf Patai 1990:39; Van der Laan 2015; Duguid 1999:112). It can be imagined that the harvest festivals held a powerful attraction for (Israelite and Canaanite) women for its reproductive aspects.

Although it is not mentioned in the Book of Judges the cult of Asherah may have been connected to divination, and the innards of birds, possibly the liver perhaps (cf 5.4.6) may have been used to evaluate a household's fertility. The use of birds for prognosticative purposes was an ancient custom at the time of the Iron Age I (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:160).

worshippers accomplished by means of cutting their flesh with swords (1 Ki 18:26) and ritual sex with sacred prostitutes. In Canaanite ritualistic worship (of Baal and Asherah) human sacrifice was possibly also involved (Zerafa 1964:236; cf Ahituv 2007:763). The peculiar attraction of these deities to human and animal blood has been noted by scholars (McCarthy 1969:166; Akintola 2011; Coogan and Smith [eds] 2012:43, 45-46, 117, 124, etcetera; cf Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:182; Martins 2015:50). As mentioned previously, the Canaanite gods, festivals and rites were explicitly condemned (McKenzie 1952:125). In the Book of Judges this condemnation formed part of the messages of judgment against Israelites (Jdg 2:1-3; 6:8-10 and 10:11-14).

⁶¹² The dove was the cultic symbol of the mother goddess/es in the ancient Near East (Willette 2014). In addition to the images of doves represented in Iron Age model shrines, a gold plaque from Ugarit (Minet al Beida) shows a goddess standing on a bull, surrounded by snakes (Münnich 2008:52; cf Sha 2018:194).

⁶¹³ The marketplace, with the row of shops lining it, belonged to Iron Age II Ashkelon (Ashkelon is mentioned in Judges 1:18 as being taken over by the tribe of Judah). In all probability, the 'streets' much better translated as bazaars (2 Sm 1:20) were inherited from the Iron Age I inhabitants of Ashkelon. King and Stager (2001:191) describe the marketplace as probably being located at the city gate – an area that consisted of a large plaza that was used as a bazaar for the trade of goods. Walled cities (and gates by extension) date back as far as the Early Bronze Age. Food offerings consisting of 'parts of sheep, goats and birds' have also been discovered in burial tombs in the Late Bronze I necropolis at Ashkelon dating between 1800-1200 BC (King and Stager 2001:369).

Patai (1990:39) comments that there is abundant archaeological evidence for the worship of Asherah in a household cult.⁶¹⁴ Worshippers thus possibly made offerings of food including birds, wine, and incense to the goddess (cf Jr 7:18; 44:19). The cult of Asherah possibly included human or child sacrifice, rituals of appeasements and the use of idols to influence the goddess as these were common practices in the Canaanite religion (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:182; cf Martins 2015:50; Sha 2018:191-192). The Canaanite festivals would have contained these ritual elements that also involved the use of Asherah cult items (cf Jdg 3:7; 6:25-26) visible manifestations of the goddess.

It is also probable that in the syncretic religion practised by the idolatrous early Israelites in their households, Asherah may have been worshipped as a deity in addition to YHWH or as the consort of YHWH in the household cults (see also Marsman 2003:545; cf Stern 2001a:20-29).⁶¹⁵ Judges 6:25 indicates the worship of Asherah and Baal at the *bamah* in Ophrah. It is also possible that YHWH was worshipped at the *bamah* as well (cf Jdg 17:1-4-5).⁶¹⁶

An 8-9th century BC inscription found at an Israelite temple in Kuntillet 'Ajrud, in the Sinai, alludes to 'Yahweh of Samaria and his Asherah' and 'Yahweh of Teman and his Asherah' (Emerton 1982:2-20; cf Dever 1984:21-37; Stern 2001a:20-29; Ruether 2005:74; Sha 2018:193). Another (tomb) inscription at Khirbet el-Kom reads: 'Blessed will be Ariyahu to Yahweh and his Asherah (Stern 2001a:20-29; cf Dever 1970:139-204; Zevit 1984:39-49; Shea 1990a:56-63). These inscriptions may suggest a cultic tradition that goes back to the idolatry practised by the early Israelites in the Book of Judges (cf Jdg 2:11-13; 3:7; 17:3-5; cf Jdg 8:27). Nakhai (2011:355) also names the paired stands found at Tel Halif that resembles similar stands discovered in the royal temple at Arad. Furthermore 'model shrines' – the abode of the Divine Couple – are referenced as evidence of the worship of YHWH and Asherah (Nakhai 2011:355).

However, Dever (2005:206-207) observes that certain scholars do not recognize Asherah as a consort of YHWH. Dever (2005:206) remarks that the name on the Khirbet el-Kom and the Kuntillet 'Ajrud inscriptions is read as 'Asherata' that is the '*Phoenician* version of the goddess' name without the final possessive suffix.' Asherah is therefore 'not necessarily Yahweh's consort but neither can she be a mere cult symbol' (Dever 2005:206). According to Dever (2005:207), there is acknowledgment of the reality of 'Asherah as a goddess...although not as Yahweh's consort.' Asherah was never worshipped as the consort of YHWH in the official religion at Shiloh (as far

⁶¹⁴ Dever 2005:185-186; Sparks 2006:16-21; Becking 1999:178; Kletter 1996:4-73; Dothan 2006:156) informs about the evidence for the worship of Asherah found in the archaeological record. The Asherah statuettes found are marked by the nakedness and exaggerated breasts of the mother goddess denoting her fertility aspects (Shalem and Ziffer 2015:455-483).

⁶¹⁵ The idea of ascribing a consort to a deity is an enduring one as seen in the ancient Near Eastern cults. In the Middle East, interestingly, even Allah if he so desires to have son would choose a (female) consort from among his creation (Quran.com 2022. Surah Az-Zumar 39:4).

⁶¹⁶ Bible Hub 2022. Judges 6:26.

as we know) and no festivals were dedicated to her at the Tabernacle. In the mindset of the author/s of Judges, the Canaanite cult was strongly and absolutely proscribed in accordance with the covenant, the unadulterated religion and by the priesthood at Shiloh (McKenzie 1952:125; Ahituv 2007:763).

Nevertheless, McKenzie (1952:125) states that at the centre of the ‘annual cycle of life from death’ endured the ‘mysterious force of sex’ which was ‘deified in the fertility goddess’ (cf McKenzie 1995:72). Inasmuch as her cultic objects were considered holy, the one ritual of primary importance, since it occurred all over nature and resulted in its continuance, was sexual union between Asherah and Baal of the Canaanites and those among the Israelites who adopted the Canaanite religious beliefs. These festivals are mentioned as taking place on the *bamot* (Jdg 3:19; 1 Ki 11:7-8; Jr 32:35; cf Nu 33:52; Lv 26:30). 1 Kings 3:2-3 indicates that not all *bamot* were Canaanite. Unadulterated worship occurs at (certain) high places (cf 1 Ki 3:2-3). The sexual union of Baal and Asherah which the people presumed to bring about the fertility of the land, was symbolized by a high priest and priestess (possibly the Canaanite version of the high priest and a high priestess). Sexual union between Asherah and her worshippers was signified by the sacred prostitutes (McKenzie 1995:72; cf Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:182; Froemming 2016:26; Westbrook 2011:75). By engaging in the ‘divine power of fertility’ (McKenzie 1995:72; cf McKenzie 1952:125) by means of the sexual act itself, the people believed that they could incite the gods to produce abundant harvests (Sha 2018:192; cf Patai 1990:86). McKenzie (1952:125) remarks that the Canaanite cult, beliefs and festivals were forcefully scorned and prohibited by the early Israelites but not ‘without a struggle’ (see also Stern 2001a:20-29).

8.3 THE ISRAELITE FESTIVALS

8.3.1 Introduction

In accordance with Exodus 23:14-17 (see also Lv 23:4; Dt 16:16; cf 1 Sm 1:3) the early Israelites were to undertake three pilgrimages to Shiloh and there to celebrate three major festivals dedicated to YHWH (see Table 8.1 and Figure 8.3). Figure 8.3 indicates the season when the festivals described in Table 8.1 took place. It is most likely that these pilgrimage festivals were undertaken by Israelite in a period of peace and covenantal restoration as explained before (see 8.2.1).

Manoah’s wife was instructed by the Angel of YHWH to fulfill the obligations of a Nazirite vow, as mentioned in Judges (13:4-5, 7, 13). Samson himself was a lifelong Nazirite. In Judges (2:5; 6:19; 13:19; 20:26), the Israelites offered sacrifices to YHWH in accordance with their prescribed regulations, even during periods of idolatry. Although these instances were occasional, they demonstrate that the people still remembered the prescribed rituals of YHWH, suggesting the existence of a faithful remnant. Therefore, during times of peace and covenantal restoration (refer to 8.2.1; Table 8.1), when the entire religious system was functioning again, YHWH’s festivals were likely celebrated by His devoted followers.

The annual religious festivals held at Shiloh, which were celebrated as pilgrimages that are listed in Exodus 23:14-17 and Leviticus 23, are as follows: Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread (Lv 23:4-8; Ex 12:14-28; 23:14; 34:18; Nm 28:17-25; Dt 16:1-8), the Festival of Weeks (Lv 23:15-22; Ex 23:16; 34:22; Nm 29:12-40), the Festival of Trumpets (Lv 23:23-25); the Day of Atonement (Lv 23:26-32), the Festival of Tabernacles [also known as the Feast of Ingathering] (Lv 23:33-44; Ex 23:16; 34:22; Nm 29:12-40; Dt 16:13-15; see Farmer [ed]1998:432-433; Martens 2004:238; cf Van Gemeren 1984:410). Exodus 23:17 instructs all Israelite men to undertake the three annual pilgrimages (to Shiloh). King and Stager (2001:354), however, point out that the ceremonial observances were not restricted to men since Deuteronomy 16:11, 14 includes women, female slaves, strangers, orphans and widows as participants of the feasts. The word feast is derived from the Hebrew root *ḥag* [to celebrate] (Van Gemeren 1984:410). Van Gemeren comments: ‘All feasts are festivals, but not all festivals are feasts.’ Van Gemeren continues: ‘Though all the festivals, except for the day of atonement were times of celebration and rejoicing,’ only the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Festival of Weeks and the Festival of Tabernacles are selected as pilgrimage feasts.

Table 8.1: The annual festivals, the daily offerings and the Sabbath offerings

Occasion	Offerings
Feast of Passover 14 th of Abib and Feast of Unleavened Bread - 15 th of Abib	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • burnt offering: an unblemished year-old male lamb or goat (Dt 16:2), • grain offering; about 2.3 kilograms of fine flour mixed with olive oil (Lv 23:13), • drink offering; about 1 litre of wine⁶¹⁷
Feast of Weeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • burnt offering: seven male lambs each one a year old, a young bull and two rams (Lv 23:18): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - (from among the lambs) two lambs sacrificed as a fellowship offering - (from among the rams) one male goat sacrificed as a sin offering, • grain offering: two loaves of bread baked with leaven and • a drink offering
Feast of Tabernacles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • burnt offering [over the period of 7 days] (Nm 29:12-39): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 70 young bulls - 14 male goats - 98 male lambs of one year old (14 per day) • burnt offering on the 8th day: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - one bull, one ram, 7 male lambs a year old • grain offering and drink offering according to the specified number of animals (Nm 29:14-16)
Daily Offerings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • burnt offering: two lambs of a year old; one sacrificed in the morning and one at dawn (Ex 29:39; Nm 28:1-8). Each sacrifice was accompanied by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a grain offering: a tenth of an <i>ephah</i> of fine flour (Ex 29:40) mixed with • a quarter of a <i>hin</i> of olive oil • a libation offering: a quarter of a <i>hin</i> of wine
Sabbath Offerings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • burnt offering: two lambs of a year old (Nm 29:9-10). • grain offering of two tenths of an <i>ephah</i> of fine flour mixed with olive oil • drink offering (of wine)

⁶¹⁷ The units of measure used in the Leviticus is *ephah* for the flour and *hin* for the wine.

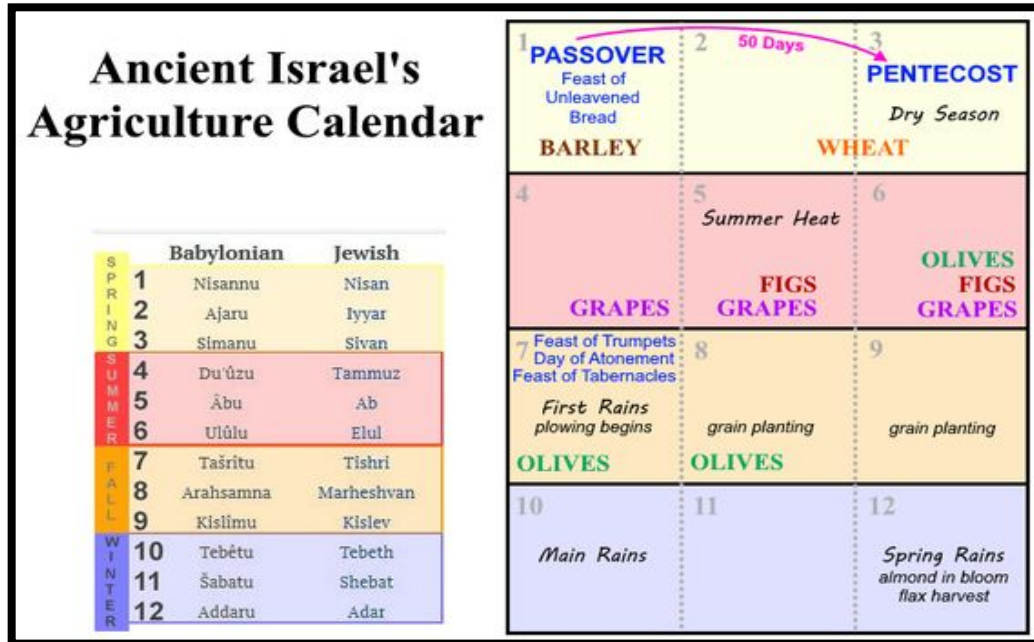


Figure 8.3 Agricultural-festival calendar (Pinterest.com)

The three principal yearly feasts, which were each observed during the course of seven days, were celebrations that were associated with the produces from the farming fields (Martens 2004:238). The festivals held at Shiloh (Ex 23:14-17) may have demonstrated a pre-monarchic life of joyousness and thanksgiving to YHWH (Martens 2004:238). They would become a part of Israelite reality in the generations throughout history. Worship of the true and proper God and the attitude of joy and expression of gratitude towards their God (Martens 2004:238,) were features that lend the Israelite feasts a greater depth of spirituality. The richer mystical nuances of the Israelite feasts set them apart from the celebrations of the Canaanites that were more carnal in nature. The Israelite feasts were devoid of the carnality that included overt sexual and other over-indulgences that were essential ingredients of the Canaanite festivals (George and George 2014:162-163).

Judges 18:31; 19:18 indicate that the Tabernacle was in existence in the pre-monarchic period at the time of the judges and that a harvest festival was celebrated in Shiloh (Jdg 21:19-21). Although the three annual religious pilgrimage festivals (Ex 23:14-18) are not mentioned in the Book of Judges, there are allusions to them (Jdg 19:18; 21:19-21; cf Jdg 18:3-31). The frequent periods of idolatry may explain why the Tabernacle and festivals do not feature in the narratives of Judges (see Table 8.2).

Table 8.2: Pre-monarchic times of peace

Periods of Peace	Periods of Oppression
Judges 3:30: 80 years of peace. YHWH is worshipped	Judges 13-16: Philistine oppression. Mixture of true worship of YHWH (Samson's parents), carnality (Samson) and tribal idolatry
Judges 5:31: 40 years of peace YHWH is worshipped.	Judges 10:16: YHWH worshipped as Ammonites declare war against the tribes.
Judges 8:28: 40 years of peace. Idolatry – Israelite tribes worship Gideon's ephod.	
Judges 21:24-25: a period of peace ensues after intertribal warfare. Idolatry inferred.	
Judges 17-19: a period of peace. Idolatry (cf Jdg 17:1-6).	

These three annual pilgrimages and the festivals associated with them characterized the early Israelite worship of YHWH at the Tabernacle in Shiloh. Perhaps this is what the author/s of Judges are contending for: the reinstatement of these festivals since in their mindset the worship of YHWH was characterized by His festivals. In addition, the three annual festivals at Shiloh were an important part of the covenantal requirements for the Israelite tribes to keep (Ex 23:14-19). Given that the author/s of Judges held a covenantal and monotheistic worldview, the following discussions will illuminate the practices inherent in their worldview and contribute to comprehending the author/s' mindset. It is also a mindset that embodies a rich cultural history that was deeply infused with the spiritual and warrants further exploration (see below).

8.3.2 Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread

Passover (פסח – *pēsah*) and the Feast of Unleavened Bread (חַמֵּץ לֹא יֵאָכַל – *ḥaḡ hammaṣṣōwt*) was the most ancient of the Israelite festivals (Zerafa 1964:235; cf 2 Ki 23:22) and was considered the most important festival in early Israel. Passover was celebrated as 'a direct fulfillment of a divine command first proclaimed in the book of Exodus' (Olson 2012:51; see 7.2.3).⁶¹⁸ Sacred scripture combines Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Lv 23:5-8; Nm 28:17-25; Dt 16:1-8; Zerafa 1964:235; De Vaux 1997:484; Craghan 1998:423; King and Stager 2001:86; see also Unterman 1996b:810-812).⁶¹⁹ Passover was the name given to the sacrifice that is slaughtered on the 14th day of Abib [אַבִּיב – literally ear of barley or grain] (Bokser 1992:755-765).⁶²⁰ The first Passover event is recorded in Exodus 12 on the eve of Exodus when Moses commands the Israelites to collect an

⁶¹⁸ However, De Vaux (1997:486) does not consider the Passover feast as the most important festival in early Israel or a pilgrimage (made to the Tabernacle) at first but came about only as a pilgrimage when the religion of Israel was centralized (at the temple in Jerusalem).

⁶¹⁹ Finkelstein and Silberman (2002:71) have a different perspective and present the Passover as 'not a single event but a continuing experience of national resistance against the powers that be' – Moses against Pharaoh and King Josiah against Pharaoh Necho for example.

⁶²⁰ Abib was the month of newly ripened barley and the first month of spring (Ex 13:4: 23:15). It was the first month of the religious year and the seventh month of the civil year of the Israelites. It started around the time of the vernal equinox, that is on the 21st of March. It was called Nisan after the (Persian Captivity (Neh 2:1) (Bible Study Tools 2022. Abib).

unblemished year-old male lamb⁶²¹ on the 10th of Abib and tend to it until the 14th of the month. At sunset of the 14th of Abib, the lamb was slaughtered and sacrificed (see Table 8.1).

The blood of the lamb was put on the sides and the tops of the doorframes of houses where the lamb was consumed. The meat of the lamb was roasted with bitter herbs and unleavened bread and the meal was eaten as a sacrificial meal, on the night of a full moon, the 14th of the month (Lv 23:5), (and on the 15th day of the month of Abib, the Feast of Unleavened Bread later also began (Lv 23:6; cf Ex 12:1-10; Bokser 1992:755-765). De Vaux (1997:490) comments that the observance of Passover at full moon was significant because there would be more visibility for it to be associated with a lunar cult (celebrated at a new/crescent moon). In Egypt on the night of the 14th of Abib, YHWH struck down the first born of every family and their animal in every house (Egyptian and Israelite households) unprotected by the blood of the lamb (Ex 12:12-13). Exodus 12:14 commands the celebration of Passover as a memorial to YHWH and His deliverance of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt (Van Gemeren 1984:412; Benner 2009:138).

McConville (1987:102) states that Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread were once believed to have originated in Canaan and were adopted by the Israelites upon their arrival. De Vaux (1997:489) has pointed out Passover was a rite observed by shepherds: nomads or semi-nomads to ‘secure fecundity and prosperity of the flock’ (cf McConville 1987:102). The blood on the doorposts was intended to drive away evil powers to protect the flock (De Vaux 1997:489; cf McConville 1987:102). McConville, however, argues that recent scholarship tends to believe that the origins of Passover can be traced to the Israelites’ earlier nomadic history before the settlement. Prosic (2004:32), however, refutes the idea that Passover is of nomadic origins and unique to the Israelites while ‘the Unleavened Bread (see below) was characteristic of the sedentary Canaanites and their agrarian religious customs’. She is confident ‘that both of them were of sedentary and Canaanite origin’ (Prosic 2004:32).⁶²² Nevertheless, Prosic is more interested in finding out if the Passover was a single festival from the beginning or an amalgam of two separated festivals (see also McConville 1987:103-110).⁶²³ However, even if Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread were Canaanite in origin, this does not change the fact the feasts as well as the two other annual festivals are inspired by the Israelite’s salvation history (see McConville 1987:103). The Israelites celebrated their first Passover in Canaan in Joshua 5:10-12. This Passover was a highlight in the lives of the Israelite tribes and is often rereferred to in the Old Testament (see 2 Ki 23:21-23).

⁶²¹ Exodus 12:5 states that the Israelites could also take a year-old kid from their goats (see also Smith 2017b) as well as from their herds in accordance with Deuteronomy 16:2 (De Vaux 1997:385).

⁶²² Prosic (2004:31) remarks that the origin of the Passover festival has been, among others, been sought in the etymology of the word ‘pesah.’ ‘The word has been connected with the Hebrew verb *psh* meaning ‘protect, save’ or ‘limp, dance with limping motions’, as well as with some words from the cognate Semitic languages, such as the Accadian *passahu* (‘make soft, supple, sooth or placate,’) Egyptian words meaning ‘harvest,’ ‘commemoration’ or ‘blow,’ and Arabic *fsh* (‘separate’) (Prosic 2004:31-32; see also De Vaux 1997:488; Snaith 2016:22-25).

⁶²³ An in depth discussion of this important topic lies outside the scope of this study (see McConville 1987:110; Prosic 2004:32-33 and Van Seters 2002:167-168).

Passover was a time for reciting and re-experiencing the Exodus as well as personalizing the event and thereby identifying with their ancestors, their history, and their God (Smith 2017b). Judges 2:1-3; 6:1-10 and 10:6-15 indicate that at various periods in the pre-monarchy the Israelites had lost their unique identity as the elected people of God (see Table 8.2). The Israelites in the aforementioned narratives had forsaken YHWH and followed the gods of the Canaanites, so that the meaning and importance of Passover may have been lost (see Jdg 2:10). In the mindset of the author/s of Judges this situation would have been an outrage since the Israelite no longer honored YHWH by commemorating His deliverance of His people from slavery in Egypt. In their mindset, the Israelites had lost their essence as a people because they forgot their Covenant God and their past (cf Jdg 2:10).

Passover was initially celebrated at home (by those faithful to YHWH) (Craghan 1998:423). Exodus 12:46 states that the Passover meal was eaten at home during the journey to Canaan and should be understood in light of the absence of a sanctuary. Later more specific instructions are given on where the Passover was to be celebrated. Deuteronomy 16 by implication associates the Passover sacrifice and the meal with the Tabernacle. Deuteronomy 16:6-6 reads: ‘You must not sacrifice the Passover in any town the LORD your God gives you except the place he will choose as a dwelling for his Name’ (cf Dt 16:7).

The Passover meal was immediately followed by the Festival of Unleavened Bread on the 15th day of Abib, as stated above (Ex 12:14-20; Bokser 1992:755-765; King and Stager 2001:354).⁶²⁴ The feast was associated with new grain; that is the beginning of the grain harvest (Ruth 1:2; cf Nm 28:16-25; Dt 16:1-8) and lasted for seven days until the evening of the 21st of the month. Craghan (1998:423) describes the feast as ‘the feast of farmers’ in contrast with the Passover which he labels as ‘the feast of semi-nomadic shepherds’ (De Vaux 1997:489-491). The Israelites were to eschew eating bread or anything else made with yeast and keep their houses free of it (Ex 12:18-20). The feast denoted freshness, the beginning of the barley harvest, the first crop gathered in the agricultural year (Craghan 1998:423). For seven days the people ate bread made from the ‘new’ barley grains and the unleavened bread (מַצֹּת – *maṣṣōt* [‘bread of misery’]) (De Vaux 1997:485) contained nothing of the preceding year’s crop (Craghan 1998:423).⁶²⁵ On the seventh day of the feast, no work was done, and a religious assembly was held (De Vaux 1997:485). Like the Passover, the feast was a dynamic event that memorialized YHWH’s redemption in the past and its effects on the present of the Israelites (Craghan 1998:423).

⁶²⁴According to De Vaux (1997:486) the Deuteronomic ‘connection’ of Passover and the Feast of Unleavened is ‘artificial.’ Exodus 12:8 clearly instructs eating the meat with unleavened bread – *maṣṣōt* – which name (‘bread of misery’) on the eve of the Israelite departure from Egypt. According to Exodus 33:34, 39 the bread eaten at the beginning of the wilderness journey was *maṣṣōt*. It can be concluded that the Israelites could have eaten the *maṣṣōt* for seven days in keeping with their newly given instructions to keep the Feast of the Unleavened Bread.

⁶²⁵ Craghan (1998:423) points out that because the Feast of Unleavened Bread is based on an agrarian setting it was embraced by the Israelites, defined at that time as ‘semi-nomadic shepherds’ (see also Bokser 1992:755-765). Craghan (1998:423) goes on to say that the feast denotes YHWH’s redemption in the words: ‘It is because of what YHWH did for *me* when *I* came out of Egypt’ (Ex 13:8). For this reason, the feast is not only the remembrance of a one-time event in the past but a dynamic reliving of it because of its repercussions for the present.’

Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread celebrated the redemptive and supernatural aspects of YHWH. There was no ancient Near Eastern equivalent of the Passover: it remained a uniquely Israelite festival throughout the Old Testament.⁶²⁶ Bokser (1992:755-765) believes that the Passover ‘is permeated with the Bible’s theological message’ of salvation (cf Craghan 1998:423).

8.3.3 The Festival of Weeks

The Festival of Weeks or Harvest (שָׁבֻעַת – *šābu‘ōl*) was the second major festival that was tied to the agricultural calendar and which was an annual pilgrimage feast celebrated at the Tabernacle (Walter, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:103; cf Neusner 1991:58). This festival like the other two might not have been celebrated during a time of apostasy but YHWH’s faithful followers would have commenced these festivals in a time of peace.

The Festival of Weeks occurred seven weeks after the beginning of the barley harvest (after Passover [Ex 34:22]) and marked the end of the wheat harvest (Dt 16:9-12; Neusner 1991:58; Perkins 1996:104; King and Stager 2001:354). The festival was marked by the offering of the firstfruits (בִּכּוּרִים – *bikkūrīm*) of wheat from the new crop in the form of two loaves of bread – ‘the firstfruits⁶²⁷ of the wheat harvest’ (at the Tabernacle) (Lv 23:17; Neusner 1991:58) and animal oblation (see Table 8.3).⁶²⁸

The Festival of Weeks is said to be of Canaanite origin. De Vaux (1997:494) remarks that ‘the feast of Weeks was a feast for farmers living a settled life’ which was adopted by the Israelites upon settlement in Canaan. According to De Vaux (1997:494), the Festival of Weeks was eventually connected to the history of salvation, just as the Passover, but this was done much later.⁶²⁹

Neusner comments that ‘like the Sabbath’ the three annual festivals transform ordinary people into ‘Israel.’ The same may be said of the celebration known as the Day of Atonement that was held at the start of the autumnal festival season and was marked by a time of solemnity and prayer (Neusner 1991:58).⁶³⁰ The Day of Atonement and all its sacred implications would have presented the idolatrous Israelites in Judges with the perfect opportunity to return to YHWH, accept His judgment but also await His deliverance. It would have been a tremendous shock to the psyche of the author/s of Judges if they did not to celebrate this momentous day would have been a great shock to their psyche. It might have

⁶²⁶ As indicated above *pesah* (Passover) means *passing over* (into new year). Compare the Akkadian word, *pašā-u* that means soothe or placate (a deity) (Bible Hub 2023. *pesach*).

⁶²⁷ Firstfruits in this verse (Lv 23:17) means the first of grain that ripened. The Hebrew word, *bikkurim*, used in the verse, literally means firstfruits (Bible Hub 2023. *bikkurim*).

⁶²⁸ Neusner (1991:58) remarks that the rabbis believed the Torah was revealed to Moses on Mount Sinai on the day of the firstfruits which they commemorated as a ‘time of the giving our Torah.’ However, De Vaux (1997:495) states that this attachment did not have rabbinical acceptance until the 2nd century AD.

⁶²⁹ Naturally, these scholarly opinions fit in neatly with their purported Documentary Hypothesis which in accordance with the latest archaeological evidence is slowly being debunked.

⁶³⁰ The New Year, Rosh Hashanah, the Day of Atonement (De Vaux 1997:496), Yom Kippur were ‘days of solemn penitence, at the start of the autumnal festival season’ – these were a ‘solemn times’ of prayer, personal reflection and ‘individual judgement,’ times of new birth and creation (Neusner 1991:59).

caused them immense distress. How could they attain absolution for their sins? This ritual, after all, set them apart from the other nations in the ancient Near East and served as a symbol of their sacred status as a holy nation devoted to YHWH. Walter, Matthews and Chavalas (2000:103) comment that the Festival of Weeks (like the other two major festivals): would have been a time ‘for fairs, the adjudication of legal disputes, the contracting of marriages and the rites of purification’ for the Israelites who suffered physical or spiritual impurity.

Barley was the main staple of the poor and low-income households in the Israelite community (Perkins 1996:104). The failure of the barley harvest in Judges 6:6 was unfortunate for less affluent families. They had to pay ridiculously high prices for barley (Perkins 1996:104) or face starvation. Perkins describe the possibility of starvation as a ‘judgment oracle’ against the Israelites (cf Jdg 2:3; cf Jdg 6:7-10; 10:11-14). It meant that YHWH had withdrawn His abundance which would have impacted upon the celebrations of the Festival of Weeks. In the supernatural worldview expressed in the Book of Judges, it meant that the unique worship system dedicated to mono-YHWH was ‘lost’ to Israelite idolatry.

The Festival of Weeks was a time of sharing, joy, prayer, and gratitude for the blessing of the bounty of the harvests (cf Dt 16:10-11; De Vaux 1997:493). When all the agricultural work for the year was concluded, the third annual pilgrimage festival was held (King and Stager 2001:354) and probably in the Book of Judges as well since the Tabernacle was in existence in Shiloh (cf Jdg 18:31; 19:18).

8.3.4 The Festival of Tabernacles

The Festival of Tabernacles or Ingathering (תִּשְׁבֹּעַ – *sukkōt*),⁶³¹ a seven-day autumn festivity was the last major festival celebrated and marked the end of the agricultural year (and as stated before not mentioned in the Book of Judges) (King and Stager 2001:354). All the produce of the fields, the threshing floor and the wine presses were gathered at this time of the year (cf Ex 23:16; Dt 16:13; De Vaux 1997:496). De Vaux (1997:495) observes that the Festival of Tabernacles was the most significant of the three annual festivals and identifies the feast celebrated in Judges 21:19 as that of *sukkōt* (cf Unterman 1996a:1088). *Sukkōt* is also designated the feast of YHWH in Leviticus 23:19 and Judges 21:19 and it may also be the feast celebrated by Elkanah and Hannah in 1 Samuel 1:3 (De Vaux 1997:495; cf Unterman 1996a:1088). It has been suggested that the festival was possibly the Passover or one of the other primary Israelite feasts. 1 Samuel 1:3 has been interpreted to indicate that men travelled to Shiloh only once a year instead of undertaking the customary three journeys because of the troubled times of the pre-monarchic age. Judges 21:19 may also indicate

⁶³¹ De Vaux (1997:495) is of the opinion that the transliteration of the word used by the Vulgate as Tabernacles or Booths, or Tents has little meaning to the modern reader (of the Bible). According to De Vaux the correct translation of *sukkōt* is huts but ‘the feast of Huts is not a pretty phrase’ and likely to give a wrong impression of the feast (as the involvement of the building of huts).

that a specific festival exclusive to Shiloh took place such as the annual sacrifice of David's household in 1 Samuel 20:9.⁶³²

During *sukkōt*, also known as the Ingathering of the harvest (הַאֲסִיף – *hā'āsip*), a considerable number of animals were sacrificed during the course of the festival (see Table 8.3). The Israelites lived in shelters or booths made from branches and vines to protect the olive orchards (and vineyards [cf Jdg 21:19]) during the harvest month (King and Stager 2001:98, 354). Later the Israelites were instructed to live in 'temporary shelters' to commemorate YHWH's deliverance of the Israelites from the Egyptians (Lv 23:39-43; Unterman 1996a:1088). Judges 21:19-21 indicates the celebration of (Yahwistic) festivals.

When the work of collecting and pressing of the grapes and olives was done, the Israelites gathered to give thanks to YHWH (De Vaux 1997:496; cf Martens 2004:238). Like the Festival of Weeks, *sukkōt* was a time of joyful feasting and rejoicing (Jdg 21:19). De Vaux (1997:496) comments that overconsumption of the new wine was not unusual in view of Eli's suspicion that Hannah was inebriated (1 Sm 1:14-15). Singing, shouting, dancing, and feasting were part of the celebrations of the harvest and pressing of the grapes (Bird 1996:1193).

Other Canaanite festivals (such as the Ingathering of the grapes) are held in 'the temple of their god' (Jdg 9:27) and provide parallels for celebrations of Yahwistic festivals by the early Israelites in the Book of Judges, although they are unmentioned.

According to Bird (1996:1193), the Canaanite Festival of Ingathering depicted by the worship of the agricultural god/s and sexual rites was replaced with the Israelite Festival of Tabernacles. Presumably this Yahwistic transformation of the Feast of Ingathering was put into place in Canaan at the time of the early Israelite settlement for all the reasons stated above. This replacement was a strong Israelite opposition against Canaanite rites and their worship systems.

Celebrated as a New Year's festival at the end of the agrarian year (Ex 23:16) *sukkōt* had a Canaanite equivalent in the form of the New Year's festival dedicated to Baal that was also held in autumn (Sabourin 1973:70; Van Rooy 1986:231; Sha 2018:212). As soon as the produce of the land (grapes and olives) was gathered and pressed, a sacred banquet was held, and gratefulness offered to the fertility god/s for the abundance of the land (cf Jdg 3:7; 6:25; cf Jdg 2:13; Sha 2018:212). The New Year's grape feast (in Judges 9:27), would have commenced in the vineyards (of the Shechemites). The Canaanites built and lived in booths made with newly cut 'leafy branches' which represented life and fertility for seven days – the duration of the celebration (George and George 2014:162-163; Sha 2018:212). The Israelite *sukkōt* had the deeper implication

⁶³² Bible Hub 2021. Judges 21:21.

of YHWH's protection and provision coming from Egypt and during the wilderness journey (Lv 23:39-43; Unterman 1996a:1088).

Like the Canaanites, the Israelites accomplished the harvesting and trodding of the grapes with joy expressed through dancing (cf Jdg 21:19) and undoubtedly singing and music-making (Unterman 1996a:1088; Bird 1996:1183; cf Dt 16:14). The Canaanite rite included the solemnness of 'prayer and ritual' on the one hand and euphoric merrymaking, inebriation, feasting, nakedness, and sex on the other (George and George 2014:162-163). Celebrations proceeded from the vineyards to the temple where a prodigious cultic banquet concluded the festivities indoors (cf Jdg 9:27; George and George 2014:162-163; Sha 2018:212).

A band of singers and musicians would have led the way to the sacred banquet and provided entertainment during the feast that took place in the temple as befitted ancient Near Eastern festivities (See Figure 8.4). As mentioned before, singing and dancing were part of the Israelite festivals (cf Jdg 21:19); Israelite celebrations spurned the excessive merrymaking and sexual activities of the Canaanite cultic festivals (George and George 2014:162-163; Jdg 9:27; 16:23) and celebrated their God's provisions and protection instead. In Judges the Canaanite sacred feast is boisterous and sacred rites such as oath making (Jdg 9:27) as well as merriment including the humiliation of the enemy (cf Jdg 16:23).

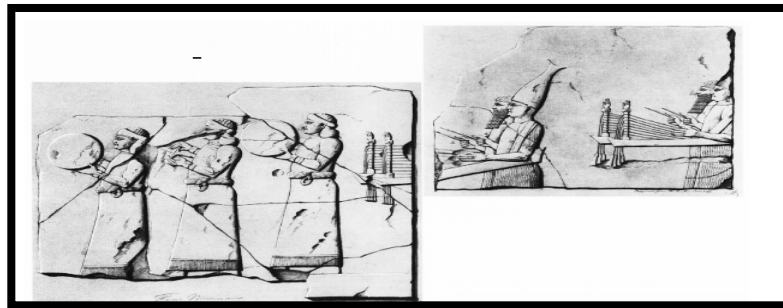


Figure 8.4 Ancient Near Eastern procession (Cheng 2012:79)⁶³³

It is possible that the feast of *sukkōt* which was probably held in the courtyard of the Tabernacle included music making and singing. Parallels of music and singing are found in 1 Samuel 10:5 and Judges 5; 11:34 (cf 2 Sm 3:31; 2 Chr 20:27; Ps 42:4; Is 30:29). It can thus be inferred that together with the ordinary celebrants a specialist group of musicians and dancers went up to the mount of the Tabernacle rejoicing and dancing. Processions were a means of expressing joy and thanksgiving, in the form of singing, chanting, and shouting, towards God for a successful and bountiful

⁶³³ These *reliefs* were found in Sennacherib's (705-681 BC) palace. Although dated to the Neo Assyrian period these musicians portray an ancient tradition of music-makers in a procession (see Cheng 2012:78-79). The musicians could be priests or professional musicians that provided music for varied kinds of processions: festival, funeral, dedication of a temple, post-war victory processions.

harvest but it was also a time of solemnity and for this reason the procession was probably led by the priests.⁶³⁴

Festival celebrations were a visible display of the fulfillment of YHWH's the covenantal promises to bless the Israelites with abundant harvests. Ideally, the covenantal relationship was upheld by their priests. Failure of the harvests implied that the priests were unsuccessful in fulfilling their duties for the festival celebrations (cf Jdg 6:4-6; cf Jdg 2:1-3; 10-13).

8.4 THE PRIESTHOOD

8.4.1 Background

The term high priest is not always used for the leading priest of the priesthood in the Old Testament. He is also not mentioned in the Book of Judges (cf 4.3.2). I am aware of views that hold that the term high priest was not in use prior to the Exile and that the words 'the greatest priest among his brothers' (Lv 21:10) is a description and not a title (De Vaux 1997:397). Leviticus 21:10 reads: The priest that had the anointing oil poured on his head (Lv 8:12) was Aaron, the head of the priests. Accordingly, the term 'greatest priest' may be a title after all. More recent scholars such as Walton, Matthews and Chavalas (2000:136) use the term high priest to refer to the head of the priesthood. In this chapter, I will use the words 'head of the priesthood' or priest to refer to the leader of the priesthood who probably was installed at the Tabernacle in the pre-monarchic period during times of peace and covenant restoration (cf 4.3.2).

8.4.2 Qualifications and duties of the priests

The priesthood of the early Israelites was first established after their exit from Egypt (Leick 2003:338).

Only men from Aaronic descent served as priests כֹּהֲנִים [*kōhānīm* – priests] (Nm 3:2-4, 10; 18:1-7; cf 7.3.1) at the *Miskhan*. Men from the tribe of the Levites, the Kohathites, Gershonites and Merarites could perform sacred duties at the Tabernacle and were elected to serve the priests as their assistants (Nm 3:5-9; cf 7.3.1; see Table 8.3).

Priests were prohibited from marrying prostitutes and divorced women (Lv 21:7). The head of the priests could only marry a virgin from among the Israelites (Lv 21:13-15). Other special requirements for the priests included refraining from a disheveled appearance and tearing their clothes (to demonstrate mourning). The head of the priests had to avoid coming into contact with a dead body or people and objects that could defile him and consequently the Holy of Holies (Lv 21:10-12; Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:134).

⁶³⁴ Festival processions in the Old Testament must not be compared to modern day (Christian) religious processions which are very formal affairs without music and song-making. Although stately, ancient Israelite processions involved music and singing as indicated above.

Table 8.3: The priesthood: requirements and duties⁶³⁵

Requirements for all Priests	Duties	Requirements for the Head of the Priesthood	Duties
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • males descending from Aaronic lineage (Ex 28:1) • between 30 and 50 years of age (Nm 4:3) • perfect health and physical appearance (Lv 19:16-23) • must be ritually pure and not come into contact with a corpse • not shave off their hair, shave off their beards or cut themselves • enter into a proper marriage (Lv 21:9,14) (not married to a prostitute, divorced woman or a widow) • must be holy as YHWH is holy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • offer sacrifices (Ex 29:38-42) • teachers [of the law] (Lv 10:8-11) • officiate as judges to settle disputes (Dt 21:5) • examine and assess impurity (Lv 13-15) • burn incense (Ex 30:7-8) • bless the Israelites and YHWH (Nm 6:22-27; Dt 10-8) • maintain the Tabernacle (Nm 3:38; 4:16) • look after the altar (Lv 6:8-13), the lamps and the shewbread • blow the trumpets (Nm 10:1-10) • Oversee the continuation of the fire on the altar (Lv 6:12-13) • Not marry a prostitute or a divorced woman 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alone could wear certain priestly garments (such as the ephod and breastpiece] (Lv 8:7-9; Jdg 8:27) • Take special care of his appearance (Lv 21:10) • Avoid ritual impurity and thus defiling the Holy of Holies (Lv 21:11-12) • marry only a virgin (Lv 21:13-15) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead the priests and direct the work of the priests (Nm 3:5-7) • Consult with YHWH (by means of the <i>Urim</i> and <i>Thummim</i>) and Inquire of the LORD (Jdg 20:28) • Consecrate and ordain the priests (Ex 29) • Tend to the golden lampstand continually (Lv 24:3-4) • Burn incense daily on the altar of incense inside the Tabernacle (Ex 30:7-9). • Offer sacrifices on the Day of Atonement (Lv 23:6, 11, 15, 20) • Make atonement on the horns of the altar of incense (Ex 30:10)

It was compulsory for priests to be free of any physical defect (Lv 21:16-23).⁶³⁶ Walton, Matthews and Chavalas (2000:134) report: ‘ritual purity is required for the sacred precincts of the altar, the sacrifice and the religious practitioner officiating at the altar in every religion in the ancient Near East. Priests therefore must be in perfect health and in full command of their senses.’ It was believed that the holiness of YHWH was mirrored by the priests who represented the tribal community in the performances of their sacred duties. However, Judges proves that the priests fell far short of this ideal (cf Jdg 17; 18; 19). In the mindset of the author/s of Judges the shortcomings of the priests would have constituted a grave sin and a defilement of the sacred Tabernacle.

⁶³⁵ Adapted from: BibleCharts.Org 2022. Old Testament Priests and Priesthood.

⁶³⁶ For a list of defects that restricted priests from performing their duties see Walton, Matthews and Chavalas (2000:134).

The amalgamation of the priest of YHWH with the Canaanite cult as indicated in Judges 17:7-13 was a dangerous violation of the covenant which brought on the house of Micah the threat of war (Jdg 18:22-26), one of the curses of the covenant (Dt 28). Micah's household which was a syncretized communal shrine (cf Jdg 18:22) was ransacked by Danites who stole the shrine's idols and persuaded the Levite priest to go with them (Jdg 18:14-20).

The primary role of the priesthood in the pre-monarchic period was to serve YHWH in His Tabernacle that is 'everything concerning the altar and what is inside the veil' (the Holy of Holies) in accordance with Numbers 18:7 (see Table 8.3). Blessings, prayers, and various sacrifices were all part of the priestly duties at the *Miskhan* (Smith 2017b). The priests also served the people and together with the judges and prophets, assumed leadership positions in the early Israelite community (Leick 2003:338). Although not a priest, Deborah was a (judicial) judge, prophet and leader of the Israelites.⁶³⁷ In all probability the priests in addition to the duties in the Tabernacle had duties to perform that were similar to those of Deborah.

Thus, priests acted in a judiciary capacity, and judged cases of 'bloodshed, lawsuits or assaults' (Dt 17:8). They served as teachers of the social and religious law (Dt 17:8-12; De Vaux 1997:353-354) and accompanied the troops into war (cf Jdg 20:28). Priests also diagnosed diseases (King and Stager 2001:69) and were the physicians in the community (Broida 2022). Skeletal remains reveal that Israelites suffered from 'arthritis, tuberculosis, septic infections, and malignancies' (King and Stager 2001:69) and it can be postulated that some of these ailments were among the diseases identified by the priests.⁶³⁸ Medical treatments by the priests included the application of figs to treat sores on the skin (Is 38:11; see Figure 8.5)⁶³⁹ and probably wine for the cleansing and disinfection of wounds as well as olive oil to soothe pain (Mounce 2016b; see also Muntner 2007:721).

⁶³⁷ An in depth discussion of the reasons for the exclusion of women from a strictly male priesthood falls outside the scope of this study since the issue has been addressed by scholars such as Bird (1999:10-20); Ackerman (2002:48); Wegner (2003:453-454) and Chalmers (2012:22-23). A primary reason stated for the prohibition of women from the Israelite priesthood is the female reproductive cycle including menstruation and parturition. The Israelite priesthood required ceremonial purity and bodily wholeness which would exclude women because of their monthly cycle and pregnancy (Hayter 1987:70; Phipps 1992:9; Marsman 2003: 536-544, 569; Bloom 2007:68, 81, 131) which is paralleled by the exclusion of women from the priesthood in the ancient Near East (Bird 1999:3-20) for the very same reason that sexual and ritual purity was required from the priests (Lv 15:19-33; Van der Toorn 1995:2052; cf Marsman 2003:505).

⁶³⁸ Other diseases that confronted the priests were fevers, heat stroke, inflammation, consumption (Dt 28:22; Lv 26:16), tumors, itch and festering sores (Dt 28:27), blindness, possibly ophthalmia, neonatorum or trachoma (Mounce 2016a; Dt 28:28), leprosy (Nm 12:10-13; Lv 14:1-57), obesity related diseases (cf Jdg 3:17), skin diseases and worms (Mounce 2016b; cf Muntner 2007:721). See also Sha (2017:245).

⁶³⁹ Walton, Matthews and Chavalas (2007:407) report that poultices of fig cakes for healing purposes were possibly used at Ugarit. Poultices were used for diagnoses of (skin) diseases, at times. The poultice would be checked a day or two after application for the skin's reaction to it or the reaction of the poultice to the skin. A medical text from Emar recommends the use of figs and raisins for this process (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2007:407).



Figure 8.5 Figs (Broida 2022)

A parallel for the quality of leadership by the priests may be drawn from that assigned to the king in Deuteronomy 17:16-20 which cautioned the king against the accumulation of wealth deceiving the people and marrying too many women. Likewise, priests were to be humble, not seek elevated status among the Israelites and be faithful to YHWH (Dt 17:20). The promotion of social and wealth equality among the Israelites was an important role assigned to the priests. Priests set the example for an ethos of equality in society by following the leadership requirements listed in Deuteronomy 17.⁶⁴⁰ However, if the priests, who were consecrated to carry out their sacred responsibilities and therefore may have been seen as having a unique and sacred bond with YHWH, could succumb to sin, what about the common individual? The author/s of Judges may have believed that while YHWH punished all the Israelites, the disgrace of idolatry associated with the priesthood would have surpassed that of the average person (cf 4.3.2).

8.4.3 Purification and ordination of the priests

Priest had to be ceremonially clean for their duties at the Tabernacle: not touch a dead body, shave their head, their beards or the edges of their beards, or cut their bodies (Lv 21:5; cf 1 Ki 18:22-39; Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:134).⁶⁴¹

The ordination of the (High) Priest and the priests (which commenced with Aaron and his sons (Ex 29; 30:30 for example) begins with their ritual cleansing with water at the entrance of the *Miskhan* (and later the Temple). Exodus 29:29-30 indicates that the ordination rites were compulsory and lasting requirements for all priests before they could take on their priestly duties. The primary duty of the priest was to serve YHWH (in the Tabernacle) (Ex 29:44). The priests were

⁶⁴⁰ Other services to YHWH included women's services at the entrance to the Tabernacle (Ex 38:8; 1 Sm 2:22; Bird 1999:10-20; Meyers 2017:1-20) that probably involved the baking of bread (Lockyer 1967:19; Van der Toorn 1986:249) and cooking duties (Bird 1999:10); providing the temple with water, spices and oil (Lockyer 1967:18; Marsman 2003:436; 528; Blenkinsopp 1997:57; Burke 2011:902); weaving and cleaning activities (Abrahams 2007b:419; Marsman 2003:436).

⁶⁴¹ The latter practices were also rituals and magic rites observed by the priests in the ancient Near East (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:134-137; cf Akintola 2011). It is probable that restraints on priests cutting their hair are based on the Canaanite ritual of offering shaved off hair to appease the spirits of the dead (cf Dt 14:1; Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:134). In the ancient Near East, along with blood, hair was one of the primary signs of the essence of life of an individual and thus the cutting of a person's hair constituted their disgrace (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:134).

also to officiate over the offerings and sacrifices (Lv 1-7) and act as mediators between the people and YHWH (De Vaux 1997:355-357).

The purification of the priest was an essential rite in the ancient Near East. However, a notable difference is that the Babylonian purification process was an apotropaic act to protect the priests against evil (Quillien 2019:73). In early Israel the cleansing rite of the priest served to consecrate the priest to minister unto YHWH (in the Tabernacle) (Ex 30:30; cf Lv 8:12, 30; Nm 3:3). After the cleansing ritual priests are dressed in their sacred garments and anointed with the sacred anointing oil (שֶׁמֶן מִשְׁחַתְּמֵן – *qōdeš mišhatmen*) specified in Exodus 30:23-25 (cf Ex 29:1-9; 30:29-38).⁶⁴²

The ordination of the Aaronic priesthood also included a young bull and rams without blemish and a grain offering in the form of round loaves of bread made without yeast (Ex 29:1-2; Ryken, Wilhoit and Longman 1998). The bull was brought to the front of the *Miskhan* and after the priests had laid (one of) their hands on it, was slaughtered (Lv 1:4; 3:1-2; 8; 13). Hamilton (2019) states that the act of the laying on of the (one) hand identified the animal as belonging to (the priests; Lv 16:21).⁶⁴³ Hamilton notes that Hittite analogues verify this practice: ‘The purpose as Hittite parallels confirm and the specifics of the cases demonstrate, was not to transfer guilt to the animal but to identify it as belonging to, and thus as reconsecrating the offerer’ (cf Wright, Milgrom and Fabry 1999:284).

The (neophyte) Israelite priests would smear some of the bull’s blood on the horns of the altar and pour the rest out at its base. The fat of all the internal organs, ‘the long lobe of the liver and both the kidneys with the fat on them’ were burned on the altar. Apparently, this was to prevent unauthorized divination rituals such as liver prognoses from taking place (cf 5.4.6; Wright, Milgrom and Fabry 1999:284; Hamilton 2019). The flesh of the bull, hide and internal organs were burned outside the Tabernacle compound as a sin offering (Ex 29:10-14). The priests laid their hands on a ram that was slaughtered and sprinkled the sides of the altar with its blood. The ram was cut into pieces and after washing the internal organs, it was burned on the altar as a burn offering.

The sacrificial rites on the occasion of the inauguration, or ordination, of the priests were concluded when the priests laid their hands on the second ram. The blood of the slaughtered ram was put on the lobes of the right ears, the thumbs of their right hands and the big toes of their (Aaron and his sons’) right feet (Exodus 29:19-21) as a cleansing ritual (cf Lv 14:14). Blood is also a means of atonement (for souls and sin) for which reason it was sprinkled on the altar (Jastrow and

⁶⁴² The sacred anointing oil was scented, and salt was added specifying its ritual pureness. The recipe for making the oil and the ingredients is given in Exodus 30:23-25.

⁶⁴³ Hamilton (2019) states that in the laying on of hands in the Old Testament one or both hands were used. In the two-handed ritual, for example, the High Priest places both hand on the head of the scapegoat to transfer his sin and that of the Israelites onto the animal (cf Lv 16:21). See also Wright, Milgrom and Fabry (1999:284).

Strack 1906). Apparently, the aforesaid ritual indicated that the priests now were purified and made holy and came under the mastership of YHWH in order to perform religious services at the sanctuary.

Rattray (1996:1147) comments that the purpose of dabbing blood on the extremities of the priests (Ex 29:19-21) was to protect the most vulnerable parts of the priests' bodies from evil.⁶⁴⁴ In this sense, the act of applying blood to the extremities of the priests brought them under the protection of YHWH. Blood rituals cleansed not only the sanctuary (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:131) but also the priest for services in His sanctuary as stated above. The blood of the ram was sprinkled against the sides of the altar and some of this blood was also mixed with the special anointing oil and sprinkled on the clothes of the priests to consecrate them (Ex 29:19-21). The fat of the ram, the ram of ordination, including the fat from the tail, the fat around the internal organs, the long lobe of the liver, both kidneys with the fat and the right thigh were part of the burnt offering. The consecrated bread together with the burnt offering were offered to the LORD as a wave offering and all the food items were presented to YHWH as a food offering (Ex 29:23-26). The ordination of the priests ended in a sacred banquet that entailed of the eating of the ram of the ordination and the rest of the consecrated bread by the priests alone. Remnants of the meal were burned up (Ex 29:31-34).

The scented oil that was mixed with the blood and sprinkled on the garments of the priests served to conceal bad odours coming from the garments and symbolized the beauty and affluence (of YHWH) (King and Stager 2001:348).

8.4.3.1 Priestly garments

The garments of the priests consisted of a breastpiece, an ephod (see also 5.3.1.2), a robe, a woven tunic, a turban, and a sash made in gold, blue, purple, and scarlet yarn (Ex 28:4-5; cf Figure 8.8). The ephod and the breastpiece were garments unique to the priesthood. The hues and fabrics of the priestly vestments, similar to the colours and materials of the *Miskhan*, identified the priests as set apart for sacred services. Like the priestly garments in the ancient Near East the Israelite priestly vestments were made of fine linen and wool – the textiles of the gods (Quillien 2019:71-89).⁶⁴⁵ The linen for the priestly vestments was imported from Egypt where it was used also specifically for priestly robes (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:131). The distinctive and ornate garments of the priests identified them as 'as priests' (כֹּהֲנִים – *lakahên*) unto YHWH (Ex 29:1) and,

⁶⁴⁴ Some scholars view that in Akkadian law the piercing of the ear of an individual (thus drawing blood) was a 'degrading punishment' rather than a symbolic sign of servitude (Hurowitz 1992a:53). Cutting off the thumbs and big toes indicated the humiliation and submission of a person (cf Jdg 1:6-7; Rattray 1996:1147)⁶⁴⁴ also symbolized by the loss of blood which was considered the life force (see Lv 17:14: '...the life of every creature is in its blood;' see also Bible Hub 2022. Judges 1:6). In Judges 1:6-7, the big toes and thumbs of Adoni-Bezek were cut off.

⁶⁴⁵ Quillien (2019:71-89) describes the priestly garments worn by the Babylonian priests during the 1st millennium BC that included a headdress, garment, coat, belts.

as such, also set them apart from the ordinary people. The vestments of the priests also included an undergarment known as an ‘*ezor*’.⁶⁴⁶ In light of Exodus 20:26 the ‘*ezor*’ was a vital garment for the priest to wear to prevent him from exposing his nakedness (Kalmanofsky 2016:51). The requirement for the ‘*ezor*’ may be a polemic against the ceremonial nakedness practised in the cults of the ancient Near East (cf Ex 20:26).

Kalmanofsky (2016:51) comments that the ancient Near Eastern gods and goddesses were often depicted as naked to demonstrate their fertility and power. Priests and worshippers went naked for initiation rites and sacrifices (Kalmanofsky 2016:51) and certainly for the sexual rituals that were prevalent in the cults (cf 2.2.1.3d; 7.4.4.1). The garments of the priests, therefore, played a great role in ascribing the sanctity of the worship of YHWH.

The hem of the robe of the Priest was adorned with a row of pomegranates made of blue, purple, and scarlet wool and golden bells in between the pomegranates (Ex 28:33-34; 39:26). The pomegranates were a sacred emblem (Mackenzie 1996:1078) and symbolized the fertility (that YHWH) bestowed on the land and its people (cf Dt 8:8; Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:110; Tigay 2004:173; Mulder 2004:508). Walton, Matthews and Chavalas remark that pomegranates were also utilized to adorn ritual appurtenances in Ugarit. Tigay (2004:173) observes that ‘the purpose of the bells is not clear.’ The words ‘that he will not die’ (Ex 28:35), according to Tigay possibly suggest that the bells were ‘apotropaic devices to protect the priest from demons’ that were generally thought to ‘haunt thresholds’ (see also 4.3.1.3a). Walton, Matthews and Chavalas (2000:110), however, assert that the golden bells functioned to signal the ‘high priest’s’ movements in the Holy of Holies an indication to the people that he was within the sanctuary and still alive (Ex 28:35; Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:110). The bells announced the presence of the Priest when he enters and exits the *Miskhan* – probably also to remove anything, that may defile him from his path and that may render him impure from performing his duties inside the sacred sanctuary.

Recently, a ceramic pomegranate was discovered at Shiloh and could be associated with a local Iron Age I cult (Lopez, Stripling and Ben-Shlomo 2019:39; see Figure 8:6).⁶⁴⁷ Pomegranates were symbols of wealth, fertility, and magic in the ancient Near East (Leick 2003; Lopez, Stripling and Ben-Shlomo 2019:51). The Hittite goddess, Kubaba, for example, is depicted with a pomegranate in her hand (see Figure 8:7).

⁶⁴⁶ To practise some of their rituals (neo-Babylonian) priests indeed wore undergarments called *šupālītu* (Quillien 2019:77). However, for obvious reasons certain rituals such as the sexual rites required nudity (Kalmanofsky 2016:51).

⁶⁴⁷ Lopez, Stripling and Ben-Shlomo (2019:44-45, 46) provide a more detailed description of the pomegranate and report on a pomegranate discovered by the Danish excavation of Shiloh.



Figure 8.6 A ceramic pomegranate from Shiloh (Lopez, Stripling and Ben-Shlomo 2019:45)



Figure 8.7 The goddess Kubaba (with pomegranate in right hand) (Leick 2003)

The pomegranate is the only fruit allowed to be associated with the Tabernacle and the priesthood (Ex 28:33; 39:25-26). Considering the symbolism of fertility and magic attached to the pomegranate in the ancient Near East (see Figure 8.7), Exodus 28:35 appears to remove it from this context (cf Dt 8:8) by making it part of the priest's robe and thus a sacred symbol of YHWH's blessing of abundance (see above).

8.4.3.2 The ephod

Ancient Near Eastern analogues for (many of) the garments of the Israelite priests exist (George 2009:61; cf Quillien 2019:71-89; Meyers 1992e:550). Two of the most essential clothing items worn by only the High Priest were the ephod (עִפּוֹד – *'ēpōd*), a linen apron or vest worn over the (כִּתְיֹנֶת – *kaṭōneṯ*) (Meyers 1992e:550; cf 5.3.1.1) and the unique breastpiece (חֹשֶׁן – *hōšēn*) (see Figure 8.8).⁶⁴⁸ The ephod was decorated with two onyx stones on which were engraved the names of the twelve tribes, 'in the order of their birth – six names on one stone and the remaining six on the other (Ex 28:9-12). Walton, Matthews and Chavalas (2000:109) remark that the act of engraving the names of six tribes on each of the stones (Ex 28:11) was a mnemonic of the priest's role of representing the Israelites before YHWH.

⁶⁴⁸ George (2009:61-62), however, is of the opinion that although 'unusual' the breastpiece with the twelve stones (of divination) and the *kappōret* (the cover of the Ark of the Covenant) were 'perhaps' not unique. Todd (1985:299), for example, notes that an Assyrian text recorded the *antassurru* – a kind of breastpiece worn by the king on his chest. Walton, Matthews and Chavalas (2000:109) mention that special stones were also used in Mesopotamia in divination rituals. The uniqueness of the breastpiece of the Israelite (high) priest, however, lies in its mystical symbolism that united a people with a monotheistic God.

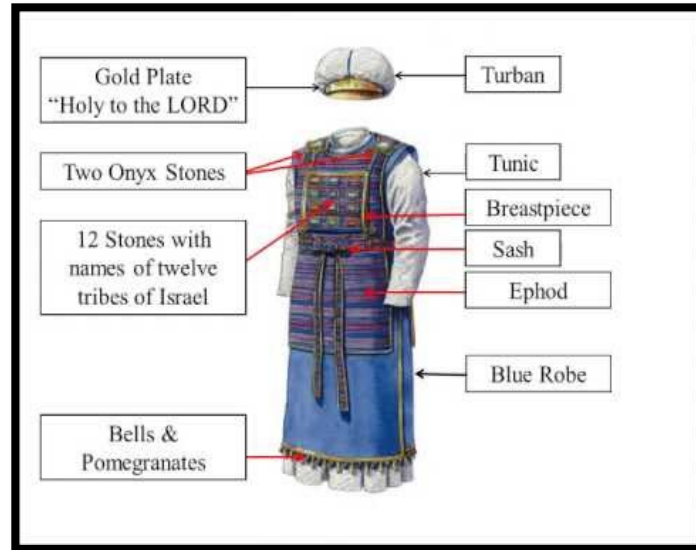


Figure 8:8 The garments of the (High) Priest (Cook 2011)

The ephod was a golden and ornate vestment that was made of luxurious fabrics. Phineas (the Priest), who ministered before the Ark of the Covenant (Jdg 20:28) would have worn such a vestment since it set him apart as a priest of YHWH. In Egypt and Mesopotamia expensive materials were used for the garments that clothed the statues of the gods and the affluent royal and priestly elites (Meyers 1992e:550; cf Quillien 2019:82). As mentioned before, in Judges the mother of Sisera awaits her son Sisera to bring back colourful and embroidered garments, a sign of luxury, as part of the war booty from the Israelites (Jdg 5:30; King and Stager 2001:158; cf 7.5.1.1).

Assyrian texts from Cappadocia that mentions a 'rich and costly garment called an *epattu*,' and Anath in the Ugaritic writings wore a garment called an '*epd* (Meyers 1992e:550; De Vaux 1997:338). Golden garments were used in Mesopotamian rites to dress the statues of the gods (Meyers 1992e:550).⁶⁴⁹ Babylonian texts reveal that priestly garments were decorated with symbols and celestial shapes such as stars and a rainbow as well as the figures of gods (Quillien 2019:82). The vestments of YHWH's priest apart from the bells and pomegranate fastened to the hem of his robe were devoid of similar symbols.

In keeping with the aniconic custom of the Israelites no image of YHWH could adorn the ephod of the priest and no statue of God could be adorned with costly garments to 'insure divine immanence' (Meyers 1992e:550). Instead, the ephod with the breastpiece and the *Urim* and *Thummim* was used to consult YHWH in divination processes in order to discern the divine will (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2001:109). The *Urim* and *Thummim*, affixed to the breastpiece that was attached to the ephod of Phinehas in Judges 20:28, were likely employed to determine the divine

⁶⁴⁹ A very ancient cultic practice in the ancient Near East was to dress the statues of the gods in their temples. A Twelfth Dynasty texts records an Egyptian official clothing his deity called 'Lord of Abydos' with 'lapis lazuli and turquoise, fine gold and all costly stones' (Wilson 1969a:330).

will concerning the outcome of the war against the Benjamites (Jdg 20:14-48). Tigay (2004:173) comments the *Urim* and *Thummim* was an apparatus to acquire God's decision on significant issues where human judgment was deemed insufficient, such as military activities, land distribution, court rulings in the absence of proof and leader selection (Nm 27:21; 1 Sm 14:37-42; Ez 2:63; cf Ex 22:8; Jos 7:14-18; Jdg 1:1-2; 20:18; 1 Sm 10:20-22).

The ephod therefore itself was a sign of divine immanence in the mindset of the authors/s of Judges since it revealed the divine will in important matters such as warfare (cf Jdg 1:1-2; cf Jdg 20:28). In Judges, the ephod is connected with idol worship (cf 5.3.1.2; Jdg 8:27; 17:5; 18:14, 17, 20; Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:109). The function and the form of the ephod in the Old Testament remain uncertain among scholars (Meyers 1992e:550; De Vaux 1997:350-351). In Exodus 28 the ephod appears as a vestment while in Judges it is possibly an idol (cf Jdg 8:27; 17:5).

In Judges 8:27, Gideon, after winning the war against the Midianites, request an item from each of his men – a gold earring – from their share of the war bounty and the warriors happily provide them (see 5.3.1.2). Then Gideon made the gold, which weighed seventeen hundred shekels, into an ephod which he put in Ophrah. The ephod became an idolatrous object since the Israelites worshipped it and Judges 8:27 states that it became a snare to Gideon and his family (cf Jdg 2:3; see 5.3.1.2). In Judges 17:5 Micah had made an ephod that he put along with some household gods in his household shrine and in which he also installed one of his sons as a priest. The ephod, household gods and the silver idol made by Micah's mother (Jdg 17:4) were later stolen by the Danites (Jdg 18:14, 17-18) and were later installed in the Danites' own sanctuary in the city of Dan (Jdg 18:30-31). By the recounting narratives, the author/s of Judges reveals the 'unauthorised' production and utilisation of a sacred object to further the desires of the Israelites. It is worth noting the author/s does not record an objection by the priesthood and elders in this matter. It is possible that the ephod adorned an idol which accounts for its worship by the Israelites.

Priestly attire displays noticeable lack of jewelry. It was believed that jewelry such as amulets and pendants had magical powers. These items had the images of idols carved on them or were dedicated to the gods (Tischler 2006:328; cf Jdg 8:21). According to Tischler (2006:328), the gold earrings of the Israelites that were made into the Golden Calf support the link between idolatry and jewelry that was made by Aaron. It is possible that a similar association was made by Gideon between the jewelry of the gold earrings of the Ishmaelites and the construction of the golden ephod in Judges 8:22-27 (see also 5.3.1.2).

8.4.3.3 *The breastpiece*

A sacred vestment of the priest that was associated with divination was the breastpiece. As said before, Phineas would have worn these vestments (cf Jdg 20:27-28). When he ministered before

the Ark of the Covenant, he was presenting the twelve tribes which the twelve stones of the *Urim* and *Thummim* symbolized.

The breastpiece was made of the same fabric as the ephod. It was ‘distinct from the ephod’ but attached to it and formed a square pouch when folded over of 9 x 9 inches in length that served as a type of bag to hold the *Urim* and *Thummim* (Ex 28:15-16; Meyers 1992d:781; De Vaux 1997:350; Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2002:109; see also 5.3.1.1). It was for this reason, as a receptacle for the *Urim* and *Thummim*, that the breastpiece is called the $\text{מִשְׁפָּטֵי הַחֹשֶׁן}$ – *mišpāt ḥōšen*,⁶⁵⁰ that is, the breastpiece ‘of (oracular) decision’ (De Vaux 1997:350).

Twelve precious stones were set into fabric of the breastpiece ‘in four rows of three stones with each stone set in gold filigree’ and represented the twelve tribes (Ex 28:17-21; Meyers 1992d:781). The term breastpiece of decision (Ex 28:29) indicates its connection with the *Urim and Thummim* (as sacred lots [De Vaux 1997:352]) and deepens the symbolic value attached to the garment (Jastrow et al 1906).

The sacrificial rites as well as discerning the will of God by means of the *Urim* and *Thummim* were the principal functions of the high priest (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:109; cf Houston 2001:87). The word *Urim* (the plural form of *ur*) means fire or light in Hebrew and by inference associated with bright stones (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:109).⁶⁵¹ The Hebrew word *Thummim* (plural form of *tom*) means blameless, integrity. The *Thummim* were symbols of complete truth and by extension holiness worn over the breast of the priest.⁶⁵²

In the ancient Near East precious stones were also used for their apotropaic value in divination rituals. Positive and negative stones (bright and dark stones) were used in oracles – asking yes-no questions of the gods (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:109). This divination procedure is known as psephomancy. Walton, Matthews and Chavalas (2000:109) describe the procedure: ‘The yes-no question would be posed and then a stone drawn out. The same colour stone would have to be drawn out three times consecutively for the answer to be confirmed.’ In an Assyrian text hematite and alabaster stones are mentioned (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:109). A similar method is described in 1 Sm 14:41-42:

Then Saul prayed to the Lord, the God of Israel, “Why have you not answered your servant today? If the fault is in me or my son Jonathan, respond with Urim, but if the men of Israel are at fault, respond with Thummim.” Jonathan and Saul were taken by lot, and the men

⁶⁵⁰ The term *ḥōšen mišpāt* is translated as breastplate of judgement (*KJV, ASV*), breastpiece of judgement (*NASB*) and breastpiece for making decisions (*NIV*).

⁶⁵¹ See Bible Hub 2022. *Ur*.

⁶⁵² Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance 2022. *Thummim*. Walton, Matthews and Chavalas (2000:109) remark that hematite used in weights and seals was called the ‘truth stone’ in Sumerian and the *Thummim* may have a similar meaning.

were cleared. Saul said, “Cast the lot between me and Jonathan my son.” And Jonathan was taken (cf De Vaux 1997:352).

De Vaux (1997:352) states that the Priest played a role in the divination in 1 Samuel 14:36. 1 Samuel 14:41-42 may be a parallel for a divination ritual that was supervised by Phinehas, the Priest in Judges 20:28 (cf Kuruvilla 2017:293n23).⁶⁵³

The vestments of the Priest, in particular the ephod, breastpiece and, as mentioned before, the *Urim* and *Thummim* were symbols of a sacred decree of the holiness of the (early) Israelites. Whenever the priest ministered before the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies, ‘he symbolically and regularly brought all Israel in with him, in the form of the tribal names’ (Meyers 1996d:154-155). Additionally, by means of the *Urim* and *Thummim* the priest performed his divinatory function of ‘bearing the judgment of the sons of Israel over his heart’ (Ex 29:30; Meyers 1996d:154-155). The *Urim* and *Thummim*, consequently, symbolized the holiness of the priest and the Israelites before YHWH (Houston 2001:87). It is probable that this was the situation during a time of peace and covenantal restoration, but not when idolatry was prevalent. One wonders about the involvement of the Priest in idolatry and if he would still utilize the *Urim* and *Thummim*. Furthermore, it raises the question of whether YHWH would respond to such inquiries. The presence of the Angel of YHWH and the prophets who conveyed divine messages suggest that the *Urim* and *Thummim* remained ‘silent’ during periods of idolatry. Since it was the Priest’s duty to consult with YHWH regarding the people by means of the *Urim* and *Thummim* it is not surprising that the lack of response from these divine tools resulted in the unwise decisions made by the elders in Judges (21:12; 23). The author/s of Judges might have been of the opinion that the ‘silence’ of the *Urim* and *Thummim* was punishment for the Israelites’ disobedience towards their God and their covenant (cf Jdg 21:25).

8.4.4 Celebrations

One of the primary duties of Priest and the priests was to bless the Israelite people literally (Nm 6:22-27; cf Lv 21:8). Another principal responsibility assumed by the head of the priesthood was to oversee the various sacrifices at the Tabernacle (see 7.4.1; see Table 8.1 and Table 8.3). Specific and significant rituals in the Israelite religion occurred on the Day of Atonement. The rituals on the Day of Atonement, the animal sacrifices and entering the Holy of Holies, were undertaken by the head of the priesthood solely and highlights his importance more so than any of his other religious duties at the Tabernacle (Lv 16:1-34). As previously mentioned, the omission of the Day of Atonement from the religious practices at the Tabernacle (see Jdg 18:31; 19:19; 21:19) would have been considered by the author/s of Judges as a severe violation of one of the most important Israelite rituals. The absence of purification and, most importantly, forgiveness of their sins implied

⁶⁵³ See Bible Hub 2022. Judges 20:28.

that the people were regarded as anathema to YHWH. This, along with other factors, could have been a significant motivation for the author/s to exert great efforts in restoring the covenant.

To prepare himself for the rituals enacted on the Day of Atonement, the Priest purified himself with water and dressed in linen clothing: the sacred tunic and linen undergarments, the linen sash and linen turban (Lv 16:4), clothing that symbolized his humility (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:131; cf Wright 1992a:72-76). However, the significance of it all would be altered if his very own heart was as fragmented as the disobedient idolatrous society.

8.4.4.1 *The Day of Atonement*

The Day of Atonement (יִום הַכִּפּוּרִים – *hakkippurim yōwm*) was celebrated on the tenth day of the seventh month (Lv 23:27) or ‘ten days after the fall of’ *Rosh Hoshanah* (Saldarini 1996:88; see also 7.2.5). About the Day of Atonement, Walton, Matthews and Chavalas (2000:131) comment: ‘Though other cultures of the ancient Near East have rituals to dispose of evil, in all of those the evil is of ritual or demonic nature, while in Israel all of the sins of the people were included.’

Accordingly, the rituals performed on the Day of Atonement served to expiate the sins and adulterations of the head of the priests and the Israelites for the past year as well as to cleanse the Tabernacle and that altar (Lv 16:1-34; 23:26-32; Nm 29:7-11; Saldarini 1996:88; Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:131). On the Day of Atonement, a bull, and two goats were selected for the oblation rites. The Reader of Judges is well aware that there are no signs of the official commemoration of the Day of Atonement in the text. However, Judges 2:4-5 does indicate a ritual of atonement (for the sin of idolatry/covenant violation). The acceptance of this sacrifice is not indicated by the author/s of Judges.

Ancient Near Eastern analogues for the Israelite Day of Atonement exist. The Biblical *ḥatta't*, or ‘purgation’ also sin offering ritual finds a parallel in the Hittite ritual of Ulippi as blood is used as a ritual purifier in the rite (Wright 1992a:72-76; cf Ayali-Darshan 2020). In the ancient Near East temples were ritualistically cleansed and dedicated to the god by dabbing the blood of a sacrificial animal on the statue of the god, the walls of the temple and the utensils (Wright 1992a:72-76).⁶⁵⁴

The rituals on the Day of Atonement consisted of the purgative rites: 1) purification of the Tabernacle with the blood of the bull sacrificed for the priests and one of the goats sacrificed for the Israelite community (Lv 16:3-19), and 2) the sending of the second goat known as the scapegoat that bears the sins of the Israelites into the wilderness (Lv 16:20-22) (Wright 1992a:72-76).

⁶⁵⁴ Wright (1992a:72-76) also describes the purification of the cella of the Babylonian god Nabû on the fifth day of the Babylonian New Year Festival (known as the Akītu festival) as a ritual that parallels that of the biblical Day of Atonement. A ram is sacrificed, and its carcass is ‘wiped’ on the temple walls to remove contaminations. Wright goes on to say that the Babylonian word for wiping used is *kuppuru* which is a cognate of the Hebrew *kipper*.

a. Purification of the Tabernacle

On the Day of Atonement, the ‘head of the priesthood’ (Aaron) sacrifices a young bull to atone for his sins (and that of his household) (Lv 16:3) and a goat for the sins of the Israelites. The blood of the two animals is used to purify the Tabernacle beginning with the interior of the most sacred environ, the Holy of Holies, then second in holiness, the interior of the Holy Place and ending with the purification of the least sacred environ, the altar outside the Tabernacle (Wright 1992a:72-76; cf Saldarini 1996:88). Only the ‘head of the priesthood’ entered the Holy of Holies as stated above (see 7.4.3.1). While he is performing the purification rites in the Tabernacle no-one is allowed access inside the sanctuary.

The ‘head of the priesthood’ entered the Holy of Holies with a censer of burning coals taken from the altar (of incense) and two handfuls of ground incense. The smoke of the incense concealed the atonement cover (*kappōret*) of the Ark of the Covenant that prevented the ‘head of the priesthods’ death (Wright 1992a-72-76; Levoratti 1998:446). At this point the ‘head of the priesthood’ had not made atonement for his sins and if the smoke of the incense did not hide the *kappōret*, he could have died witnessing the presence of YHWH (in the cloud over the *kappōret*).

Leviticus 16:2 states that YHWH would appear in the cloud over the atonement cover.⁶⁵⁵ Walton, Matthews and Chavalas (2000:131) remark that the Akkadians used the word *melammu* to refer to the ‘visible representation’ of the glory of a god that is ‘enshrouded in smoke or a cloud.’⁶⁵⁶ Inside the Holy of Holies, the ‘head of the priesthood’ took the blood of the bull and the goat and sprinkled it on and in front of the *kappōret*. Similarly, the Holy Place and the outside altar (of burnt offering) were cleansed of the sins of the ‘head of the priesthood’ and the people. According to Walton, Matthews and Chavalas (2000:131), the blood ritual that purifies the sanctuary from the contaminations (of the people) accrued during the year ‘works from the inside out’ (as described above) until the sins are placed on the head of the scapegoat which carries them away.’ Possibly possible this rite was performed at the Tabernacle during the periods of covenant restoration recorded in Judges (see Table 8.2). Then too the ritual described below might have taken place.

b. The scapegoat

The purpose of the scapegoat (אֲזָזֵל – *‘āzāzēl* [Azazel]) ritual was to purge the community of their sins – the reason for the adulteration of the Tabernacle (Levoratti 1998:466; cf 7.4.1.2c). The scapegoat was chosen by lot (Lv 16:6) – one lot for YHWH and the other for the scapegoat (Lv

⁶⁵⁵ It has been suggested that the word *kappōret* comes from the Egyptian term for a footrest (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:106, 131).

⁶⁵⁶ Walton, Matthews and Chavalas note that the Canaanite word *anan* could possibly convey a meaning similar to the Akkadian *melammu*.

16:8; see Figure 8.9). Accordingly, Walton, Matthews and Chavalas (2000:131) consider ‘Azazel’ as a proper name and probably that of a demon (cf Wright 1992a:72-76).⁶⁵⁷



Figure 8.9 The scapegoat [Reconstruction] (Ayali-Darshan 2020)

The ‘head of the priesthood’ laid both hands on the head of the scapegoat and by confession transferred all the sins of the Israelites onto the goat (see Figure 8.9). The goat was sent into the wilderness to remove the sins of the people from the Tabernacle and the community (see Figure 8.9; Lv 16:21-22; Levoratti 1998:466; cf 7.4.1.2c). After the *ḥaṭṭa*’t (the word is translated as sin-offering but it also means sin; Grabbe 2001:97) and scapegoat rituals, the ‘head of the priesthood’ went inside the Tabernacle to remove the garments worn during the rituals, bathing and changing into his regular priestly vestments. He offers a burnt offering for himself and the community. The fat of the *ḥaṭṭa*’t is burnt on the altar (Lv 16:23-25; Wright 1992a:72-76). The ritual of the scapegoat is but one rite that was meant for the ordinary people.

c. The people

The Day of Atonement was a day of rest for the Israelite community and the ‘complete cessation of work’ was required (Wright 1992a:72-76). Other essential requirements focused on self-denial including fasting, sexual abstinence and anointing (cf Nm 30:14; 2 Sm 12:16-20; Wright 1992a:72-76). Rest on the Day of Atonement was ‘a day of Sabbath rest’ for the people and a ‘lasting ordinance’ (Lv 16:31). In this manner, the Israelites contribute to the holiness that is required of them

⁶⁵⁷ Walton, Matthews and Chavalas comment that early Jewish interpreters understood Azazel to be the name of a demon in accordance with the 2nd century BC Book of Enoch. The goat is not sacrificed to Azazel but released to Azazel (Lv 16:26; Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:131). The scapegoat was sent into the wilderness which was inhabited by various wild animals (Levoratti 1998:446). Walton, Matthews and Chavalas (2000:131) mention that the Babylonians believed in *alu*-demons that resided in the desert. In addition, the *Ebla tablets* record a purification ritual for a tomb in which rite a goat is dispatched into the steppe country. A Hittite ritual against plague involved twine of red, blue, yellow, white and black wool twisted into a crown and placed on the head of a ram (the scapegoat which was driven up the road towards the enemy [that presumably had cursed the land with pestilence] (Goetze 1969a:347). It has been presumed that Leviticus 16:6-10 describes a similar ritual in which a goat is sent into the wilderness as a scapegoat (𐤀𐤆𐤅𐤀𐤏 – Azazel) to make atonement for the sins of the Israelites (Ahituv 2007:763). Ahituv (2007:763) relates that during the Babylonian New Year festival (*Akitu*) a human being was replaced with a goat and offered to the goddess of the abyss Ereshkigal and in an Akkadian magical text the cure for the sickness of a man is passed on to a goat that is released into desert and beheaded. Ahituv also mentions that the precise meaning of Azazel is disputed: some believe it is the name of a place while others think it to be the name of a ‘power.’

on their religious celebrations. The early Israelites were instructed in their covenantal laws to live their sacred and ordinary lives continuously within the structure of the Holiness Code (Lv 17-26; Barton 2001:8). Ironically, the religious mindset depicted in the Book of Judges always accentuates holiness through the lens of Israelite infidelity towards YHWH (cf Jdg 2:1-5; 6:1-10; 10:6-15, etcetera). Schwartz (2004:247) comments:

...holiness is conceived of as an effervescence of the Presence of the LORD. It infuses everything with which it comes into contact ... transforming it into the designated personal property of the deity. ... holiness is not confined to the realm of the Tabernacle and priesthood; rather the Israelite people as a whole can and must attain holiness (Lv 6:11; 8:10-13; 19-20).

In addition to the three annual pilgrimages made to Shiloh, sacrifices and offerings, prayers, sacred vows, blessings, and curses were features of the holy worship of YHWH that were undertaken by the early Israelites at the *Miskhan* and in their households. In what follows next, the discussion will focus on the religious duties of offerings and sacrifices, the Sabbath adherence and vows, blessings, and curses of the ordinary people that may have occurred during times of covenant restoration. These peaceful times are indicated in the Book of Judges (see Table 8.2 and Figure 8.2).

8.5 OFFERINGS, CELEBRATIONS AND RITUALS OF THE ORDINARY PEOPLE

The communal offerings and sacrifices required for the early Israelites to bring to the Tabernacle (during times of covenant restoration) are as follows:

8.5.1 Burnt offerings (עֹלָה – ‘olah, ‘that which goes up’)

In the Old Testament (and the Book of Judges) there are various verbs to denote the sacrificial act but only the Hebrew verbs זָבַח (sacrifice), הֵעֵלָה (bring up) and הִקְרִיב (sacrificed) are used to refer to the slaughter of animals for sacrificial purposes (Rainey 2007b:639).⁶⁵⁸ Rainey states that the word הִקְרִיב (and its cognate noun *korban*) ‘expresses the idea to bring near.’ Accordingly, in Judges 2:5, the Hebrew word וַיִּזְבְּחוּ (wayyizbəḥū – and they sacrificed) is based on the root word זָבַח (*zabach* - to slaughter for sacrifice)⁶⁵⁹ (cf Gn 31:54; 46:1; Ex 3:18, etcetera). In the narrative of Judges 2:5, the animal slaughtered would have been a male animal from the herds or flocks (see above).

⁶⁵⁸ In this segment about communal offerings, all Hebrew terms and transliterations are attributed to Rainey (2007b:638-644). In the Old Testament two verbs denote the slaughter of an animal: for secular טָבַח – *tābūah* (cf Gn 43:16) and sacred שָׁחַט – *šāḥaṭ* (cf Nm 11:22) and for sacred purposes (Rainey 2007b:639).

The earliest archaeological indication for sacrifice is found in the altars of the Ubaid era in 4th millennium BC Mesopotamia (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:120). The earliest explanations for animal sacrifice are provided in the Sumerian Literature. The *Lugalbanda Epic*, for instance, states that animal sacrifices ‘originated as a means of permitting meat consumption.’ ‘Sharing a meal with the deity allowed people to slaughter the animal for their food’ (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:120). It is more probable however that ritual sacrifice was mostly made to use the entrails of the slaughtered animal for prognostic purposes (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:120). In a Hittite text a lamb is slaughtered, and its entrails inspected for favourable omens that signified a ‘fruitful breeze’ and ‘satisfaction’ (Goetze1969d:128).

⁶⁵⁹ Bible Hub 2022. zabach.

In Judges 6:25, the term *וַהֲעֵלִיתָ* – *waha ‘ă-lîṭā* (to go up to)⁶⁶⁰ derived from *הֵעִלָּה* (bring up) is used by the Angel of the LORD to instruct Gideon to offer a burnt sacrifice (*עֹלָה* – *‘ōlāh*). The animal sacrificed by Gideon was a young goat. The Angel of the LORD requires Manoah to make a burnt offering (*עֹלָה* – *‘ōlāh*) and Manoah sacrificed *וַיַּעַל* – *wayya ‘al* (used to denote a sacrifice), a young goat (Jdg 13:16, 19). The burnt/meal offerings of Gideon and Manoah and his wife are described in 3.4.1.1b-c. These meal offerings were not presented at the Tabernacle, or officiated by a priest but they were accepted by the Angel of YHWH indicating that YHWH does not prescribe to the dominant cultural ideology that prescribe such sacrifices to be done by a priest at the Tabernacle. Perhaps the author/s narrate these theophanies as a ‘sign of the times’ when the flagrant idolatry led to YHWH Himself intervening to rescue His people.

Animal oblation and altars feature prominently in the religions of the ancient Near East as all sorts of animals were sacrificed as offerings to the gods (see also 7.4.1.2b-c). Meyers (1996c:26) observes the following: ‘... non-Israelite sacrificial systems were rooted in the idea of providing sustenance and pleasing odors for the gods in their earthly residences. Israelite altars, while technically hearths for God’s dwelling did not preserve that concept. Rather they function to bring humanity close to heaven and not vice versa.’ The significance of animal sacrifice in the Yahwistic religion lies in the sacred and ritualistic shedding of the animal’s blood. Rainey (2007b:639) observes that

The surrender of a living thing was a major factor in nearly every kind of sacrificial ritual; that life was being forfeited was signified by the extraction of an animal’s blood: “For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it for you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement, by reason of the life (that is in it)” (Lev. 17:11).

Burnt offerings, that is male animals only, from only the herds or flocks (sheep or goats) (Lv 1:1, 10) and which were ‘completely burned on the altar except for the skin’ were accepted (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:120). Poor households could present a burnt offering of a bird, a pigeon, or a dove (Lv 1:14). The burnt offerings were accompanied by offerings of grain, of the finest flour, and drink offerings (Nm 28-29; Rainey 2007b:641). The priests mixed the flour with olive oil and put incense on top to be burnt as a memorial offering on the altar (Lv 2:14). The burnt offering was made to entreat YHWH for the forgiveness of sin as well as to consecrate the body of the offerer (Larkin 2008:163). Walton, Matthews and Chavalas (2000:210) remark that burnt offerings functioned ‘as means to approach the Lord with a plea’ that included entreaties for ‘victory’ (cf Jdg 20:26), ‘mercy, forgiveness,’ ‘purification’ as well as ‘favor for a number of things.’ Sacrifices and offerings were made in Judges as a plea of divine forgiveness, mercy and repentance (Jdg 2:5). In Judges 20:26 burnt offerings and fellowship offerings were made to entreat YHWH for a successful war outcome. The Israelite sacrificial system conducted at the Tabernacle served

⁶⁶⁰ Bible Hub 2022. alah.

as a means by which the entire community could worship YHWH and demonstrate their loyalty and devotion to Him (Meyers 1996c:26).

8.5.1.1 Propitiation offerings

The propitiation offerings involved the sin offering (חַטָּאת – *ḥaṭṭa't*) (cf 7.4.1.2b-c) and guilt offering (אֲשָׁם – *ʾasham*). Walton, Matthews and Chavalas (2000:122) remark that ‘the purification offering has traditionally been called the sin offering’ but that the terminology has changed since it is known that the offering dealt not only with moral offences but also with purification in instances of serious of ritual impurity (cf Longman and Dillard 2006:88). Grabbe (2001:97) remarks that the sacrifice is required in certain cases when no sin is involved and thus ‘purificatory offering’ has been presented as an alternative title. However, the phrase sin offering is still used more often despite being problematic (Grabbe 2001:97).

The sin/purification offering comprised the sacrifice of a flawless young bull at the Tabernacle (Lv 4:1-21) that was made for unintentional trespasses committed by the entire community. The sin/purification offering for an unintentional transgression of a leader comprised ‘a male goat without defect’ (Lv 4:22-26; Grabbe 2001:97). The sin/purification offering for an individual committing an unintentional sin consisted of an unblemished female goat (Lv 4:27). A spotless female lamb or a dove or a pigeon were also acceptable as sin offerings (Lv 4:32). The guilt offering (for defiling the LORD’s ‘holy things’) was an unblemished ram (Lv 5:14-16). The instances where a guilt offering is required are: when withholding part of what is due to YHWH (the holy things of the LORD) for example tithes or firstfruits.⁶⁶¹ These offerings would have applied to the early Israelites in the Book of Judges had they committed unintentional sins.

Walton, Matthews and Chavalas (2000:122) observe that in personal circumstances, public consecration services, and specific festivals all involved offerings that cleansed or cleaned the sanctuary and not the offender from the consequences of the offence or condition. Temple cleansing was a regular requirement in the ancient Near East because the people believed that impurity left the temple open to attack by destructive demons (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:122). Among the early Israelites maintenance ‘of the purity of the Tabernacle had to do with the holiness of God’ (see 7.4.3.2a). ‘If the Lord was to remain in their midst, the holiness of the sanctuary must be maintained’ (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:122; cf Longman and Dillard 2006:83-85, 89). In the religious perspective of the author/s of Judges, the aforementioned sanctity would be forfeited if the priest himself is compromised. The author/s show that YHWH does indeed ‘leave’ the Tabernacle to redeem and make His people holy again (cf Jdg 2:1-5; 3; 4, and so forth).

8.5.1.2 Other religious offerings

⁶⁶¹ Bible Hub 2022. Leviticus 5:15.

The fellowship offering (Lv 3:1-17) was a voluntary offering that consisted of an unblemished male or female animal from the herds or flocks which was presented as a meal offering. Rainey (2007b:642) mentions that these offerings were not obligatory except in the case of fulfilling the Nazirite vow and the Festival of Weeks.

The peace offerings (שלמים – *shelamim* [pl]) ‘is the basic sacrifice of all communal offerings’ and ‘any domesticated animal from the herd or flock, male or female was permissible’ (Lv 3:1, 6, 12; Rainey 2007b:642). The thanksgiving offering (זבה(ה)תודה [‘*zevah (ha) todah*’]) was the most common type of peace offering (Rainey 2007b:642). Other offerings consisted of the wave offering (תנפה – *tenufah*), the freewill offering (נדבה – *nedavah*) – ‘the minimum offering’, the dedicatory offering and the libation offering [נס – *nesekh*], daily offerings (see Table 8.1), votive offerings (נדן – *nādār* [see below, 7.5.1.1f]) as well as Sabbath offerings (see Table 8.1) and offerings on the New Moon (Nm 28:11-15; Rainey 2007b:640-642).⁶⁶²

a. Votive offerings

At the dedication of the Tabernacle, the leader of each tribe presented one silver plate, one silver bowl and one golden dish (Nm 7:84). It was also customary to present votive offerings at the temple of a deity in the ancient Near East. Votive offerings were made for various reasons including to ensure the continued protection and blessing of the god upon the individual presenting the offering; as thanksgiving offerings; as a memorial or dedication gift given upon important events such as a king’s ascension to the throne, a successful war campaign, and the completion of the building of a temple (Sebbane 2016:425). Among the Israelites, people, animals and land could also be dedicated to YHWH to fulfil a vow (Lv 27:1-34). Hannah vows to dedicate her son to YHWH and in fulfilment of her vow presents Samuel at the Tabernacle together with a meal offering of a young bull, an ephah of flour and a wine offering (1 Sm:1:24-28).⁶⁶³ The mother of Micah dedicates her silver to YHWH as a votive offering to reverse her cursing of her son into a blessing.

Cultic activity at Shiloh is demonstrated in the discovery of clay vessels, incense stands, votive bowls and anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figurines dated to the Middle Bronze Age and the Iron Age (Stripling 2016:89-94; cf Zevit 2001:108; Bunimovitz and Finkelstein 1993:81-196; Sha 2018:145). Amid the large collections of ‘votive figurines’ found in Israel are theriomorphic (a

⁶⁶² A drink offering usually came with the burnt and peace offerings (Nm 15:1-10; Rainey 2007b:641). Rainey observes that the standard libation offering for a lamb ‘was one-fourth a *hin* of wine’, for a ram it was one-third and ‘one-half for a bull.’ The term ‘strong drink’ (שכר – *shekhar*) that is used to refer to drink offering (Nm 28:7) is considered to be a synonym for wine (Ex 29:40; Rainey 2007b:641). See Rainey (2007b:639-644) for a fuller description of the communal offerings made at the Tabernacle.

⁶⁶³ In the ancient Near East dedication offerings were made at the dedication or rebuilding of a temple (Oppenheimer 1969a:559). In the ancient Near East people could also be dedicated to a temple. A Babylonian legal text states that a father could dedicate his daughter ‘as a hierodule, a sacred prostitute or a devotee’ to a god such as Marduk at his temple (Kramer 1969c:174).

god having an animal form), and ‘non-zoomorphic; statuettes made of metal, stone, or clay (King and Stager 2001:352-353; cf Richard 2003:372; Sha 2018:146). Only earthenware vessels such as the ceramic vessels unearthed at Hazor, el-Qom, Arad, Tel Sheva and Kuntillet ‘Ajrud (King and Stager 2001:353) were accepted as votive offerings at the Tabernacle (Sha 2018:146).⁶⁶⁴

In the Old Testament votive offerings as *מבחר נדרים* – *nidrêkem mibḥar* (special gifts) were voluntary offerings made and also associated with offerings made in the fulfillment of a vow (*נדר* – *nāḏār* or *neder*) (Dt 12:11). Votive offerings not affiliated with vows were also presented as praise and thanksgiving offerings and also part of offerings of devoutness made to YHWH (De Vaux 1997:318). The only requirement for votive offerings in the pre-monarchy was that they had to be made at the Tabernacle.⁶⁶⁵ The dedicatory offering of silver made to YHWH by the mother of Micah, for her son to make ‘an image overlaid with silver’ was an illegal offering since it involved the silver being made into an idolatrous image (Jdg 17:3). Judges reports it initially being installed in the unlawful shrine of Micah and then in the illegal shrine of the Danites (Jdg 18:30).

Votive gifts could also consist of meal offerings of flour (Lv 2:1), bread (cf Lv 2:4 7:11-16) and meat (Lv 7:15) as well as drink offerings such as wine (cf Nm 28:31; 29:30-31; Lv 23:37; 1 Sm 1:24). Olive oil would have served as votive offerings at the Tabernacle (for the lamps; Lv 24:2) as it did at the Temple in later years (cf Lv 6:13; King and Stager 2001:98). King and Stager mention the olive press in the sacred compound at Tel Dan that provided oil for the lamps and votive offerings in the Temple. Olive presses would have provided the lamps in the Tabernacle with fuel as well. Finkelstein and Silberman (2002:115) report that in all three periods of highland settlement (cf 4.2.1.1b; cf Footnote 6, 220, 221 see also Table 8.1) the production of wine and olive oil flourished.⁶⁶⁶

b. Incense

Incense (*קֶרֶבֶת* – *qəṭōret*) featured prominently in the Israelite religion (Ex 25:6; 35:8; 37:29; Fowler 1992:409-410). Incense (also rendered as *lēbōnā* and ‘actually translated as frankincense’ [Fowler 1992:409-419]) was an offering made to YHWH and which provided the golden altar

⁶⁶⁴ Lavish votive offerings of precious metals were made to the ancient Near Eastern gods by those who could afford it. A list of Babylonian year names includes ‘A shiny votive offering’ as the name of a year (Oppenheim 1969b:271) that demonstrates the importance of votive offerings in the religions of the ancient Near East. At the *migdal* temple in Pella (dated 1350 BC-900 BC), cult stands dedicated to Asherah were unearthed that held offering dishes (Bourke 2004:1; Hadley 2000:156) and which served as altars (Churcher 2003). Food offerings to the god at his temple, such as perhaps in ‘the temple of their god’ (Jdg 9:27) and the temple of Dagan (Jdg 16:23) were also customary in the ancient Near East (Kramer 1969a:51). Food (as votive) offerings were placed in the dishes as a gift to the deity (Churcher 2003). Offerings to the gods also consisted of wine (Nakhai 2001:43), beer (Borowski 2003:70; Fleming 2004:74) and possibly milk (Westbrook 2011:75). Libation tables were discovered at Hazor (Münnich 2008:40).

⁶⁶⁵ Cf Encyclopedia.com 2022. Votive Offerings.

⁶⁶⁶ Finkelstein and Silberman (2002:115) mention that in all three periods of highland settlement surplus wine was exported to the lowlands and outside the borders of Canaan to Egypt for example. In one (Early Bronze Age) Canaanite storage jar uncovered in Egypt the remnants of grape seeds were found.

before the Holy of Holies with its incense (Meyers 1996c:25-26). The ingredients for the making of incense are provided in Exodus 30:34. Incense featured among the commodities exported from Canaan to the Mediterranean (during the highland settlements) (King and Stager 2001:146) since it was a product that held spiritual significance and was widely used in the ancient Near Eastern religions (Stern 2001b:20-29).⁶⁶⁷ The continued use of incense as a sacred fragrance is attested by the Early Bronze Age and Iron Age incense altars discovered (Fowler 1992:409-410; King and Stager 2001:157; cf Stern 2001b:20-29).⁶⁶⁸ An Akkadian text lists cane, cedarwood and myrtle as (fragrant) as offerings made to the gods on the cult (or 'pot') stands (Speiser 1969:95) but the only formula accepted for the fragrant incense in the Tabernacle is the one described in Exodus 30:34.⁶⁶⁹

8.5.2 Celebrating the Sabbath

The absence of any mention of Sabbath keeping in the Book of Judges is evident to the reader of the narratives. Nevertheless, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the author/s' worldview and their emphasis on the covenantal lifestyle, it is essential to delve into the discussion surrounding the observance of the Sabbath day which would have been upheld by those faithful to YHWH.

The Sabbath (שַׁבָּת – *šabbat*) and the weekly observance of this the seventh day of the week was another sacred ceremony peculiar to only the Israelites (see also Table 8.1). In addition to Passover, no precursors for the Sabbath day of rest exist in the ancient Near East (Walton 2018). Walton believes that the Passover and Sabbath are unique to the early Israelites. Consequently, the elimination of the Sabbath day by the idolatrous Israelites resulted in the eradication of a crucial aspect of their identity as the sacred and chosen people of YHWH.

However, by keeping the Sabbath, the Israelites memorialized both creation (Ex 20:8-11) and their deliverance from slavery (Dt 5:12-15; King and Stager 2001:353). Sabbath is related to the Hebrew verb *shavat* – 'to cease' or 'to rest' (King and Stager 2001:353; Jacobs 2007:616). Accordingly, the Sabbath was a day of 'rest and feasting' on which no work was to be performed so that all Israelites, slaves, and travelers may be refreshed (Ex 23:8; King and Stager 2001:353; cf Olson 2008:1-30).

Walton (2006:35) mentions that the term '*sabbath* (Akk. *šapattu*, fifteenth)' has been unsuccessfully proposed as an explanation for the Israelite tradition of the Sabbath, 'and allusions to it even as a possibility are less and less frequent. It is YHWH Himself who institutes the Sabbath by his own example (Gn 2:2-3; Davies 2001:28). Walton (2006:35) notes that 'just as YHWH rested'

1.1⁶⁶⁷ Stern (2001b:20-29) mentions the incense altars and incense burners that were used in the Asherah cult.

⁶⁶⁸ The Iron Age incense stands were discovered at Megiddo and Ta'anach (King and Stager 2001:157).

⁶⁶⁹ The ingredients for the incense burned at the Tabernacle: gum resin, onycha, galbanum, pure frankincense, and salt (Ex 30:34). Incense was also used for secular purposes of disguising bad odours, as an insect repellent, and to fumigate funeral pyres (Fowler 1992:409-410). Galbanum was used for medicinal purposes (Muntner 2001:721).

after He had completed the creation so too did divine rest exist among the Mesopotamian deities. In ancient Near Eastern literature a god rested in his temple after the restoration of order (Walton 2018). But this act was not transformed into a religious ceremony as the Sabbath was in early 'Israel.' The Sabbath is celebrated to honour YHWH in accordance with the covenantal stipulations. Exodus 20:10 states that the seventh day is a sabbath to 'YHWH your God' (Houston 2001:81). In the pre-monarchy, commerce would have been prohibited as it was in the times of the prophet Amos (King and Stager 2001:353; see Table 8.1 for the Sabbath offerings made at the Tabernacle).

8.5.3 Rituals

8.5.3.1 Introduction

Vows, blessings, curses and prayers and entreaties (Jdg 5:23, 24; 11:30-31; 17:2; cf 6:7; 10:10, 15) were prominent features of the religious behaviour of the Israelites as depicted in the Book of Judges (see Table 8.4).

Table 8.4: Religious behaviour of the Israelites⁶⁷⁰

Religious Activities in Service of YHWH					
Blessings Deborah Jdg 5:24 blessing Jael Micah's mother Jdg 17:3	Curses Deborah Jdg 5: 23 (the Angel of YHWH cursing Meroz Jdg 5:31 cursing the (Canaanite) enemies of YHWH Jotham son of Gideon Jdg 9:57 Micah's mother Jdg 17:2	Vows Jephthah Jdg 11:30 Nazirite Vow Samson's mother Jdg 13:4, 13cf Jdg 16:17 By the Israelites at Mizpah Jdg 21:1, 5	Entreaties By the Israelites: against Canaanite oppression Jdg 3:9, 15; 6:7; 10:10 Gideon Jdg 6:36 War against Benjamites Jdg 20:1, 18, 23, 26 Wives for Benjamites Jdg 21:2	Prayer and Praise Deborah's song of victory Jdg 5 Manoah Jdg 13:8 Samson's praying for strength Jdg 16:28 The Israelites 'cry out' to YHWH for help Jdg 3:7, 12, 4:3, etcetera	Offerings and Sacrifices Gideon Jdg 6:19 Manoah Jdg 13:19 The Israelite community Jdg 2:5; 20:26; 21:4
Divination War outcomes: Jdg 1:1-2; 6:37-40; 20:9, 18, 23, 27	By the Israelites Jdg 21:18				

In this segment the emphasis will be on discussing vows, blessings, and curses, entreaties and prayer and praise. Entreaties, prayer and praise will be discussed under the same heading.

8.5.4 Vows

Vow making was fairly common amongst the early Israelites (Fretheim 2001:116). Men and women could make vows to YHWH (Nm 30:1-16). Men were obligated to fulfill their pledges. Young women living in their fathers' households were not obligated to keep their pledges if what they vowed was imprudent and thus forbidden by their fathers. Likewise, the 'rash' vow of a married women could be overturned by her husband. However, a judicious vow made by a young woman and a married woman was binding. Similarly, a divorced or widowed woman was obligated to keep a vow (Nm 30:1-9). Certain vows were unlawful: any vow that dedicated the

⁶⁷⁰ My compilation.

proceeds from sacred prostitution was invalid since YHWH was Holy (Lv 27:26; Dt 23:19; De Vaux 1997:466).

Vows were made to a deity for all sorts of things in the ancient Near East. A Hittite-prescribed ritual to cure male impotence includes vow-making (Goetze 1969a:349). In a prayer the Hittite king Mursilis entreats the ‘Hattian Storm-god... and ye Hattian gods’ to lift a plague that transpired in the land, and the king makes vows to the gods (Goetze 1969b:394). Vows were also part of the dedication of a temple to Shamash (Oppenheim 1969a:556).

In the Book of Judges vows are made by Jephthah (Jdg 11:30-31) and the mother of Micah (Jdg 17:2), the mother of Samson (cf Jdg 13:4, 13; Jdg 16:1;7). Although vows were usually an individual act (Fretheim 2001:116) the entire community made a vow that ‘not one of us will give his daughter in marriage to a Benjamite’ (Jdg 21:1, 6; see also Table 8.4). Apart from the mother of Samson, in all the above instances of vow making, the pledges signify the influence of the Canaanite cultic traditions upon the Israelite religious psyche (Wiersbe 2007:457). Following in the tradition of vow-making and a twisted form of Leviticus 27:2, Jephthah made a promise to dedicate ‘whatever comes out of the door of my house’ as a burnt offering if YHWH grants him victory over the Ammonites (Jdg 11:26; Longman and Dillard 2006:141).

In Judges 17:1 the mother of Micah dedicates the eleven hundred shekels of silver, which Micah had stolen from her and then returned to YHWH. The mother took two hundred shekels of the silver to a silversmith and had an image made. The idol was probably made of wood overlaid with silver (Jdg 17:3-4). Walton, Matthews and Chavalas (2000:651) observe that in the ancient Near East idols came in a diversity of shapes and sizes and were usually shaped from wood and covered with beaten out sheets of silver or gold. Idols were mainly human in form and had distinguishing postures, apparel and hairstyles. In the ancient Near East, the god could become the statue and rituals were performed to animate the god’s life in the idol (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:651). Incantations, spells and other magic acts could be conducted on the idol to ‘threaten, bind and compel’ the god. Other rituals associated with the idol were intended to assist or care for the deity (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:651). Regarding the aforesaid, Walton, Matthews and Chavalas note that ‘idols then represented a worldview, a concept of deity that was not consistent with how Yahweh had revealed himself.’

Hamori (2015:197) describes the mother of Micah as a ‘benefactress,’ who is not engaged in divination but she participates in ‘a good deal of religious activity’ and one of these activities involve the instruction to have divinatory articles made for Micah’s house shrine (Jdg 17:3-4). Micah establishes a cult and replaces the appointment of his own son as a priest with a Levite in his sanctuary (Jdg 17:5-12; Murphy 1993:174). According to Murphy (1993:174), Micah and his mother are not condemned for their idolatry. Apparently, ‘they sought to please YHWH, although they erred in their efforts’ (Murphy 1993:174). However, Judges 17:6 does state ‘that everyone did as

they saw fit' and perhaps by these words the author/s of Judges wish to express their disapproval of the idolatrous religious efforts of Micah and his mother.

In the ancient Near East food and non-food articles such as silver, valuable objects, land and 'dependent persons' were gifts promised to gods in return for the fulfilment of a vow (see also 7.5.1.1 e-g; Beckman 2005:349). Similarly, among the Israelites a vow is a pledge to give or to dedicate to YHWH a person or a thing (De Vaux 1997:465). The purpose of the offering vowed 'was to add force to a prayer by making a kind of contract with God': first YHWH granted the favour and thereafter the supplicant fulfilled his or her part by delivering the vowed offering (De Vaux 1997:465). This type of provisional promise was completed once YHWH granted the petitioner, the mother of Samson, for instance, her request for a child (Cartledge 1992:12).

8.5.4.1 The Nazirite vow: the mother of Samson

The Nazirite vow was a 'special vow... of separation to the LORD...' (Nm 6:1-2; cf Jdg 12:3-5; 16:17) undertaken by both men and women (Fretheim 2001:116) in which they set themselves apart from the rest of the community to serve YHWH for a period of thirty days (Cartledge 1992:12; McDowell 2010:142-143; cf Sha 2018:159).

In response to her prayer for a child the Angel of YHWH appears to the Danite mother of Samson with a special announcement (cf Jdg 13:8; cf 7.5.1.1c). It is possible that she had made the same vow as Hannah to dedicate her child to YHWH, if only YHWH would bless her with a baby (cf 1 Sm 1:10). Meyers (2017:7-8) relates that women made vows 'in the context of prayer' and often 'in times of danger or distress – war, journeys, illness and infertility.' Judges 13:3-6 reads:

The angel of the LORD appeared to her and said, "You are barren and childless but you are going to become pregnant and give birth to a son. Now see to it that you drink no wine or other fermented drink and that you do not eat anything unclean. You will become pregnant and have a son whose head is never to be touched by a razor because the boy is to be a Nazirite, dedicated to God from the womb. He will take the lead in delivering Israel from the hands of the Philistines.

Accordingly, both mother and son would be Nazirites, the mother for as long as she was pregnant and Samson until his death in Judges 16:30 (cf Nm 6:1-21). Samson declares himself to be 'a Nazirite dedicated to God from my mother's womb' (Jdg 16:17;). Apparently, the Nazirite vow was a requirement for the mother to fall pregnant and bear a son. The mother was possibly an outcast in her community because of her infertility (Block 2003:72; Sha 2018:92) and sitting or praying in a field (Le Roux 2016:501-536) apparently friendless (cf Jdg 13:9; Brensinger 1999:146). Early Israelite society, parallel to the tradition in the ancient Near East, placed a great emphasis on motherhood and within the prevalence of this cultural domain, an infertile woman had no 'rights' or involvement in the future of her society and thus she had no authority (Brensinger 1999:146; Sha 2018:93). She was, consequently, in addition to being the non-ideal body (Le Roux

2016:501-526) ‘not a (re)productive member of her society’ (Sha 2018:93). Regardless of other necessary contributions she might have made that could have improved her social standing in society, as well as any perspicacity and intelligence comparable to those shown by the wife in Judges 13 (Block 1999:419), society expected her to be a mother first and foremost (Sha 2018:93).

The Angel of YHWH appears to the woman a second time (cf 3.2.2.1b). The miracle performed by the Angel of YHWH at the rock where the Manoah had presented his sacrifice was confirmation of the identity of YHWH (Jdg 13:19-22). The miracle was also a sign of confirmation that soon the woman will have the status of motherhood, an alleviation of her ‘unenviable position’ as a barren woman (Brensinger 1999:146; Sha 2018:93). The Angel’s announcement came with a double blessing; the blessing of a child which and the blessing of the wife’s subsequent an improved social status. The special set of instructions given to the wife would set her apart from the rest of the people in her community demonstrating her divinely appointed status (Jordan 1985:230-231; cf Brettler 2005:46-47; Sha 2018:93). She, the non-preferred body, had found favour with YHWH (Le Roux 2016:501-526) and therefore her people too would accept her. The elevation of her lowly status by God would be visible and recognized by her people and she would finally come into her own right as a woman of status and authority among her people when she gave birth to her son (cf Jdg 14:1-5; Brensinger 1999:146; Sha 2018:93; cf Jordan 1985:231; 99 2011:33).

8.5.4.2 Other features of the Nazirite vow

As stated above, during the period of the vow, Nazirites refrained from drinking wine, or any drink or food made of grapes. They also did not cut their hair or touch a dead body (Nm 6:1-12; Jdg 13:3-5 (see above); cf Jdg 6:17; 1 Sm 1:11; Barton and Blau 1906; cf Marsman 2003: 597; Sha 2018:159; cf 4.3.1.1.biii; 8.5.4.3). Long hair symbolized the Nazirites’ (Samson’s) consecration to YHWH and to whom God was his or her physical and spiritual strength. Uncut hair permitted the divine authority to flow through the Nazirite, act in the individual and represented trust in YHWH (Hunt 2006; cf Damazio 1988:148; Sha 2018:148; cf 7.4.3). Any contact with the dead required the Nazirite to undergo a 7-day-long purification rite. On the 7th day the Nazirite’s hair was shorn off and burnt and sin offerings in the form of pigeons or doves were made together with a year-old lamb as a guilt offering. The Nazirite’s hair was re-consecrated, and the vow repeated. The 7-day period defilement was not regarded as part of the period of consecration (Nm 6:9-12).

Barton and Blau (1906) comment that the requirements for the Nazirite vow are identical to the requirements applicable to the ‘head of the priesthood’ and the priest during religious services in the Tabernacle. Thus Nazirites, in this sense, are considered as priests and priestesses (Am 2:11-12; Barton and Blau 1906; cf Olyan 2000:60-61; Sha 2018:159). It is thus possible that given the lack of a righteous priesthood (cf Jdg 17-19), the woman (the non-ideal body type) may now occupy that role because of her faith in YHWH that declares her to be righteous (cf Gn 15:6). Contrary to ancient Near Eastern texts that solely portray kings, priests, and gods in a positive light

(Brown 1995:12), the biblical writers, including the author/s of Judges, do not attempt to conceal the sinful deeds committed by the leaders and priests of the Israelites (cf 1 Sm 2:12-17). Both the elder and the common individual can be considered righteous, and both should be equally responsible for their wrongdoings.

8.5.4.3 Sacrifices at the fulfilment of the Nazirite vow

At the fulfilment of her vow the mother of Samson would have presented the specific types of offerings to YHWH at the Tabernacle at Shiloh (cf 1 Sm 1:24). Perhaps the author/s of Judges are juxtaposing the fulfilment of this vow with the broken covenant vow of the woman's fellow Israelites. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that the Angel of YHWH will require the mother of Samson to take a vow that can only be fulfilled at the Tabernacle which suggest that the Tabernacle is playing a religious role in the community.

Five categories of offerings were presented at the culmination of a Nazirite vow – the end of a special service to YHWH and separation from the community (Nm 6:1-8):

- an unblemished year-old male lamb as a burnt offering,
- an unblemished year-old female lamb as a sin offering,
- an unblemished ram as a fellowship offering,
- grain offering including a basket of unleavened bread, and
- a drink offering (Nm 6:13-15; Sha 2018:148).

The sacrificial offerings were quite expensive and funded by and affluent individuals in the case of a poor Nazirite (Hunt 2006; cf Sha 2018:148). At the fulfilment of the vow the Nazirite's long hair was cut and dedicated to YHWH as a sacrifice (Barton and Blau 1906; Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:146; Sprinkle 2015). Numbers 6:18 reveals that the consecrated hair was shaven off and placed into the fire made for the fellowship sacrificial offering in order to prevent it becoming 'deconsecrated' (Milgrom 2007:46; cf Sha 2018:148).

A Phoenician inscription dated to the 9th century BC reveals that a person made their consecration of shaven hair in the fulfilment of a vow to the goddess Astarte. Two important cultic objects in sympathetic magic were hair and blood that represented an individual's life force. In the Nazirite vow the tradition of the cutting of hair bears a similarity to the cutting of hair in the ancient Near East, symbolizing re-emergence into the community (Walton and Matthews 2000:182; Cartledge 1992:18-23).

Walton and Matthews (2000:182) note that the requirements for the Nazirite vow may display YHWH's contempt of the popular cults. The injunctions against the eating and drinking of any grape products, cutting of the hair and contact with dead bodies in the Nazirite vow were aspects that symbolized (Canaanite) cultic concepts of fertility, 'sympathetic magic' as well as the cult of

the dead (Walton and Matthews 2000:182; cf Sha 2018:149). These were features that YHWH sought to remove from the early Israelites and in doing so the ordinary people could become God's emissaries representing a discernable indication of His condemnation of the popular cults (Walton and Matthews 2000:182; Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:146; see also 4.3.1.1biii). According to the judges, this was also the message conveyed by the mindset of the text's narrator/s.

8.5.5 Blessings and curses

8.5.5.1 Introduction

Blessings (הַבְּרָכָה – *habbārākōwt*, or 'bārūk' [Dt 28:2]) is understood to be a performative statement, 'the effective activity pronouncing and bringing about good for someone' (Urbrock 1992:755-761).⁶⁷¹ A blessing also functioned as greetings prayers, praise, and worship in early Israelite religious and secular experiences (cf Jdg 5:23-24, 31; 9:57; 17:2-3; 21:18; see Table 8:4; Yardeni 1991:183; Brichto 2007:750; Skulkina 2013:4; cf Sha 2018:165). As a greeting or prayer, a blessing was an act that invoked good for someone or a request to prevent or defuse evil. As an action of praise the supporter, human or divine is thanked and acknowledged for assistances received or anticipated (Urbrock 1992:755-761).

Curses (הַקְּלָלָה – *haqqəlālōwt* [Dt 28:15]) were the exact opposite of blessings and may refer to a declaration of evil to punish or harm someone, 'the actual harm or punishment effected, or an invocation of the same' (Urbrock 1992:755-761). Urbrock comments that it was unconceivable to curse a deity (Lv 24:10-16) even if it was for some harm 'attributed to God's neglect or disfavor'. Cursing YHWH (or a human ruler) was prohibited (Ex 22:27). In the ancient Near East and early Israel cursing the deity was tantamount to blasphemy and constituted a capital offence (Johnson 2020:84). Johnson remarks that cursing YHWH was futile since God was the controlling authority to bring about an effective curse or a blessing.

Ideally, early Israelite lives centred on the covenantal blessings and curses (Dt 28; cf Jdg 2:1-3). Accordingly, blessings and curses are evinced in good fortune or evil (misfortune) that comes upon a person ([or a thing] Brichto 2007:750; Pedersen 1991:437-441) when the covenant is violated. Outside of the covenant, that is in a non-religious setting, blessings and curses could also be invoked on an individual or an object that pleases or displeases the speaker of the blessing or the curse. Urbrock (1992:755-761) consequently distinguishes between magic and religious concepts 'of the efficacy' of a blessing and a curse (see further below). The magical concept attributed intrinsic power to a blessing or a curse statement and once uttered must automatically lead to a

⁶⁷¹ Worship rituals that employed sympathetic magic to induce the divine favour were very prevalent in the ancient Near East. Many blessings were also bestowed upon a deity by the king to invoke the mercy and favour of the god, only after the king had undergone the prescribed purification and sacrificial rites. In the (prayer) praise to the god Amun he is heralded as a healer and a magician and naturally the healing qualities of the god would have been invoked through his character as a magician (Wilson 1969d:369).

result. The religious concept attributed the power and efficacy of a blessing or curse to the cooperative will and action of YHWH or the gods (Urbrock 1992:755-761).

Consequently, the covenantal blessings, *'bārûk,'* as religious concepts and devoid of magic, included health, longevity, many children, affluence, honour and (war) victory. Conversely, covenantal 'maledictions' brought sickness and death, infertility, crop disasters, poverty, defeat, and disgrace throughout the Book of Judges (Pedersen 1991:437-441; Brichto 2007:750). The covenantal blessings were conditional and contingent upon the fidelity of the Israelites towards their God (Nitzan 1994:122; Venema 2010:48-49; cf Sha 2018:56). Blessings and curses were equally as binding as covenants and vows (cf Nm 30:1-16)⁶⁷² since the name of YHWH was invoked as the controlling authority (Yardeni 1991:183; Brichto 2007:750; cf Sha 2018:165). In Judges 5:23 the curse against Meroz and the blessing of Jael were said in the name of YHWH (see 8.5.5.3b). In Judges 9:27 the curse spoken against Abimelech was uttered in the name of the god of the temple where it was invoked (see 8.5.5.3c). In an earlier Egyptian text, the god Geb is named as the authority to curb humans from insulting the name of a deceased king (Wilson 1969a:326).⁶⁷³

A blessing or a curse in the ancient Near East was accompanied by an ensemble of magic rites and objects or charms. The blessing or curse and its magic ensemble was inaugurated by an individual or a nation in the belief that its association with the entreated deity or the supernatural world would either be of value to or harm the receiver/s of the blessing or the curse (Jastrow and Nowack 1906; Sha 2018:165). Guillaume (1943:251) remarks that apotropaic objects (charms) were anticipated to ward off demonic attacks and the sorcerers behind them. The apotropaic objects would have been used with the suitable Babylonian incantations (magic words) and magic rituals to defend against evil (Guillaume 1943:251; cf Fabry 1998:362-364). Egyptian charms against snakes were activated by uttering curse words (Wilson 1969a:326). The weight of a curse was such that not even the gods of Egypt were immune against its powerful magic (Wilson 1969a:327). It has been proposed, that among the Israelites too, the speaking or writing of certain words, the name of YHWH for example, in a blessing or a curse, held definite physical power (Lv 21-23; Hempel 1925:26; Pedersen 1991:437; Skulkina 2013:11; cf Sha 2018:165).

8.5.5.2 *Archaeological evidence*

A 7th century BC silver scroll inscribed with the priestly blessing written in Paleo-Hebrew was discovered at Ketef Hinnom, outside the Old City of ancient Jerusalem (Fant and Reddish 2008:405; Andrews 2011:162; Smoak 2016:12:42; Schreiner 2019:121-122; Feldman 2020:181-182; Heymann [sa]). In later periods, the priestly blessing was adapted to apotropaic purposes (Morris 2017:73) and the silver scrolls found at Ketef Hinnom served as amulets that were worn around the neck (Merrill, Rooker and Grisanti 2011:233; Smoak 2016:17). Evidence for even

⁶⁷² See also Chapter Two in which the Sinai covenant is discussed.

⁶⁷³ The cited text is in the Sakkara Pyramid of the deceased Pharaoh Unis (25th century BC) (Wilson 1969a:326).

earlier Hebrew writing that dates to the 10th century is the Gezer Calendar and the 9th century *Mesha Inscription* (Andrews 2019:86-85; 2020:198). A *pottery shard*, unearthed at Khirbet Qeiyafa revealed the oldest Hebrew inscription discovered (Andrews 2011:153-168; Andrews 2019:86; Arnold 2014:309; Chatfield 2015:472-473). The Khirbet Qeiyafa pottery shard is dated to the 10th century BC (Becking 2010:24-25; 2021: 28-29; Ertl 2020:156).⁶⁷⁴

Recently, it has been proposed that ‘the oldest recorded alphabet may be Hebrew’ (Petrovich 2020; see also ABR Staff 2022).⁶⁷⁵ If the findings of Petrovich are accurate, it is possible that the early Israelites were able to record their religious laws and blessings in writing (see below in this segment). The priestly blessing may have been a litany that formed part of the written texts of the early Israelite religion (cf Jos 8:32, 34-35). Judges 8:14 indicates that a tradition of literacy existed in the pre-monarchy (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:257; Richelle 2022:342; cf Pitkänen 2010:60; Doering 2012:204-205; Millgram 2018:200-201). That Gideon could read the writing of the young man of Sukkoth is evident in his recognition of the words as the names of the officials of Sukkoth (Jdg 8:14). Apparently, it was written on something other than a piece of pottery. A divine blessing of peace would have been a most desirable benediction to have in writing even if one could not read it and only understood what the writing was. All the same it would have been available to all in the same way that the blessing was pronounced over the entire assembly.

The remarkable discovery of a *curse tablet* dated to the Late Bronze Age, found on Mount Ebal in 2022 has sparked controversy.⁶⁷⁶ If authentic it may validate the idea by Hempel (1925:26); Pederesen (1991:437); Skulkina (2013:11) that curses (and blessings) were autonomous forces that were unleashed by the power of the spoken word (see Figures 8.10 and 8.11). Consequently, the beneficial or destructive entities of blessings and curses were employed in prayers when people were powerless to bring about a benediction or a malediction in their own strength and abilities (Brichto 2007:751). The *curse tablet* from Mount Ebal as reported by the ABR researchers in proto-alphabetic script reads:

Cursed, cursed, cursed – cursed by the God YHW.
You will die cursed.
Cursed you will surely die.

⁶⁷⁴ University of Haifa 2010. Most Ancient Hebrew Biblical Inscription Deciphered.

⁶⁷⁵ Wilson-Wright (2017:1-12) presents an analysis and refutation of Petrovich’s assertions. Hassler (2017:829-831) cites, the German scholar, Hubert Grimme, as presenting the same theory in the 1920’s. If the theory proposed by Petrovich is verified, certain long-held assumptions about the veracity of early Israelite history in the Book of Judges need to be re-evaluated (see Millgram 2020:205-206).

⁶⁷⁶ The curse tablet, or defixio, is a 2 cm x 2 cm folded lead curse tablet that was found by Dr. Scot Stripling in Joshua’s altar on Mt Ebal (ABR Staff 2022. The Mount Ebal Curse Tablet, Featuring Dr. Scot Stripling on CenterPoint). The TOI (2022) reports that the curse tablet has not been uncovered in an excavated stratified context and has yet to be published in a peer review journal (TOI 2022. Podcast: Does a tiny ‘curse tablet’ from Mt. Ebal date to the Israelite Settlement?). However, ABR reports that an academic peer reviewed article will be published later in 2022. (ABR Staff 2022. ABR Researchers Discover the Oldest Known Proto-Hebrew Inscription Ever Found).

Cursed by YHW – cursed, cursed, cursed⁶⁷⁷

The inscription is in the proto-alphabetic script and consists of 40 letters, and is hundreds of years older than any of the known Hebrew inscriptions.⁶⁷⁸

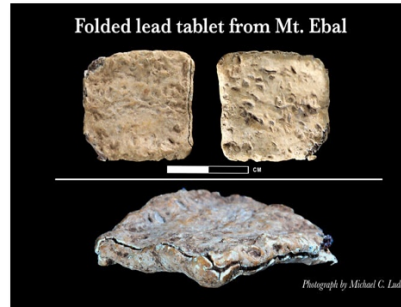


Figure 8.10 The Curse Tablet from Mt Ebal (Luddeni 2022)

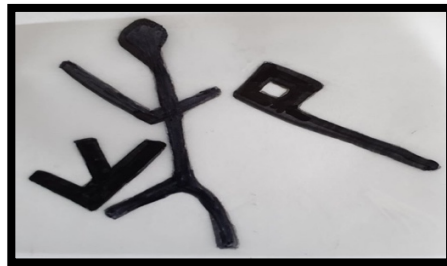


Figure 8.11 Divine Name of 'YHW' (Galil 2022)

Recently, a renowned archaeologist has debunked the ‘controversial’ Mount Ebal *curse tablet* as a mere ‘common fishing weight’ (Steinmeyer 2023). However, the debate continues.

Apotropaic objects from Ketef Hinnom, the silver scroll, with the priestly blessing inscribed on it, for example, could be a cultic tradition copied from previous eras (perhaps a curse tablet like the one from Mt Ebal?). A parallel is presented by the fourth to seventh century AD amulets and inscriptions like the ones from Ketef Hinnom that were found in many places in Israel, Syria, and Asia Minor (Yardeni 1991:184; cf 2.4.1.1b) and obviously ritual objects copied from previous time periods.

An earlier parallel curse from Mesopotamia invoked in the name of the god Shamash states: I will curse thee with a great curse, With great speed let my curses attack thee (Speiser 1969:86). Both the texts demonstrate the conviction that a curse (or a blessing) originated from the ‘disposition and the ability’ of YHWH or the ancient Near Eastern gods to bestow favour on or impede the ‘good life’ (Urbrock 1992:755-761). Urbrock mentions that this was a belief that was of vital

⁶⁷⁷ In the ABR article Gershon Galil recognizes the literary structure of the inscription as chiasmic parallelism (ABR Staff 2022. The Mount Ebal Curse Tablet, Featuring Dr Scot Stripling on CenterPoint).

⁶⁷⁸ ABR Staff 2022. ABR Researchers Discover the Oldest Known Proto-Hebrew Inscription Ever Found.

importance to human wellbeing. Among the early Israelites and Canaanites, a variety of gestures and rituals may have accompanied the utterance of a blessing; the laying on of hands or the ceremonial sharing of food (Urbrock 1992:755-761). It is also possible that similar gestures and rituals accompanied the pronouncement of a curse.⁶⁷⁹

8.5.5.3 *Models of blessings and curses in Judges*

As indicated above, the Israelites and ancient Near Eastern nations attributed the spoken word (*dābār*) with an unusual power (Urbrock 1992:755-761). Once uttered the word became an independent force that continued to produce an effect whether or not the situation had changed, or the speaker had a change of mind (Urbrock 1992:755-761; see above; cf Frymer-Kensky 1984:24-25; Vanhoozer 2005:851-854).⁶⁸⁰ However, Judges 17:1-3 (cf 1 Sm 14:24-30, 36-40) indicate that countermeasures could be taken to reverse a curse (Urbrock 1992:755-761). After she had uttered the curse, the mother of Micah reversed it by blessing her son and dedicating the stolen silver to the LORD (Jdg 17:2-3).

a. The ‘curses’ of the Angel of YHWH – Judges 2:1-3 and 10:13-14

In the Old Testament the supreme source of power is YHWH (Urbrock 1992:755-761). In the Book of Judges, the supremacy of YHWH’s authority is demonstrated in the pronouncements of (a predictive) curse in Judges 2:1-3 when YHWH hands the Israelites over to the rule and artifices of the Canaanite gods. The Angel of YHWH’s prophetic message might also be thought of as a (‘lenient’) prognostic curse (Jdg 2:1-3). As punishment for their disloyalty towards YHWH and their disobedience towards their covenant, the Israelites would suffer continuous troubles at the hands of the Canaanites and their gods (Jdg 2:3).

The message in Judges 10:13-14 possibly was either delivered by the Angel of YHWH or a prophet of YHWH (cf Jdg 6:8-10) and might resemble a curse. The Israelites had once again taken to serving the gods of the various nations mentioned in the narrative. YHWH thus hands them over to the tyranny of the Philistines and the Ammonites (Jdg 10:6-8). When the Israelites cry out to the LORD for divine assistance and rescue, He answered them that since the Israelites had forsaken Him, they should cry out to the gods whom they have served to save them. Then the Israelites got rid of their foreign gods and served the LORD (Jdg 10:10, 15-16). YHWH had hardened His heart when they first cried out to Him (Jdg 10:13). ‘... you have forsaken me and served other gods, so

⁶⁷⁹ Numbers 5:11-31 presents a strange account of an apparent magic ceremony to ascertain a wife’s fidelity (Frymer-Kensky 1984:11-26). The text accentuates the ancient tradition that the spoken words of a blessing and curse were by themselves conduits of magic power and extant in their own right (Frymer-Kensky 1984:24-25; Vanhoozer 2005:851-854; cf Sha 2018:167).

⁶⁸⁰ Urbrock (1992:755-761) mentions that ‘the supposed independent power of words in the Bible’ has been doubted and holds the view that blessings and curses were not ‘automatic’ and ‘irrevocable.’ A blessing, or a curse, therefore, could be overturned by an authoritative person such as a rash vow made by woman could be negated by a father or a husband (cf Nm 30:1-16).

I will no longer save you'. However, when they start serving Him again, YHWH relents and raises up Jephthah to deliver the Israelites. Despite the belief that a curse once spoken was irrevocable (see 7.5.3.2a), YHWH demonstrates in Judges 10 that this is not the case and that He in His sovereignty can proclaim (Jdg 2:3) or dissolve a curse (Jdg 10:16). This does not imply that YHWH is fickle like the ancient Near Eastern gods but it does illustrate YHWH's sovereign authority to act according to an inherent feature of His nature: compassion.

b. The curse of Meroz and the blessing of Jael

A blessing and curse are also announced by the prophetess Deborah in Judges 5, in which narrative the juxtaposition of blessing and curse function as a literary device (Urbrock 1992:755-761). In Judges 5:23, the prophetess mentions that the inhabitants of Meroz who did not join the military campaign against Sisera have been cursed by the Angel of YHWH (Exum 1996:233). The curse against Meroz resembles a formal curse declaration in a treaty document (Webb 2012). Webb, however, asserts that it is probably a poetic variation of the standard prophetic and legal forms of dialogue. An exact judgement was not declared against Meroz; therefore Webb (2012) believes it is more of a 'strong disapproval than a curse' – and in that context constituted suitable punishment rather than total annihilation (cf Sha 2018:168). However, it has been suggested that the curse implies the extermination of Meroz (Douglas and Tenney 2011). Accordingly, the inhabitants of Meroz were probably a non-Israelite tribe since the extermination of an Israelite tribe would have been anathema; that is a curse in itself. Judges 21 demonstrates the desperate efforts of the Israelites to preserve the Benjamite tribe of whom all the men were killed in the war narrated in Judges 20 (Jdg 20:1-46; 21:2, 6).⁶⁸¹

The blessing of Jael by Deborah would have been spoken in the name of YHWH (Jdg 5:23-24) since YHWH was believed to be the controlling authority. In contrast to the unwillingness of Meroz to join the war, a non-Israelite woman is declared to be praiseworthy and 'most blessed of all women' (Streete 1997:60). In Judges 5:24, Deborah blesses Jael for slaying Sisera. Deborah blesses Jael for displaying loyalty and courage towards the Israelites, their covenant and YHWH while the absent tribes and Meroz treacherously abandoned their part in the covenant. Jael is celebrated for her allegiance to YHWH while Meroz is cursed for non-compliance and infidelity (Cundall and Morris 2011).

c. The curse of the people in 'the temple of their god'

In Judges 9:27 the curse spoken against Abimelech was pronounced in the name of the temple's ('the temple of their god') patron deity. Antagonized by Abimelech's rule over Shechem, the

⁶⁸¹ The identity of the inhabitants of Meroz and the location of Meroz are unknown (Exum 1996:233; Webb 2012). They may have been an Israelite tribe (Cundall and Morris 2011). Since the destruction of Meroz is implied in the curse, Douglas and Tenney (2011) state that the inhabitants of Meroz were probably Canaanites allied to the Israelites.

inhabitants of Shechem ‘acted treacherously’ against Abimelech (Jdg 9:22). The narrative in Judges 9 indicates that the revolt of the Shechemites is brought about by YHWH as an act of judgment against Abimelech’s slaying of his seventy brothers (Jdg 9:22, 9:5; see also Amit 2004:531). The seventy shekels that was paid out by the temple treasury in Judges 9:4 in order for Abimelech to hire scoundrels to help him murder his brothers, is a sign of how ‘cheaply’ Abimelech’s brothers were esteemed ‘(compare a fifty-shekel-per-male ransom price in Lev 23:7)’ (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:258). Ancient Near Eastern temples often had large treasuries (1 Ki 7:51; Amit 2004:530), large enough to afford hiring the scoundrels that provide Abimelech with an army. Judges 9:27 describes the citizens of Shechem holding a festival in ‘the temple of their god’ after the grape harvest. Under the leadership of Gaal, who might have been part of a group of mercenaries (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:259), the citizens plotted against Abimelech (see also above). Together they cursed Abimelech and given that the act took place within a sanctuary of possibly the god Baal-*berith*, the curse could have been a formalized rite and most likely performed by a priest in ‘the temple of their god.’

It was believed that the effectiveness of the curse rested upon the temperament and ability of the god to thwart the ‘good life’ (Urbrock 1992:755-761); that is, the rule of Abimelech. The power of the curse would have been augmented or actuated by magic rites and incantations (Keener and Walton 2016:937; 2019:939). Longman and Enns (2008:314) observe that to some extent, imprecation or cursing was ‘a primary way ancient societies policed themselves’ and ‘acted as a constraint, corrective, and stimulant to better deeds.’ Apparently, the cursing of Abimelech (Jdg 9:27) was accompanied by the eating of a ritual meal. Sacrifices and meals were part of the ‘body of rites and rituals’ that seemingly are related to the ratification of treaties in the ancient Near East (Quick 2018:183). Abimelech, undeterred by the curse against him, fought against Gaal and the citizens of Shechem (Jdg 9:39-41) and was victorious. However, he would die when a woman dropped a millstone on his head from the roof of the tower of Thebez where she and the people of the town of Thebez had fled from Abimelech (Jdg 9:50-53). The absence of genuine faith in YHWH and adherence to His covenant is portrayed in this narrative as the ultimate futility of human existence. The author/s of Judges ascribe the strife of the Shechemites, which was initiated by Abimelech, as a vignette of the Israelites’ intermingling with the Canaanites in all other cities where similar discord may be unfolding (cf Jdg 1:19-36). The author/s reveal that the Israelites will not find peace unless they wholeheartedly devote themselves to YHWH and faithfully follow His covenant.

d. The curse and blessing of the mother of Micah

The Israelites’ faithfulness to YHWH was a requirement for the covenantal blessings to be granted (see 7.4.3.2) (Nitzan 1994:122; Venema 2010:48-49). It was therefore imprudent for the mother of Micah to make a vow (to YHWH) in which she dedicated an offering of silver to be made into an idolatrous image (Jdg 17:3). It is also ironic that by her actions the mother hoped to reverse the

curse she had previously uttered against her son (Jdg 17:1-3) and in doing so, whether aware or unaware of it, the covenantal curses would befall on herself for her idolatry (cf Dt 28:15). As the matriarch of a household the mother had commensurate authority. The quantity of silver – eleven hundred shekels – stolen indicates that the mother of Micah was a wealthy woman and had in addition the authority and status that goes with substantial wealth and it was believed that the curse of a figure of authority was more effective (cf Jdg 5:28-30).

Earlier the mother had cursed the person who had stolen her eleven hundred shekels of silver (Jdg 17:1). The mother might have believed, in accordance with the traditions of the times, that she had an enemy who performed dark magic against her (Ps 59:2, 5; 141:4), ergo the disappearance of her money. The curses of this evil and dark power had to be thwarted with her own curses of even greater power. She, subsequently, probably prayed to YHWH whose ‘cursing power’ was greater as well as speaking the proper ‘curse formulae’ to legitimize the curse (Smith 1997:188; cf Sha 2018:167). His apprehension regarding the potency of the curse may explain why Micah returned the silver to his mother.

Upon discovering that the thief was Micah, her own son, the horrified mother hastily tried to undo the curse by blessing her son as she understood the gravity of the matter since a curse was considered to be as valid as a covenant (Jdg 17:2). She quickly revokes the curse, as stated before, with a blessing as it was also believed that a blessing invalidated a curse (Jdg 17:2; Jastrow and Nowack 1906; Yardeni 1991:183-184; cf Sha 2018:166). Combining the aforesaid beliefs with the magic concept of a blessing, the mother of Micah counterbalances her curse by the act of a blessing and by dedicating her silver to YHWH.

It was believed that the blessings and curses pronounced by holy and morally superior women and men, such as priests and prophets (Deborah blessing Jael and cursing the non-participating tribes and the enemy in Judges 5, for example), and heads of households (for instance, the mother of Micah) believed to be in close fellowship with God, were superior and particularly effective (Jastrow and Nowack 1906; Smith 1997:189). It is probable that Micah’s mother engaged in cultic rituals that included the use of amulets and incantations similar to the silver scrolls from Ketef Hinnom (Yardeni 1991:184; see Nm 5:23).⁶⁸² Micah probably would have asked for it if his mother had not freely blessed him after cursing him (Sha 2018:167). In a reverse prayer, another cultic ritual requiring the assistance of Deity ‘in symbolic actions, the mother blessed her son (Smith 1997:188-189; Sha 2018:167).

⁶⁸² The apotropaic artifacts from Ketef Hinnom were in all probability copies of older cultic practices. According to Yardeni (Yardeni 1991:184), amulets and inscriptions similar to those from Ketef Hinnom, ranging from the fourth to the seventh century AD, were discovered in several locations in Palestine, Syria, and Asia Minor and were undoubtedly ceremonial artifacts handed down from earlier generations.

It is intriguing to contemplate the thoughts of the author/s regarding the audacious act of Micah's mother, who dared to pronounce both a curse and a blessing in the name of the LORD (Jdg 17:2-3). Furthermore, she went on to present a votive offering of her silver to the LORD for her son, to create an image. Similar to the Canaanites, Micah's mother attempts to manipulate YHWH by offering a 'ritual bribe,' in the hope that the LORD will be persuaded to turn her curse into a blessing. The author/s demonstrate through this narrative the extent to which the household of Micah has embraced syncretism, and potentially reflected the syncretism and idolatry in the broader society (cf Jdg 18:30-31). The fact that Micah believes that the LORD will 'be good to him' now that the Levite has become his priest is indicative of the Israelites trying to live their lives and profess their faith in YHWH on their own terms (cf Jdg 17:6). According to the perspective of the author/s of Judges, this conviction can only lead to catastrophe for Micah and his fellow Israelites. Ultimately, Micah will be deprived of his valuable idols and the Levite as a priest. In his own words, he expresses his profound despair by asking, 'what else do I have?' In essence, he has lost everything because he lacks a devoted faith in YHWH. The author/s of Judges consistently emphasize that having an unwavering belief in YHWH is all that Micah and the Israelites truly need to experience a meaningful and prosperous existence.

e. The curse in Judges 21:8

All good and evil were under YHWH's authority. Since God could obstruct all intentions a blessing or a curse could not become effective without His approval. Thus, blessings and curses are 'neither automatic nor irrevocable' among the Israelites (Urbrock 1992:755-761). Blessings and curses are effective only when spoken by an authoritative figure or an approved person such as a prophet, priest or an elder (cf Jdg 10:13-14; 21:1, 5) at the suitable place and time together with the proper gestures and rituals (Urbrock 1992:755-761; Smith 1997:189).

In Judges 21:1 the Israelites had made an 'unwise' oath at Mizpah (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:575): 'cursed be anyone who gives his daughter in marriage to the Benjamites' (Jdg 21:18). Walton, Matthews and Chavalas (2000:275-276) relate that the Israelites had waged a war of utter destruction in their zeal to get revenge on the Benjamites. By pledging not to intermarry with any of the survivors, they had 'sealed the fate of their future existence' (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:275-276). The vow might have also served as a safety precaution in case there were any more clashes with the Benjamites (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:275-276). The destruction was so extensive, nevertheless, that the six hundred survivors were left without wives or other women to marry. The Israelites had to find an alternative source of brides for the Benjamites since they could not break their vow without incurring the wrath of YHWH (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:275-276).

8.5.6 Entreaties, prayers and praise

Blessings and curses functioned as types of prayers and worship upon which people built their daily lives (Yardeni 1991:183; Brichto 2007:750; Skulkina 2013:4; Sha 2018:166). As previously discussed burnt offerings as well as other offerings served as a way to approach YHWH with an entreaty for a variety of situations in life including military victory (cf Jdg 20:26; 11:30), clemency and absolution of sin (cf Jdg 2:4-5), 'purification' (Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:210) as well as divine guidance and divining the will of YHWH (Jdg 1:1-2; 20:27-28). As indicated before, women (and men) frequently took vows 'in the milieu of prayer and in times of peril or trouble such as during war' (as stated before), travel, illness, and infertility (Jdg 13:3) (Meyers 2017:7-8). As indicated before, the prayers and entreaties of men and women and were means to connect with YHWH (Sha 2018:166). These religious acts demonstrate the loyalty and faith of the supplicant in YHWH's promise of blessings in accordance with their covenant (Dt 28:1-14). As previously mentioned, Samson did not abrogate his faith in YHWH despite his love for a non-Israelite woman (Jdg 14-16). He was betrayed by Delilah, blinded and placed into captivity by the Philistines (Jdg 16:18-21) and made a fool of in front of a crowd of Philistines (Jdg 16:23-25). He died after uttering a prayer to YHWH, entreating the LORD to grant him one last victory over the Philistines.

Women's religious pursuits at the entrance of the Tabernacle, for example, their prayers, intercessions, offerings and vows, which influenced the women who came after them, played an important part in the religious lives of the early Israelites (cf Jdg 4:4; 13:3-5, 19-24; Lockyer 1967:20; Sha 2016:153). As mentioned above, infertile women such as the wife of Manoah in Judges 13 would have prayed to YHWH for a child. Marsman (2003:224) notes a married woman desiring a child could pray to YHWH and make a vow. Nakhai (2011:356) states that in a (syncretic) woman's household, religion included prayers and offerings, the use of magic objects and rituals (amulets, herbs such as mandrakes [Sha 2018:288] and divination) as well as magic healing and medical assistance (cf Sha 2018:252). A woman who was part of a syncretic household cult, which was probably a synthesis of the Yahwistic religion and the Asherah cult (cf Jdg 17:1-5), could pray to Asherah (cf Jdg 2:13; 10:6) and make offerings of food and other gifts to her in order to induce the goddess to approve the petitioner's plea (Sha 2018:251). However, the author/s of Judges demonstrate that it was YHWH, who granted the wife of Manoah her wish for a child, who was ultimately in control of a woman's fertility (Jdg 13:3-5-25).

Praise was another religious act that was a means of connecting with YHWH and usually followed after a prayer was answered successfully. In Judges 5:1-31, for instance, Deborah praises YHWH for as the military victory over the Canaanites (Jdg 5:1-31; see Table 8.4). Hannah praises YHWH in a prayer of thanksgiving for her son Samuel (1 Sm 2:1-10). Parallels of prayers and praising a deity can be found in the ancient Near East as well. In a Sumerian prayer entitled 'Man and his God' a man's prayer and entreaties are accepted by his god which leads to the praise of the god (Kramer 1969e:589). Praising YHWH in a prayer extolled the divine nature, His creative power

and sovereignty to rule, to bring about victory over the enemy, and to heed and assist the weak and afflicted (1 Sm 2:1-10; Longman and Gundry 2008:599).

8.7 CONCLUSION

The author/s of the Book of Judges offer limited details regarding the cyclical periods of covenant restoration that followed a cycle of idolatry, oppression, and deliverance through warfare. This chapter attempted to gain a more profound comprehension of the author/s' worldview and their unwavering endorsement of the covenantal way of life by endeavoring to analyze the religious practices and beliefs of the people during a time of peaceful covenantal renewal. This analysis was accomplished through discussions on the Yahwistic festivals, the priesthood, and the rituals of the people.

The festivals of YHWH held significant sacred symbolism, as they served as a commemoration of the annual provision of abundance of the one true God who blessed His people and rewarded them for their devotion to their God and covenant. YHWH's sacred festivals were deeply spiritual occasions of holy thanksgiving and the enjoyment of YHWH's beneficence which were devoid of the carnality and over-indulgences of the Canaanites. In the mindset informing the author/s of Judges only by worshipping YHWH could the Israelites continuously be assured of His bounty. The author/s show the consequence of Israelite idolatry throughout the text. It becomes evident that the Yahwistic festivals starkly contrasted with the Canaanite festivals, which were characterized by licentious and hedonistic practices that were often detrimental to individuals due to their impious attitudes according to the biblical worldview.

The Israelite religion was distinct from the Canaanite cults due to its observance of unique ceremonial practices such as the Day of Atonement and Sabbath keeping. These rituals served as a clear indication that the Israelites were the chosen people of YHWH and a holy nation. However, to the author/s of Judges, the abandonment of these festivals and celebrations during a period of idolatry was seen as a complete disgrace. Not only did the Israelites lose their identity as YHWH's people, but they also became a source of shame in the eyes of both other nations and their own God. Idolatry was akin to proclaiming a sentence of death over them. Thus, the author/s are intent on restoring the covenant for only then could the Israelites restore their lives and regain the favour of YHWH

Together the priesthood, offerings and sacrifices, religious activities such as vows, blessings, and curses of the unadulterated followers of YHWH described in this chapter, presented a supernatural mindset that assist in illuminating the worldview of the author/s of Judges. The office of priesthood and religious activities of the Israelites showcased the non-Israelite nations with the most proper form of worship – the veneration of the One, True God, YHWH through the proper rituals that He had instituted through the Sinai covenant. The aforesaid is one of the primary themes

characterising the worldview of the author/s of Judges as presented in their persistent and fervent pursuit of the covenant which they constantly advocate for in the text.

CHAPTER NINE

CONCLUSION

9.1 THE STUDY

The mindset informing the author/s of the Book of Judges is covenantal and monotheistic which is reflected throughout the chapters and associated themes of this study.

Archaeological evidence suggests that the Israelites settled in the Canaanite highlands around the twelfth century BC. It was to be a people's presence that brought about a profound cultural and cultic transformation of a land by means of a unique religion, lifestyle and associated mindset. Monotheism endorsed a definite worldview from which emerged a distinct approach to worship and the adherence to a specific lifestyle, the effects of which remain unparalleled and which are still profoundly experienced in the modern era.

In light of the aforesaid, the text of Judges contains a deeply entrenched worldview that, while not immediately evident, endorses monotheistic worship by means of the Israelites' strict obedience to the Sinaitic Covenant. The author/s of Judges emphasize the significance of covenant and monotheistic worship of YHWH since these elements serve as emblems of the self-revelation of the One True God to His people and YHWH's desire to have a reciprocal relationship of devotion and faithfulness with the Israelites.

Monotheism via the covenantal lifestyle was ideally expected to reflect the Israelites' lives in Judges. However, the author/s of Judges reflect a tribal society that is characterized by dysfunction and idolatry. As a result, the text takes on a highly polemic, confrontational and non-conformist approach in its critique of the Israelites' idolatry and anti-covenantal lifestyle. Subsequently, cyclical idolatry, judgement, oppression, deliverance and covenantal restoration are themes that serve to permeate the narratives of Judges. It is particularly the lens of the aforesaid motifs that the worldview of the author/s of Judges, wherein they advocate covenant and monotheism, is emphasized.

Given the foregoing, the mindset conveyed by the author/s of Judges is accompanied by a profound and spiritual belief system and lifestyle. This study was solely focused on examining and elucidating that mindset by means of this belief system and way of life; that is the lived experiences of the Israelites as depicted in the Book of Judges.

The following objectives formed the core of this study: an analysis of the religious mindset of the author/s of the Book of Judges by means of covenant-making, monotheism, the recreation of sacred space in Canaan and the establishments of Tabernacle and Shiloh as the primary sacred site of the Israelites, divine communication and associated lifestyle, the idolatry of the early Israelites and a subsequent anti-covenantal effect, theophany in Judges, inequality, the Israelite religious

festival, the priesthood as well as the worship of the ordinary people (see below). The aforementioned themes served to illumine the practices of the early Israelites that in turn and as indicated above fashioned the religious mindset informing the author/s of Judges.

By the presenting the mindset informing the author/s of Judges, this study intends to assist in closing the gap between academic indifference and the modern rationalistic worldview that strongly perceives of the religious mindset presented in the Book of Judges as illusory (see Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:211; see also 1.9). This study intends to achieve a more holistic or comprehensive understanding of the early Israelites – the realism and validity of their lives and their legitimate place alongside other nations in this world. The mindset of the author/s of Judges, based upon their faith in YHWH and His sacred covenant that form the basis for a superior moral framework, social, religious and legal system that has had a lasting impact on contemporary Western society.

In light of the aforesaid it is an enduring mindset informing the author/s of Judges that defiantly declares the mystery of the Israelites does not lie in their origins nor their emergence on the highlands of Canaan but in the continuation and expansion of the Israelite people and their culture, and system of beliefs throughout the historical ages. It is hoped that this study will open the door to more investigation of this undeniably compelling and fascinating mindset that informs the author/s and world of the people in the Book of Judges.

9.2 THE METHODOLOGY

The Hebrew Bible and, specifically, the Book of Judges, continue to be the key textual sources for information on the pre-monarchical era. The Book of Judges is thus, well-suited for an analysis of the religious mindset of the Israelites since it is a text that lends itself to keeping a record of both the mystical and secular aspects attributed to this worldview. Embedded in the text of Judges is the author/s strong emphasis on covenant preservation and the exclusive worship of YHWH in an era of overt Israelite idolatry. Through the motif of redemption the author/s are constantly endeavoring to reinstate a covenant made with YHWH in the past. It is believed that this covenant refers to the Sinaitic Covenant which was essentially an extension of the Abrahamic Covenant.

A multidisciplinary qualitative approach was utilized to further illumine the religious mindset and practices in the Book of Judges, while simultaneously providing supporting for the authenticity of these religious perspectives. The *historical-critical method* applied to the biblical texts involved in this study was used to reveal the world and people behind the narratives in the Book of Judges (see Soulen and Soulen 2011:89). Textual analysis of both Judges along with the rest of the Old Testament as well as ancient Near Eastern texts have provided valuable insight into a world that is contextually far removed from modern society. This textual analysis has greatly contributed to

the understanding the mindset informing the author/s of the Book of Judges and the period depicted in the text to the best extent possible.

A *biblical archaeological method* was employed to provide evidence for the realism of the numinous mindset of the author/s of Judges as it allowed to look for markers of this worldview in the material culture of ancient Israel, for example, in the religious sites of the Israelites. Furthermore, this method which includes all avenues of evidence with a significant emphasis on the biblical text (Bunimovitz and Faust 2014:50) allowed this study to further shed light on the author/s of Judges' mindset and produce a more complete understanding of this specific worldview. To further clarify the distinct religious mindset of the early Israelites, ancient Near Eastern comparative studies were utilized to grant insight into the world of the Israelites in Judges. The *comparative studies approach* allowed for parallel ancient Near Eastern practices and traditions to illuminate Israelite religious behaviour and mindset that may not be that evident in Judges and therefore served to provide a lens for the polemical nature of the biblical text, particularly in the Book of Judges. A *theological approach* provided the impetus for the history making endeavours of the early Israelites and the manner in which the author/s of Judges approach the events that they describe in the narratives of the book. In addition, Zevit (2002:75) and Lapidoth's (2002:22) descriptions of sacred places have been applied to Shiloh and the Tabernacle that the site housed (see Chapter Four) which assisted in the understanding of the sacred symbolism attached to Shiloh and the Tabernacle.

9.3 SACRED PLEDGES AND LIFESTYLES

The mindset informing the author/s of Judges (Jdg 2:1-2; 3:7, 12:4:1; 5:4; 6:1;10:6) can be attributed to a theological influence derived from the Book of Deuteronomy (cf Dt 7:2, 9; 8:18; 31:16-17; 32:15; 33:2) and previous texts. The aforesaid texts, collectively, pertain to the worship of YHWH above all other gods, the establishment of covenants and the experience of a relationship with YHWH built upon the aforesaid premises.

The application of a *theological approach* to the text of the Book of Judges provides valuable insights into the function of the author/s' religious system as a coherent worldview and which impacted upon the religious and cultural phenomena that they describe in the text (see also Hedges 2013:40-42).

The author/s of Judges thus impart an intense covenantal mindset which one will discover is deeply embedded in the text of Judges. It is the author/s' religious beliefs in a unique Deity, His laws and requirements for life (2.2.4-2.2.5) that grant their worldview its inherent value and significance and which, ironically, is persistently portrayed through the lens of periodic idolatry. It is a worldview that advocates, via the themes of cyclical idolatry and oppression, for exclusive devotion to YHWH and obedience to His covenant in order that it may go well with the Israelites (cf Jdg 2:1-3). The abovementioned will thus explain the author/s preoccupation with the themes of

judgement, redemption and covenant renewal and warfare as a tool of deliverance throughout the text of Judges (cf Jdg 2:1-5; 2:10-19; 3; 4; 6:8-10, 6:11-20, 34-40; 7; 10:10-16; 13:3-20).

The covenantal relationship was thus perceived to be the most appropriate and divinely ordained way of life that the author/s would have held to be greater than that of the Canaanite culture and cults (cf 2.2.5.8) and which accounts for the author/s of Judges' consistent promotion of the covenant laying embedded in texts such as Judges 2:1-5; 6:8-10; 10:10-16. The presence of two contrasting covenants, namely the covenant of YHWH and the treaties established with the people of Canaan, is effectively demonstrated in these texts, specifically Judges 2:1-3.

The aforesaid narratives are also indicative of a chronological sequence of covenant making preceding the Israelites' settlement in Canaan (cf Jdg 2:1-2; 6:13). A *theological methodology* reveals that the concept of covenant-making can be traced back to the relationship between YHWH and humanity as depicted in the narrative of the Garden of Eden and exemplified in the instructions given in Genesis 2:15-16 which may be considered as YHWH's blueprint for human life. It was YHWH's intention for people to have a relationship with Him, to comprehend that He is the Only True God, and to find meaning and purpose in life through this understanding. It has been asserted that the relationship between YHWH and humanity was covenantal from the beginning, a relationship that is broken when Adam and Eve disobey the instructions given in Genesis 2:15-16 (see 2.2.3.1a-b).

Following the fall, YHWH initiates a comprehensive plan of redemption. Therefore, according to YHWH's plan, a new religion and culture – a new order of things – were to be instated in Canaan through a covenant (cf 2.2.4-2.2.5) that would uncover the spiritual curtain of deception that 'enfolds' all nations (cf Is 25:7) and which drives them to idolatry (Dt 32:15-18). To initiate His plan of redemption via covenant, YHWH establishes the Abrahamic Covenant (Gn 12:7; 15; 17; see 2.2.5-2.2.5.3) which ultimately reaches its culmination in the Sinaitic Covenant (Ex 19-20; see 2.2.6-2.2.6.4). The Abrahamic Covenant is probably alluded to in Judges 2:1 (Lv 26:44; cf Dt 7:9) while the author/s' word: 'I brought you up out of Egypt' may be reminder of the later event of the Sinaitic Covenant. Nevertheless, Judges 2:1 shows the significance of the covenant mentioned in the narrative. It intimates that the Israelites could have enjoyed continued peace, abundance and success in the land (see above). The idolatrous Israelites were unfortunately and tragically unable to comprehend that the only things needed to be met were to fulfil the terms of the covenant, obey YHWH's laws and instructions, and have complete devotion to YHWH (see also above). This narrative sets the stage for the ensuing cyclical pattern of idolatry, redemption, peace and covenant renewal.

What sets the Abrahamic and Sinaitic Covenants apart from the dominant cultural ideology of the ancient Near East and the idolatrous Israelites is their redeeming role of fostering unwavering devotion and faithfulness to a single God, rather than emphasizing rituals and carnality (cf Jdg 2:1-

3; 6:8-10; 6:11-20; 10:10-16; 13:3-20). A *theological approach* shows that the early Israelites hold a significant position in the framework of YHWH's grand scheme of cosmic salvation, which could elucidate their strong dedication to maintaining the covenant throughout the narratives depicted in the Book of Judges (see also above).

The ancient Israelites were given the important task of demonstrating the divine will and requirements of the One True God to the neighboring polytheistic nations in the ancient Near East. They were expected to accomplish this by adhering strictly to the covenantal way of life and showing unwavering devotion to YHWH, who served as their covenant God and King.

It is clear, therefore, that the author/s of Judges intended to present the Israelites' loyalty to their God and covenant as both a polemical statement and a guiding principle of monotheism within the context of ancient Near Eastern polytheistic beliefs. This can be seen through the repeated retelling of historical events in Judges 6:8-10; 10:10-14 (cf Judges 11:15-27), which highlight YHWH's involvement in the Israelites' history and His demand for exclusive worship.

By employing a comparative studies approach, which entails analyzing the Sinaitic Covenant in relation to other ancient Near Eastern treaties, a more profound comprehension of the Sinaitic Covenant can be accomplished. (see 2.2.5.7). This was achieved by identifying and analyzing common attributes between the Sinaitic Covenant and ancient Near Eastern treaty making. The structure of the Sinaitic Covenant is considered to be based upon ancient Near Eastern treaties, specifically those between a king and a vassal.

However, there are notable differences that emphasize the unique nature of the Sinaitic Covenant (see 2.2.5.7). In contrast to the primarily political character of treaties in the ancient Near East that involved many deities, the Sinaitic Covenant stands out as a comprehensive socio-religious covenant solely between YHWH and the Israelites. Unlike the gods of the ancient Near East who were prone to breaking oaths, the Book of Judges demonstrates YHWH's unwavering faithfulness, even when His people are not faithful (see Jdg 2:1-2; 3:5-8; 4:1-3; 6:8-10; 8:33; 10:10-14, and so on).

In the worldview of the author/s of Judges the Canaanite gods are perceived by the author/s as false and deceptive deities (*shedim*/ 'demons') and their impact upon the lives of the idolatrous Israelites is considered evil since they lead the Israelites away from their faith in YHWH. A *comparative studies approach* reveals notable distinctions between the deities of the ancient Near East and YHWH. These disparities encompass diverse elements, encompassing their innate unpredictable characters, absence of ethical principles, and self-centred anticipations regarding their own and human existence. In the worldview of the author/s of Judges, the act of worshipping the Canaanite gods was deemed an abomination. This was primarily due to the author/s belief that such worship amounted to serving deceased entities, which stood in stark opposition to the life of YHWH and His holiness. YHWH's had an objective to eliminate the presence of the *shedim* from

the land by commanding the Israelites to destroy their high places and cult images. Regrettably the Israelites failed to comply with this instruction.

Biblical archaeological and comparative studies methodologies shed light on the lifestyle adopted in Canaan by the Israelites. The founding of Israelite settlements in cities like Shechem (Gn 12:6; Jdg 9), Bethel (Gn 12:8; 13:3; Jdg 20:26-28), Hebron (Gn 12:18; Jdg 1:20), and Mizpah (Gn 31:48-49; Jdg 20:1) can be understood as being influenced by the patriarchal traditions associated with Abraham and Jacob. These urban centres, mentioned in biblical texts such as Genesis and Judges, served as important locations where the Israelite communities established themselves.

Archaeology reveals an Israelite presence in the cities of Bethel and Mizpah as discussed in (2.3.4.2 c). The book of Judges demonstrates that cities like Shechem (2.3.4.2a) and locations such as Gilgal and the *bamot* (see 2.3.4.3a-b) serve as indicators of the Israelites' engagement in idolatrous practises, whilst Bethel and Mizpah continue to function as significant centres for the worship of YHWH. Archaeology lends support for Israelite idolatry and Yahwistic worship which assists in understanding the mindset of the author/s of Judges and the world in which this perspective functioned.

It can be conceived that in light of Genesis 12:2-3, the author/s of Judges understood that the covenant had to be preserved in order for YHWH's plan of universal redemption to be carried out. And yet, the early Israelites exhibited such a proclivity towards idolatry despite their best efforts. It is possible that the author/s of Judges could see what the idolatrous Israelites were unable to see – a greater vision of redemption that YHWH extended to all people in a world where His best intentions for people are revealed in His justice, His standards, righteousness, and overall benevolence and care.

Although hidden in the text, the author/s of the Book of Judges holds to a religious mindset that has tremendous transformative powers – to persuade people to break free from a cycle of idolatry and idolatry and embrace a life of faith in YHWH. Through their narratives, the author/s of the Book of Judges reveal that YHWH's covenant is centred around everlasting redemption. YHWH's genuine compassion for His idolatrous people and His desire to redeem and restore them to Himself stem from His unwavering commitment to never break His covenant with them. Despite the Israelites' perfidy, their dire circumstances, and the darkness that looms in certain accounts, the writer/s by skillfully incorporating the concepts of covenant and redemption in their narratives, offer hope and assurance that YHWH will always find a way to rescue His people, just as He has done countless times in the past. While YHWH demands exclusive worship and unwavering obedience to His covenant, the author/s relates that He recognizes that the Israelites are incapable of fulfilling these requirements. Therefore, He personally intervenes in the Book of Judges to redeem His people and reinstate His covenant.

9.4 MONOTHEISM: MONO-YHWH WORSHIP

The practice of idolatry among the Israelites operated within a religious framework characterized by the worship of multiple deities in Canaan (Jdg 2:10-19; 3:5-6, etcetera). Polytheism was a religious practice which had been established and perpetuated for many centuries before the Israelites' arrival and settlement in Canaan and which appeared to effectively sustain societal functioning in the land. Based on the biblical narrative, Canaan is shown as a region rich in resources (cf Ex 3:17), where several Canaanite nations thrived (cf Jdg 3:3, 5; 4:2-3; 14-16) under diverse polytheistic belief systems, worshipping deities such as Baal and Ashtoreth/Asherah (Jdg 2:11, 13; 3:7; 6:25-26; 8:33; 10:6), Chemosh (Jdg 11:24), Dagon (Jdg 16:23; see 3.6.1.1). However, Genesis 15:16 and Judges (2:3; 3:7-8 etcetera) reveal complexities in the Canaanite societies (cf Lv 18:24; 1 Ki 21:26) and the rule of their gods (Dt 32:17, 21; Ps 82:5). Henceforth, the perspective guiding the writers of Judges views monotheism and the covenantal lifestyle as a strategy to dismantle these deities and counteract their antagonistic impact on the nations.

In light of the aforesaid, YHWH reveals Himself to the Israelites and the rest of the ancient Near Eastern nations through monotheism practised under a covenant (the Sinaitic Covenant) (see also Chapter Two). Monotheism is the divine strategy to foster a mutually beneficial and wholesome relationship between a certain Deity and a particular people (cf Jdg 2:1-5; 11-19, etcetera) that will ultimately encourage other nations to join. Bauckham (2004:207) concurs that the distinctiveness of YHWH lies in the context of monotheism – mono-YHWH worship - and His unique covenantal relationship with His elected people, the Israelites.

A theological methodology emphasizes the presence of covenant and the importance of covenant keeping through mono-YHWH worship that are encoded in the text of Judges. These elements are shown to be fundamental to the worldview of the author/s, as indicated by many passages such as Judges 2:1-5; 3:7, 12; 4:1-3; 6:8-10; 10:10-16, among others. The sacred covenant emphasizes that exclusive worship must be directed solely to this God and that adherence to the rules and regulations prescribed by this God alone, in the worldview held by the author/s of Judges, is the only path worthy of pursuit in people's lives (see 3.2.1-3.2.2.1a-b).

Monotheism redefined the Israelites' concept of deity and the exclusive worship of a sole God (Hill and Walton 2010:201; see 3.2.1.1). Unlike the aloof ancient Near Eastern gods, people may enter into a relationship with YHWH who takes on the role of divine benefactor, provider, protector. In light of the aforesaid, mono-YHWH worship – a form of monolatry (see 3.2.2) – establishes YHWH as the supreme and sovereign creator and King of the Israelites and indeed over all the earth. Monotheism not only redefined the conception of deity (mono-YHWH worship) in the ancient Near, but also, of the creation processes which are solely attributed to YHWH and humanity's value and status relative to God which differed significantly from similar ideas about creation in the ancient Near East (Hill and Walton 2010:201).

Israelite monotheism provides the ancient Near Eastern nations with the highest concepts of Deity, perfect divine ethics, wisdom, justice and judgement (see 3.3.6.2-3.3.6.3) and redemption (cf 2.2.3.1c) which are divine attributes of YHWH alone that are continuously depicted by the author/s of Judges (see Jdg 2:1-5, 10-19; 3:7-11, etcetera). The author/s of Judges demonstrate that YHWH, unlike the Canaanite gods, is not a nature or regional God (see 3.3.2) and therefore the divine qualities of omnipotence, omnipresence and omniscience may be ascribed to Him alone (see 3.3.3-3.3.4). The author/s of Judges effectively illustrate the attributes of YHWH, an emphasis that is driven by their monotheistic worldview, which enables them to highlight these divine qualities as superior to the nature of the Canaanite gods (cf Jdg 2:1-5; 10-19; 3:9-11, 15, 30, etcetera).

Monotheism defined the identity of the Israelites as the chosen people of YHWH, a holy nation and a kingdom of priests (Ex 19:5-6; see 3.2.2.1a) who have a covenantal relationship with Him that describes their role in life as worshippers of the one true God. The author/s of Judges depict the recurring struggle of the Israelites to maintain their distinct identity as the chosen people of YHWH. This struggle necessitates the author/s' persistent efforts to combat the prevalent idolatrous practices in their community by its messages endorsing monotheism which consistently and paradoxically occur through the lens of the Israelites' idolatry (cf Jdg 2:1-5; 6:8-10; 10:6-14).

A *comparative studies approach* reveals that the disparities between polytheism and monotheism have resulted in an insurmountable divide between these two distinct forms of religious beliefs. The author/s of the Book of Judges adopt a resolute position emphasizing the exclusive propriety of worshipping YHWH. The author/s of Judges likely possessed an understanding that the *Shema*, was a monotheistic instruction which required the Israelites to obey YHWH by means of their faithful adherence to the covenantal lifestyle. This understanding likely stemmed from their oral tradition and familiarity with their history (Jdg 2:1-2; 6:8-10, 13; 11:15-24; see also Chapter Two).

Both the *Shema* and the *I am* statements in Judges (6:16; 13:11-12) as discussed in Chapter Three point towards the nature of YHWH and His eternal existence which are additional features that emphasize the distinctiveness of the religion and worldview of the author/s of Judges. There is no consensus on the meaning and origins of the divine name, YHWH, which is used solely for the name of the God of the Israelites and does not appear to have an acceptable etymology (Kaiser 2017; Smith 2002:6-7). The distinctiveness of YHWH is further characterized by His personal name, which also functions as a depiction of His eternal and self-sustaining essence as disclosed to the early Israelites (see 3.4-3.4.3.1). By employing the *historical-critical method* throughout Chapter Three, an examination of the texts Judges 6:16 and Judges 13:11 (see to Jdg 3.5.3.1a-c), for example, enables the establishment of a reconstruction according to the historical context of the authors and recipients. The author/s of Judges show the monotheistic inclination of the *I am* statements found in the aforesaid texts. These statements hint at the self-revelation and confirmation of the identity of the Israelites' covenant God, YHWH, through a clever linguistic manipulation of His name. These assertions further underscore the recurring concept of covenant in Judges,

while also referencing the historical bond between the Israelites and YHWH, highlighting His unwavering loyalty.

The covenant Name, YHWH has great significance as it signifies that YHWH is the uncreated, self-sustaining, and everlasting God, surpassing the names of the ancient Near Eastern gods that merely symbolize their attributes and functions within the pantheon (see 3.6.1.1).

The application of *theological, comparative studies, higher criticism*, and to a lesser extent *biblical archaeological approaches* in Chapter Three aimed to enhance the understanding of the worldview of the author/s of Judges. These approaches shed light on the author/s' distinct monotheistic mindset, which regarded the God YHWH as superior due to His nature that illumined His faithful commitment to a specific group of people. This commitment demonstrated His resolve to carry out a plan of redemption for the Israelites and, ultimately, all of humanity. The author/s exhibited a steadfast commitment to the covenantal and monotheistic perspective, regarding any alternative worldview as very objectionable for, as shown in Judges, it brought the Israelites only divine judgement, suffering and oppression.

9.5 THE (RE)CREATION OF SACRED SPACE IN CANAAN

As previously indicated, monotheism via the covenantal lifestyle (see Chapters Two and Three) is embedded in the text of Judges (cf Jdg 2:1-5; 2:10-19, etcetera) and as demonstrated throughout this study it is the essence of the mindset informing the book's author/s. The Israelites' utilization of sacred space (cf Jdg 2:4-5; 13:19-20; see 4.3.1.1a, c), at times the restoration of idolatrous ritual places to mono-YHWH (cf Jdg 6:11, 19, 25-26; see 4.3.1.1b) emphasize the author/s' preference and advocacy of monotheism and covenantal allegiance. Monotheism through the covenantal lifestyle was the feature of Israelite life that was to transform the cultic landscape of Canaan, recreating it into bastions of mono-YHWH worship. As stated before, the author/s show that frequently that was not the situation among the Israelites in Judges (cf 2:10-19; 3:5-7, 12; 4:1-3, etcetera). Nevertheless, the Israelites did experience periods of covenantal restoration and it is then when mono-YHWH would have been worshipped at YHWH's sacred sites.

The utilization of a *theological methodology* aids in comprehending the concept of monotheism as a polemic against Canaanite polytheism (see also Chapters Two and Three), a concept which should have permanently transformed sacred space in Canaan into places of mono-YHWH worship as stated above. The monotheistic processes of worship and beliefs at Yahwistic sacred space in Canaan would have served as a proclamation of YHWH's sovereignty and dominion over the land. The sacred space of YHWH refers to a designated area specifically for the use of and performance of rituals as set out in the covenant (see 4.2.2.1). The holiness of YHWH sanctifies any place He appears in the Book of Judges and transforming it into sacred space (see 4.2.1.1).

Had the Israelites adhered to the requirement to eradicate the Canaanite *bamot* (Ex 23:24) they may not have been delivered the prophetic message in Judges 2:1-3 and subsequently, fallen under YHWH's judgement which circumstance introduced their perennial proclivity to idolatry and oppression, from which the appointment of successive judges could not save them. Sacred space in Judges is infused with the theme of purification and redemption which is also evident in the 'ordinary' environment (cf Jdg 5:20; 6:34-40; 7:22). Ironically, these are motifs that should have been ascribed to Shiloh and the Tabernacle that was set up there. The strange absence of Shiloh and the Tabernacle from Judges might demonstrate the author/s' reluctance to describe possible corruption and idolatry occurring at the Israelites' primary religious centre since it would have been a disgrace to associate the 'dwelling place of YHWH' with immorality and idolatry.

Perhaps the author/s of Judges wish to present the idea that it is YHWH who alone possesses inherent sovereignty and who does not rely on humans to reestablish His authority and His covenant among the Israelites (see 4.3.1.1a-c). The aforesaid further emphasizes the covenantal mindset of the author/s of Judges in which monotheism is confirmed by YHWH's exercise of sovereignty over the Israelites and their world. The following points should also be taken into consideration:

In a metaphorical sense, the recreation of sacred space in Canaan is also observed when the author/s describe them as places of reproof (4.3.1.1a-b), judgement (4.3.1.1a), and instruction (4.3.1.1b-c). The aforesaid demonstrates that ultimately Yahwistic sacred spaces are places that symbolize hope and deliverance, granting the Israelites the prospect of a successful covenantal relationship and thereby a prosperous life and future. They also invoke the covenant and YHWH's historical (patriarchal) interaction with the Israelites (cf Jdg 2:1-2; 6:8-10, 13) reaffirming the covenantal connection with Yahwistic places of ritual.

The aforesaid ideas are consistent with the beliefs about YHWH and His faithfulness as expressed by the author/s of Judges in narratives such as Judges 3:9-11, 15; 4-7, etcetera. Another noteworthy feature of Israelite sacred space is that in contrast with the ancient Near Eastern temple where the material needs of the gods are met, YHWH Himself meets the needs of His people at times at locations external to the Tabernacle as demonstrated in Judges (see 4.3.1.1a-b)

In light of the above, the concept of sacred space among the Israelites and Canaanites has many similarities, although the primary distinction lies in monotheism; the distinctive character and nature of the Israelites' God, YHWH, and all rites associated with mono-YHWH worship (see Chapters Two and Three; see also 4.2.2.1-4.2.2.2).

The utilization of a *comparative studies method* facilitates comprehension of the sacred spaces utilized by the Israelites, encompassing geographical characteristics such as hills, trees, and water, as well as man-made structures such as doors, altars, and threshing floors (see 4.3.1.2-4.3.1.3a-b).

However, these places may also demonstrate idolatrous worship (Jdg 6:25-26; cf Jdg 3:5-6), acts of atrocities (cf Jdg 19) and unconventional behaviour which reveal covenant violation and the Israelites' constant need for redemption and covenant restoration. It is evident that the locations mentioned in 4.3.1.1-4.3.1.3a-b serve as platforms for the establishment and elucidation of religious ideologies held by the author/s of the book of Judges: the Israelites' engagement in idolatrous practices which were condemned by the author/s and which they address by descriptions of the YHWH's presence at these sites (see above; cf Jdg 2:1-5; 6:8-10; 10:10-14).

A *biblical archaeological approach* provides evidence for the presence of the early Israelites in 12th century BC Canaan and reveals the spiritual transformation of mono-YHWH worship and its impact upon the physical landscape of the land (see 4.1-4.2.1.1a-b). In addition, the Book of Joshua (18:1, 8, 9, 10; 19:51; 21:2; 22:9; 22:12) indicates Shiloh, where the Israelites had set up the Tabernacle, to be the main religious centre of the tribes. However, inexplicably Shiloh rarely takes centre stage in Judges and apart from Judges 18:31; 19:18 and 21:19, the Tabernacle is scarcely mentioned (see below).

It is worth noting that both Bethel (Gn 12:8; 28:18-19; 35:1-7), Shechem (Gn 12:6; 33:18-20 as well as Mizpah (Gn 31:45-49) and Hebron (Gn 13:8) possess a significant cultic heritage among the early Israelite community, with historical roots tracing back to the patriarchal era, specifically the times of Abraham and Jacob (2.3.4.2a-d; 4.3.1.1a). Together with Hebron, Bethel, and Shechem, Shiloh formed part of an important trade route in Canaan and like the other cities mentioned most probably had a rich cultural and cultic history (see 4.4.2-4.4.2.1a-b). Given the Israelites' tradition of inhabiting cities with a long history of cultic activity and patriarchal associations it remains a mystery why Shiloh does not share a similar background (cf 4.4.2-4.4.3.1).

Both a *comparative studies* and a *biblical archaeological approach* contribute to the comprehension of the sacred elements of cosmology, sacred alignment, sacred geometry, and sacred sanctuary in the context of the physical construction and metaphorical and physical function of the Tabernacle as outlined by Zevit (2002:74-75). *Zevit's framework* for delineating sacred space was also employed to facilitate comprehension of the spiritual attributes associated with sacred space in the ancient Near East and among the early Israelites as it pertains to the Tabernacle (Zevit 2002:74-75; see 4.4-4.5.6.6). The utilization of a *historical-critical method* in analysing the term 'Shiloh' yields the idea that it possessed noteworthy spiritual associations for the Israelites, namely the concept of a future Messianic deliverer which may also be foreshadowed in the Book of Judges (cf Jdg 13:5).

Therefore, it is reasonable to argue that the decision to choose Shiloh as the location for erecting the Tabernacle may have been influenced by the notion of redemption. It is plausible that Shiloh was intended to serve as the city of redemption for all nations considering YHWH's plan of universal restoration of all nations to Him (Chapter Two). Perhaps for this reason, possible patriarchal

associations with Shiloh remain one of the most well-preserved secrets in the Old Testament until Israelite occupation of the city. However, due to the Israelites' idolatry and the subsequent destruction of Shiloh by YHWH, this purpose was not fulfilled (see 4.2).

In light of the aforesaid, the Israelites, in keeping with the tradition of temple building according to the aforesaid sacred elements, selected Shiloh as their primary religious centre under the guidance of YHWH. As mentioned before in this study, YHWH may use customs and practices that were commonly known to the early Israelites to fulfil His plans and purpose for His elected people. The results are that the proportions, materials and alignments of the Tabernacle and its furnishing were ascribed sacred perspectives and concepts that distinguished the realm of YHWH from that of common people – that is, the sacred from the mundane. However, these sacred elements were never meant to create a barrier between the divine and human as they did in the ancient Near East. Rather, they symbolize the dwelling place of YHWH and the desire of the One True God to bind His people (and ultimately all nations) to Himself in a covenant relationship of mutual devotion and faithfulness.

The sacred components mentioned above possess a monotheistic quality. The worship of other deities alongside YHWH in Shiloh was not permitted. In contrast, both El and Baal are objects of worship in the region of Shechem. The omission of any major reference to Shiloh by the author/s of Judges as previously mentioned, may be attributed to the distorted worship of YHWH that occurred there. The association of Shiloh and the Tabernacle with a society characterized by idolatry, violence, general disorder, and particularly the violation of the covenant and possible corruption of the priesthood, as stated before, could be considered a significant dishonour by the author/s of Judges who therefore do not mention them except in 'passing' references. Consequently, idolatry takes place external to Shiloh in places such as Ophrah (Jdg 6:11), Gilgal (Jdg 3:19, 26) and this is a situation intended by the author/s of Judges to reflect what may be happening at Shiloh (cf Jdg 2:10). As previously stated, it is plausible that the author/s refrain from acknowledging Shiloh due to their perception of the immense dishonour it would have brought upon the sacred name of YHWH. However, the author/s also frequently reveal YHWH's desire to restore His people to Himself.

9.6 DIVINE COMMUNICATION

In the Book of Judges, prophecy is an acceptable means of seeking the divine will of YHWH (see 5.3.2-5.3.2.2a-e (see also 5.3.3-5.3.3.2 and 5.3.1.1). Conversely, celestial divination and extispicy were discouraged practises among the early Israelites. The analysis of divine communication in Chapter Five focuses on the concepts of covenant adherence (prophecy) and covenant violation (celestial divination and extispicy) (see below).

Divine communication as examined in Chapter Five functioned not only as a medium for communication between YHWH and the Israelites (as stated above) or the Israelites and the Canaanite gods (cf 5.4-5.4.6.6) but also as a comprehensive *theological framework* that profoundly influenced both religious behaviours and daily life of the early Israelites. This fact is also borne out by the methods of communication employed by the early Israelites in Judges (see 5.3.1-5.3.3.2). Judges shows that a religious system of animal oblation and offerings existed (Jdg 2:4-5; 6:19; 13:19-20; 20:26; 21:4) to interact with YHWH as well perhaps with other deities (cf Jdg 3:5-6; 10:6; 17:5). Chapter Five argued that contact between YHWH and the Israelites (Jdg 2:1-5; 6:8-10, 11-34; 7, etcetera) or the Canaanite gods and the Israelites (cf Jdg 2:10-19; 3:5-6, etcetera) served a dual purpose it symbolized the Israelites' 'walk with YHWH' (see 5.2.1) and involved the Israelites' actual participation in divinatory practices both Yahwistic (see 5.3.1.1; 5.3.2-5.3.3.2) and possibly Canaanite (see 5.4-5.4.6.6).

The utilization of a *historical critical approach* in the examination of terms like *yashab*, *rādāh*, *hāllak*, and *yāda* aids in understanding the idea of 'walking with YHWH' that the author/s would have supported (cf Jdg 2:1-3; 6:8-10; 10:10-14). The concept of 'walking with YHWH' places greater emphasis on the upholding of a covenantal relationship rather than on divination as a means of connecting with the divine the latter which was of overarching importance in the ancient Near East (see 5.2.1.1). The Israelites could 'walk with YHWH,' inter alia if they prescribe to His approved divinatory methods of prophecy, (2:3; 4; 6:8-10; 13:3-20), dreams (cf Jdg 6:25; 7); the casting of lots (cf Jdg 1:1-2), and the *Urim* and *Thummim* (cf Jdg 28).

All ancient Near Eastern divination practises such necromancy, celestial divination, extispicy were forbidden to the Israelites. Ancient Near Eastern divination exemplifies the stark contrast between the covenant culture of YHWH and the prevailing cultural ideology of the ancient Near East. In the ancient Near East people were intent on establishing a relationship with the gods to acquire the gods' knowledge about the future. The gods, in turn, were willing to share their knowledge if their needs were met (see 5.2.1; 5.4-5.4.6.6). By contrast, YHWH desired to nurture a relationship with the Israelites based covenantal loyalty and devotion to Him alone. The Sinaitic Covenant, in its essence, acted as a type of 'prophetic document' since it provided the Israelites with an understanding of what the future held as outlined in the blessings and curses of the sacred agreement (see 5.4.1). Therefore, the Israelites had no real need to seek the divine will regarding the future.

YHWH also demonstrates in the Book of Judges that He has no need for divinatory mechanism to communicate with His people if He desires to do so cf Jdg 2:1-3; 6:11-20; 13:3-20). In this way the author/s of Judges elucidate the manner in which YHWH transcends prevailing cultural ideologies regarding divination (see (see 5.3.2.2a-e). By their association with the Canaanite cults the Israelites probably was involved in their divinatory practices such as necromancy, celestial divination and extispicy although this is not indicated in the narratives of the Book of Judges.

The utilization of *comparative studies and biblical archaeological methodologies* provides valuable insights on the likely participation of the early Israelites in the aforesaid divinatory rituals (see 5.4.3-5.4.6).

It is evident from Judges 1:1-2; 4:6-9; 6:8-10; (cf Jdg 6:11-34; 13:3-20) that YHWH does not prohibit the practise of divination for seeking the divine will by means of the appropriate divinatory devices and practitioners regarding those matters not addressed in the covenantal laws and stipulations. As previously indicated, Judges, demonstrates that contact with YHWH (5.3.2; 5.3.3) largely takes place within a recurring pattern of idolatry. As a result, divination, particularly prophecy, functions as a means of judgement and approach (Jdg 2:1-3; 4:6-9), instruction (Jdg 6:11-20; 13:3-20) which the author/s of Judges employ as a tool to foster upholding the covenant among their fellow Israelites.

The prophets mentioned in the book of Judges (Jdg 4:7-9; 6:8-10; probably Jdg 10:11) consistently confirm the monotheistic messages embedded in the text. They serve YHWH and bring about important socio-religious transformations in society and thus YHWH's prophets are oriented towards the collective interests of His people (see 5.3.2.4). By contrast, the focus of the ancient Near Eastern prophets and prophecy was primarily directed towards the king and his political and practical requirements.

In light of the above, divine communication in Judges has to do with covenant restoration and upholding the covenantal relationship. Divination in Judges shows the steady progression of Israelite society from monotheism (Jdg 1:1-2) to idolatry (Jdg 8:27; see 5.3.1.2) as well as portraying societal upheavals and possible improper use of the Ark of the Covenant and the *Urim* and *Thummim* (see Jdg 20:26-28). In the event of seeking the will of the Canaanite gods, the Israelites were subject to condemnation, which may be regarded as an additional nuanced aspect of the condemnatory sentiments conveyed by the author/s of Judges (see 6:8-10; 6:11-34; 7; 10:10-14; 13:1-20) and the author/s' intense struggle to assist the Israelites in preserving their covenant.

9.7 DIVINE MANIFESTATION

A *theological methodology* applied to the text in Judges (2:1-5; 6:11-20; 10:10-16; 13:1-20) aids in the following understanding: firstly, it highlights the monotheistic redefinition of the concept of the manifestation of deity that primarily occurred in the form of the cult image/s (see 6.3.4-6.3.5). Secondly, it emphasizes the restoration of the covenantal relationship within which framework the theophanies in the Book of Judges consistently occur. It thereby establishes an essential feature of the (Yahwistic) mindset of the author/s: that is divine redemption. Throughout the historical records of the Old Testament, theophanies, appearing in various forms, played a significant role as divine interventions in the affairs of the Israelites (Ackroyd 1996:397). These divine

manifestations were always associated with the concept of salvation. Likewise, in the narratives of Judges where YHWH's manifestations occur the emphasis on salvation becomes even more pronounced.

The emphasis on salvation is further supported by the correlation found in Judges 5:4-5, as discussed by Niehaus (1995:21-22). Rooker (2003:860) notes that: 'First, God appeared to initiate the covenant (cf Ex 19; cf Jdg 2:1-5). Second, God appeared to instruct or correct his covenant partner' (cf Jdg 2:1-3; 6:11-23; 13:3-20). When YHWH appears to correct his covenant partner, a leader; that is a judge, is called to bring about the instruction and the correction and to bring judgment on the enemy of the Israelites (Jdg 3:10; 6:34; 11:29; cf Jdg 2:10-19; 14:19; Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:619; see also 6.4).

Bright (2000:160) asserts that the theophanies (in Judges) can be interpreted as a polemical declaration made by YHWH Himself, aimed at challenging the notion of the gods' presence as embodied in their cultic statues. In the Book of Judges theophanies occur in the form of the Spirit of YHWH (Jdg 3:10; 6:34; 11:29; 13:25; 14:19; see 6.3.3), the Angel of YHWH (Jdg 2:1-5; 6:11-20; 13:3-20; cf Jdg 7:22; see 6.3.5-6.3.5.3) and in certain weather and celestial phenomena (Jdg 5:4-5, 20; see 6.3.6). The divine warrior motif and weather theophanies in the ancient Near East and in the Book of Judges share similarities in their form or configuration, transitory nature, and association with divine warfare (see 6.3.7) at which point these resemblances cease. A *comparative studies approach* facilitated the comprehension of the aforementioned motifs.

Walton (2018) comments that the difference between YHWH and the gods derives from God's justice that stems from His nature while justice is merely the duty of a god such as Shamash and not a part of his nature (cf 3.2.3.1). Furthermore, YHWH does not have whims such as the unpredictable ancient Near Eastern storm gods and thus YHWH's ability to dispense judgment and justice is consistent (for example throughout the Book of Judges). The Israelites are consistently judged and punished for their idolatry. The Angel of YHWH may punish the Israelite (Jdg 2:3) but so too will the Spirit of YHWH punish those who oppress them (cf Jdg 3:10-11; 6:34; 11:29, etcetera).

The author/s of Judges reveal that the theophanies of YHWH are greatly dissimilar to ancient Near Eastern divine manifestation in their embodiment of the divine. Notably, YHWH's self-revelation never occurs in the form of a statue as indicated previously.

Furthermore, the purpose of a *temporary theophany* in the ancient Near East, varied from that in Judges. The weather phenomena are the ancient Near Eastern gods themselves. In one Akkadian text, Adad thunders inside a black storm cloud (Speiser 1969:94) and in another Adad rides on the four winds in a thunderstorm (Grayson 1969:514). The Sumerian storm god Iskhur that 'thundered through the heavenly expanse' (Kramer 1969d:586) is an example of a god existing in the weather

phenomenon itself. In Judges, weather theophanies are only signs of the temporary habitation of YHWH in the corporeal world. The thunderstorm in Judges 5:4 is never YHWH, but YHWH is, the creator and controller of the storm.

Theophanies in the form of frightening displays of thunder and lightning are perceived as the gods themselves engaging in battles for ascendancy (see Speiser 1969:113) which usually presaged disaster for a nation. YHWH and as depicted in the Book of Judges does not engage in warfare solely to obtain authority over other gods for, He is the sovereign God of the universe (cf 3.3.5-3.3.5.1). YHWH goes to war against the enemies of the Israelites to deliver His people from their oppression (Jdg 4:6-7; 6:14, 16; cf Jdg 3:9-10, 15).

Another form of YHWH's self-revelation occurs in the form of the miracles in Judges 6:20, 34-40 symbolizing His power and presence and commitment to deliver the Israelites from their enemies. The concept of covenant is emphasized through theophany in the Book of Judges, highlighting the author/s' message that it is YHWH Himself who will save His people and renew His covenant. (see also 9.3 and 9.5).

9.8 OPPOSING VALUES: EQUALITY AND INEQUALITY

The covenant of YHWH encompassed a principle of equality that placed equal value on all Israelites. Despite the seemingly prosperous communities in the Canaanite societies, there were underlying societal issues present in their cultures (see 7.4.1.1-7.4.1.2; 7.4.3). As a result, when the early Israelites, who often imitated the Canaanites, embraced their cults (cf Jdg 2:2, 10-19; 3:5-7, etcetera), it is highly likely that these societal imbalances among the Canaanites were also transferred into the tribal community. In this chapter, as in the entire study, it has been clearly illustrated that the Israelites' failure to comply with the divine directive of completely conquering Canaan resulted in significant and wide-ranging repercussions (cf Jdg 2:1-3). It could be argued that one of the many consequences of the Israelites' disobedience was the presence of anti-covenantal imbalances in their society and an underlying cause of why the author/s of Judges launched their critique against the Israelites (cf Jdg 2:1-3; 6:8-10; 10:10-14).

A theological methodology assists with the understanding that while it is true that the Canaanite cults had a significant impact on the idolatrous Israelites, it would be unjust to attribute the responsibility for the disparities alluded to in the Book of Judges only to these influences no matter how significant they were (see also 7.2.3.2a-b).

The heart of the Israelites and their propensity to sin against YHWH and His covenant would also have played a great role in bringing those changes in the Israelite community that were adverse to the covenantal lifestyle (see 7.2.2.1a-d; 7.2.3.2a-b; 7.3.1-7.3.2). Societal abnormalities undermined the divine plan that YHWH had envisioned for His people. YHWH's intention was to bring together His people under His rule with the objective of fostering a unified community of Israelites

who embraced a common set of laws, religious beliefs, and way of life that upheld the inherent value of every individual.

Monotheism allowed people to be perceived from a distinct religious perspective wherein they are regarded as equals who possess the same access to divine compassion and care as well as the provision of abundance, and overall well-being in life. The Israelites need not be slaves of the gods (cf Jdg 2:1; 6:8-9; 10:11) but instead they may belong to the human family of YHWH. They may live as free man and woman under His kingship and enjoy the beneficence of the one true God who only has the best interest of His people at heart. It is perhaps for this reason – selfless love and devotion to God and each other that – that biblical monotheism had to be opposed ironically by Israelite idolatry (cf Jdg 2:1-3; 3:5-7, 12).

The Israelites displayed a great propensity in duplicating their neighbours' cults and culture and by inference the hierarchical systems of rule and life that characterized Canaanite society (cf Jdg 2:10-19; 3:5-6; 6:15; 8:2; 17:7-13; 19; see 7.2.1.1c). The resultant anomalous systems (cf 7.2.1.1a-d) which, as stated above, led to the socio-economic disparities and other injustices alluded to Judges (6:15; 8:2; 19; 21:21) would have been considered as a great evil in the worldview of the author/s of Judges. It was a situation that could only be corrected by the Israelites' return to YHWH and the covenantal lifestyle which is what the messages of judgement and cycles of oppression (Jdg 2:1-3; 2:10-19; 6:8-9; 10-14) and YHWH's eventual deliverance of His people apparently promote.

In light of the aforesaid, the author/s do not absolve the Israelites from their culpability and active involvement in the establishment of these disparities. It is noteworthy that they do not explicitly implicate the enemies of the Israelites as being responsible for their descent into idolatry and its consequences as described above and in Chapter Five (see 7.3.2.2a-b; 7.6.1-7.6.2) The utilization of a theological approach facilitates comprehension of the Israelites, and, applied to the text, helps to understand that the blame is always the Israelites' for abandoning their covenant and the consequences of this violation and why this is seen as a great evil (cf Dt 28:15:-68). For encoded in the covenant is the principle of equality which reflects the nature of YHWH who values all human life as equal and extends His blessings of abundance to all (see 7.4.4-7.4.4.1; cf 7.3.2.1).

In addition, the covenant's incorporation of the ethos of egalitarianism functions as a proactive mechanism to deter oppression and mitigate the detrimental consequences of socio-economic inequalities, which historically resulted in division and violence within the Israelite community as depicted in Judges (cf Jdg 6:15; 8:2; 12:1-6; see also 7.3.2.2a-b). These distinctly anti-covenantal, social and religious structures adopted by the Israelites dislodged the unique conditions that preserved the material and spiritual health of the Israelites. The covenant after all presented monotheism as a superior religious system and mindset compared to that of polytheism and the gods who did not regard all human life as equal (see 7.4.3). The early Israelite acceptance of these traditions

led, as stated above, to vast alterations in the covenantal lifestyle and associated mindset that sought to protect them from the very social predicaments that occurred in Judges 6:15; 8:2; 17; 19 (see 7.3.1.1-7.3.2).

A *biblical archaeological approach* indicates that an ethos of egalitarianism did exist among the early Israelites in Canaan as the harsh environmental factors and kinship groups led people to work together and share resources (cf 7.2.1-7.2.1.1; 7.2.2). It is important to note that the affluence of Canaan (see 7.2.2) was intended to be accessible to every member of the Israelite community under the governance of YHWH's kingship that under the covenant ideally insured a state of egalitarianism, justice and prosperity for all (cf 7.4.4.1). This constituted freedom to every Israelite individual and the right to enjoy the abundance of Canaan. However, archaeological evidence in conjunction with the narratives in Judges indicate that the early Israelite community did not possess a complete egalitarian structure (cf Jdg 6:15; 8:2; 10:3; 12:9, 14). Archaeology shows the existence of surplus resources which provided select groups with opportunities to accumulate wealth (cf 7.2.1; 7.2.2; 7.2.2.1; 7.2.3.2). Ideally, the optimal approach to address this predicament would have entailed the storage of excess resources at the Tabernacle, with the intention of subsequently redistributing them back into the community (cf Jdg 6:15; 8:2; see also 7.2.3.2). Nevertheless, the disintegration of the covenantal way of life among the Israelites made them susceptible to creating opportunities for societal inequities and the abuse of life that are present in the Book of Judges (see 7.3.1.1-7.3.1.2).

A *comparative studies approach* of the lives of the ordinary Canaanites described in Chapter Seven (see 7.4.1.1-7.4.1.2-a-d) might provide insight into the lives and idolatrous practices and perceptions of the oppressed Israelites depicted in Judges which in the mindset of the author/s would have been perceived as a great disgrace incurred not only upon the Israelites as the image bearers of YHWH but also upon YHWH Himself. It can be inferred from Deuteronomy (17:14-20) that the leaders of the Israelites were not to amass wealth (cf Jdg 10:3; 12:9,14), and were to govern with humility, obeying the covenant and thus lead the people with an ethos of equality (cf Dt 17:14-20; see 7.3.2.2b). However, the cyclical episodes of idolatry reveal the leaders and the judges' inability to uphold the covenantal lifestyle probably due to their own weaknesses including the desire for wealth. It is then when the lifestyles of the Canaanite gods adopted by the Israelites become the blueprint for their own lives (see 7.6.1-7.6.2) which was antithetical to the covenant (see 7.4.4.1). The primary solution presented by the author/s to rectify these sins committed against YHWH and His covenant was consistently centred around a recommitment to the covenantal relationship and the act of worshipping YHWH again.

9.9 FESTIVALS, PRIESTS AND PEOPLE

The festivals of the Israelites and religious practices are not described or extensively elaborated upon in the Book of Judges (8.3-8.3.4; 8.4-8.4.1.1a-c; 8.5-8.5.6). Due to prevailing idolatry among

the people the narrator/s of Judges are primarily preoccupied with covenant reinstatement. However, the festivals observed by the Israelites (8.3.1-8.3.4), the role of their priests (8.4-8.4.4.1a-c), and the worship rites practised by the common Israelites such as curses, blessings, vows and prayers (8.5-8.5.6) can be analysed by means of a *comparable studies methodology* that grant insight by means of looking into similar traditions in the ancient Near East.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that there exist significant distinctions between these practices of the Israelites and those prevalent in the ancient Near East. These disparities primarily arise from the unique aspects of the Israelite covenant and Israelite monotheism, which distinguish it from the religions practised in the ancient Near East (see 8.2.1-8.2.2.2).

The annual pilgrimage festivals of the Israelites in Shiloh (cf Jdg 18:31; 19:18; 21:19), and their all-encompassing focus on YHWH, serve as a significant point of differentiation from the ancient Near Eastern festivals, which predominantly centred around potency rituals aimed at promoting the fertility of the land and its inhabitants. In contrast, the Israelite festivals were characterized by a strong spiritual emphasis, with, as stated before, a primary focus on celebrating YHWH and the expression of gratitude towards YHWH for His abundant blessings. The application of a *theological and historical critical approach* aids in comprehending the spiritual purpose of these festivals and the manner in which the Israelites perceived and engaged with them (see 8.3.1-8.3.4). The Israelite festivals also strengthened the covenantal relationship. These events probably served as opportunities for personal reflection on YHWH, family, community and oneself. The festivals emphasized the Israelites' identity as the chosen people of YHWH fostering a sense of unity, communal spirit and destiny.

As stated above (see 9.5), the Book of Judges also exposes the recurring pattern of idolatry among the Israelites which may explain the author/s' brief references to the Tabernacle (as seen in Jdg 18:31; 19:18; 21:19; see also 4.3.2). Considering the aforesaid, it is possible that the religious festivals of the Israelites were disrupted by idolatry (Jdg 2:10-19; 3:5-6, etcetera) and resultant social turmoil and oppression (cf Jdg 3:7, 12; 4:1-3; 6:1-7, etcetera; see also 9.5). However, during periods of covenantal restoration (Jdg 3:11, 30; 5:31, etcetera), the priesthood stands out due to their adherence to monotheistic rituals and the spiritual associations of the attendant sacrificial rites. A *theological approach* aids in the understanding the importance and significance of blood rituals in the religion of the Israelites as singular rites of purification and redemption.

The Israelite Passover ceremony in Egypt was in essence an apotropaic rite that protected the Israelites from being killed by YHWH (Zerafa 1964:235; Bokser 1992:755-765; see 8.3.2). The covering of the doorposts of houses with the blood of a sacrificed lamb functioned as purification acts, cleansing the inhabitants from their sin guilt and resultant death (Ex 12:1-12; 21-23;29-30; Finlan 2004:74-75). As indicated in Leviticus 17:11 it is the blood of a sacrificed animal that brings about atonement for sins (cf 8.3.2; 8.4.4.1a-b). The uniqueness of the Day of Atonement is denoted

by the blood of the sacrifice that expiates the sins of the Israelites for a year. In the context of the ancient Near Eastern sacrificial system, sacrificial blood was used primarily to appease the gods, gain their favour and bring about the fertility of the land. The cessation of this expiation ritual during periods of idolatry likely weighed heavily on the minds of the author/s of Judges, who perceived its rejection along with the covenant as a rationale for the denunciation and subsequent punishment of the Israelites (cf Jdg 2:1-3). This was because, according to the author/s' worldview, the Israelites were unable to seek forgiveness for their sins and thus they remained impure as a people, a disgraceful situation since they were after all the people of the holy God, YHWH.

It was the responsibility of the Israelites to reveal the majesty of their covenant God to the Canaanites and the rest of the ancient Near East. This is most probably the aim of the author/s of Judges to convey a monotheistic message under a covenant when they describe their condemnation of the cyclical idolatry of the early Israelites, their judgement and eventual deliverance and covenantal restoration (cf 3.2.1.1).

9.10 AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Future research could explore the function of the stones of idols mentioned in Judges 3:19, 26 and their potential connection with Gilgal. If these stone idols were concentric in shape, they would share a similar configuration to stone circles found in many parts of the world. Further investigation and research into these stones might reveal their significance as places of divination. Additionally, a more in depth examination of the Nazirite vow and the role of hair in the performance of the vow and its fulfillment may shed light on the enigmatic power of hair which was linked to Samson's physical strength. To determine whether the concubine of the Levite was performing a ritual before her death, it is important to conduct a thorough analysis of her final act of placing her hands on the threshold of the house. The threshold led to a small entrance before reaching the actual door and studying the interior of this space, including any objects placed there as well as inscriptions on the threshold, may provide insights into the religious significance of the woman's actions. By delving into these aspects, researchers may gain a deeper understanding of the worldview held by the author/s of Judges.

Abbreviations

ABR	Associates for Biblical Research
AJA	American Journal of Archaeology
AP	Apologetics Press
ASOR	American Schools of Oriental Research
ASV	American Standard Version
AYBD	The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary
AUSS	Andrews University Seminary Studies
BA	The Biblical Archaeologist
BAR	Biblical Archaeological Review
BAS	Biblical Archaeology Society
BASOR	Bulletin of the American Schools Oriental Research
BHD	Bible History Daily
BBR	Bulletin for Biblical Research
BSB	Berean Study Bible
BTSK	Baptist Theological Seminary Kaduna
COJS	Centre for Online Judaic Studies
CRI	Christian Research Institute
CSM	The Christian Science Monitor
CTJ	Christian Theological Journal
CTSJ	Chafer Theological Seminary Journal
DTIB	Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible
DDDB	Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible
EDT	Evangelical Dictionary of Theology
EJ	Encyclopaedia Judaica
ESV	English Standard Version
HCBD	The Harper Collins Bible Dictionary
IEJ	Israel Exploration Journal
IES	Israel Exploration Society
ISV	International Standard Version
IVP	InterVarsity Press
JAAR	Journal of the American Academy of Religion
JAEA	Journal of Ancient Egyptian Architecture, The
JANER	Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions
JANES	Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society
JAOS	Journal of the American Oriental Society
JBL	Journal of Biblical Literature
JBR	The Journal of Bible and Religion
JBQ	Jewish Bible Quarterly
JE	The Jewish Encyclopedia
JEOL	Jaarbericht Ex Oriente Lux
JETS	Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society
JNES	Journal of Near Eastern Studies
JPOS	Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society, The
JPS	Jewish Publication Society

JQR	Jewish Quarterly Review
JS	Journal for Semitics
JSS	Journal of Semitic Studies
JSem	Journal for Semitics
JSOT	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament
JTS	Journal of Theological Studies
KJV	King James Version
MDB	Mercer Dictionary of the Bible
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NBD	The New Bible Dictionary
NEA	Near Eastern Archaeology
NIV	New International Version
NKJV	New King James Version
NLT	New Living Translation
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NUBD	The New Unger's Bible Dictionary
OBC	The Oxford Bible Commentary
OJB	Orthodox Jewish Bible
OTE	Old Testament Essays
PEF	Palestine Exploration Fund
PEQ	Palestine Exploration Quarterly
RB	Revue Biblique
RSV	Revised Standard Version
SAAB	State Archives of Assyria Bulletin
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SVT	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
TA	Tel Aviv
TDOT	Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament
TLOT	Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament
TOI	The Times of Israel
WTJ	The Westminster Theological Journal
VT	Vetus Testamentum
ZAW	Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft

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