

EL ELOHE ISRAEL?
AN INQUIRY INTO THE ALLEGED CANAANITE BACKGROUND
OF EARLY ISRAELITE RELIGION

by

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ABSTRACT

This study is an evaluation of whether or not the biblical account of Israelite religion before the time of Moses can be used as evidence for the worship of the Canaanite deity El among the early Israelites.

Chapter 1 gives a survey of the scholarly literature on this subject, discussing the various ways in which the relationship between Yahweh and El is conceived therein, highlighting some of the common evidence used to support the common historical reconstructions. Especially relevant is the evidence that concerns the use of the term **לֵךְ** in both the personal names and the divine titles of Genesis. This is followed by some comments on my goals, methods, presuppositions, limitations, and my thesis statement.

In order to assess the evidence of Genesis, it is necessary first to understand how Scripture presents that evidence; specifically, are we to envision a situation in which the name Yahweh was known and spoken along with the various El designations, or one in which God was not known as Yahweh, but was instead referred to primarily by these El designations instead? Thus, chapter 2 treats God's revelation to Moses in the burning bush, and chapter 3 treats his statement in Exod 6:3, in which God appears to claim to have been known by the patriarchs as El Shadday, rather than as Yahweh. Having examined the biblical explanation for the origins of the divine name, in chapter 4 I evaluate several proposals concerning the alleged worship of Yahweh prior to the worship of him among the Israelites. My conclusion from these three chapters is that the name Yahweh was not known prior to its revelation to Moses.

Having determined that the characters of Genesis would not have had knowledge of the name Yahweh, in chapter 5 I seek to give an account for why the name appears in the dialogue of Genesis. Finally, in chapter 6, an evaluation is given, both of the evidence from the biblical onomasticon prior to the exodus, as well as the various El compounds in Genesis, in order to arrive at an answer to the research question.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AANL	Atti della Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei
Akk.	Akkadian
ALHR	American Lectures on the History of Religions Series
<i>ARW</i>	<i>Archiv für Religionswissenschaft</i>
BAH	Bibliothèque archéologique et historique
BCBC	Believers Church Bible Commentary
BE	Babylonian Expedition of the University of Pennsylvania, Series A: Cuneiform Texts
BES	Brown Egyptological Studies
BWAT	Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten Testament
<i>CHLI</i>	<i>Corpus of Hieroglyphic Luwian Inscriptions</i>
CM	Cuneiform Monographs
<i>CTH</i>	Laroche, Emmanuel. <i>Catalogue des texts Hittites</i>
<i>CTM</i>	<i>Calwer Theologische Monographien</i>
<i>CWSSS</i>	<i>Corpus of West Semitic Stamp Seals.</i> Ed. Nahman Avigad.
DMOA	Documenta et Monumenta Orientis Antiqui
DN	Divine Name

<i>DULAT</i>	del Olmo Lete, Gregorio, and Joaquín Sanmartín. <i>A Dictionary of the Ugaritic Language in the Alphabetic Tradition</i> . Ed. and trans. Wilfred G. E. Watson. 2d ed.
ECC	Eerdman's Critical Commentary
ESV	English Standard Version
<i>IGLS</i>	<i>Inscriptions grecques et latines de la Syrie</i>
JPSTC	Jewish Publication Society Torah Commentary
<i>KRI</i>	Kitchen, Kenneth A. <i>Ramesside Inscriptions</i>
LAI	Library of Ancient Israel
LHBOTS	Library of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
LSAWS	Linguistic Studies in Ancient West Semitic
MAD	Materials for the Assyrian Dictionary
MRCS	Melton Research Center Series
MRS	Mission de Ras Shamra
NCBC	New Cambridge Bible Commentary
NET	New English Translation
<i>NKZ</i>	<i>Neue kirchliche Zeitschrift</i>
NLT	New Living Translation
PBS	Publications of the Babylonian Section, University Museum, University of Pennsylvania
<i>PNAE</i>	Parpola, Simo, Karen Radner, and Heather D. Baker (eds.). <i>The Prosopography of the Neo-Assyrian Empire</i>
RSO	Ras Shamra-Ougarit
<i>Shn</i>	<i>Shnaton</i>

SOTBT	Studies in Old Testament Biblical Theology
StudP	Studia Pohl
THOTC	The Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary
UCOP	University of Cambridge Oriental Publications
UISK	Untersuchungen zur indogermanischen Sprach und Kulturwissenschaft
WF	Deimel, Anton. <i>Wirtschaftstexte aus Fara, in Umschrift herausgegeben und bearbeitet</i>
WVDOG	Wissenschaftliche Veröffentlichung der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Historical Reconstruction and the Role of El in the Biblical Account of Pre-Mosaic Israelite Religion

Much of the current discussion on early Israelite religion has its roots in the groundbreaking work of Albrecht Alt, published in 1929 as *Der Gott der Väter*,¹ in which Alt sought to show that the early nomadic Israelite tribes worshipped several distinct deities, each bearing the name of a patriarchal ancestor: “The God of Abraham,” “the Fear of Isaac,” and “the Mighty One of Jacob.” These tribes brought their gods into the land of Canaan, and were exposed to the worship of different gods at local sanctuaries within Canaan. According to Alt, the gods of these sanctuaries (the “’Ēlîm”) were tied to respective locales, whereas the otherwise anonymous ancestral gods, the “gods of the fathers,” were connected only to their tribal ancestors through promises made to them, and were therefore more suitable for nomadic groups. After time, these tribes melded together and fictitious genealogies and accounts of a single family history were developed in order to link their pasts together. In different ways, the Elohist and the Yahwist both indicate that they equate these gods of the fathers, attested to in their source material, with Israel’s national deity, Yahweh.²

¹Albrecht Alt, “The God of the Fathers,” in *Essays on Old Testament History and Religion* (trans. R. A. Wilson; Garden City: Doubleday, 1968), 3–86; trans. of *Der Gott der Väter* (BWAT 3.12; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1929), 32–38.

²Ibid., 28–31.

Alt's entire scenario is rather speculative, and so considerable stock is given to inscriptions attributed to Nabatean and Palmyrene tribes living between the first century B.C.E. and the fourth century C.E. as support.³ Here, he notes phrases such as *theos patrōos* and *theos Aumou*, which he claims reflect the frequent expression in Genesis, “the god of x’s father” (and its various forms). Supposedly, these were anonymous deities, known to migratory people groups for promises made to their ancestors.⁴ The extent to which Alt’s theory is dependent on these parallels should not be overlooked:

The inscriptions we have used make it impossible to doubt that the Israelite tradition of God of the Fathers presents us with a type of religion that was a living force among other Semitic tribes both in the desert and for centuries after their settlement; and this justifies us in concluding that the analogous Israelite tradition may likewise rest on historical facts in the nation’s early history.⁵

Although heavily criticized, Alt’s model has exerted a powerful influence over other historians of Israelite religion. Much of this was due to his work’s affinities with the American school associated with scholars such as Albright, Bright, Gordon, and Wright, which tended to affirm, to varying degrees, the essential historical truthfulness of the biblical storyline. According to Alt, the key promises of Genesis could all be regarded as historical via critical methodology.

Criticisms of Alt’s work have largely been directed against his use of the comparative literature mentioned above, which is virtually the sole line of evidence amassed

³Ibid., 38–58. Here Alt relies on the earlier work of Julius Euting, *Nabatäische Inschriften aus Arabien* (Berlin: Druck und Verlag von Georg Reimer, 1885). He considers the Nabateans to be the “successors . . . of the oldest form known to us of the worship of Yahweh” (8).

⁴Alt, 54.

⁵Ibid., 58.

in support of his otherwise highly speculative conjectural reconstruction of early Israelite history. There are several reasons for this criticism. First, the parallels are simply too late, stretching well into even the Roman era. In fact, the majority of the most significant inscriptions he cites date to after the second century C.E.⁶ To be fair, the extrabiblical data available to Alt was minuscule compared to that of subsequent generations. *Der Gott der Väter* was published scarcely a year later than the initial discovery of Ras Shamra, and the decipherment of its alphabetic script was not accomplished until 1931 by Virolleaud—and even then only imperfectly.⁷ Second, the portrayal of the early Israelites as strictly nomadic (i.e., uninfluenced by urbanism) has been questioned.⁸ Third, attestation to the expression, “god of x’s father,” can be found much earlier, where the deities referred to are not, in fact,

⁶Ibid., 47.

⁷This first full presentation of sign values was Charles Virolleaud, “Le déchiffrement des tablettes alphabétiques de Ras-Shamra,” *Syria* 12 (1931): 15–23. See André Caquot, Maurice Sznycer, and Andrée Herdner, *Mythes et légendes* (vol. 1 of *Textes ougaritiques*; LAPO 7; Paris: Cerf, 1974): 34–41, and Pierre Bordreuil and Dennis Pardee, *A Manual of Ugaritic* (LSAWS 3; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 3–6.

⁸Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 8–9. A prime example of how Bronze Age nomads had intimate ties with urban centers comes from the administration of Zimri-Lim at Mari (see Daniel E. Fleming, *Democracy’s Ancient Ancestors: Mari and Early Collective Governance* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004], 147–69).

anonymous.⁹ Fourth, Cross has raised serious doubts about the development of Nabatean religion posited by Alt.¹⁰

As can be seen in this brief review, Alt's work focused very little on the El¹¹ names of Genesis, and much of what he did say is based on his understanding of the word לֶאָן in the patriarchal narratives as an appellative,¹² a position entirely understandable in light of the evidence available to him. With the discovery of the texts found at Ras Shamra, however, scholars very quickly realized that El, whose existence as an independent deity had already been known for some time, was the head of the Ugaritic pantheon, and that the West Semitic religion of Ugarit is a close analogue to that of Palestine ("Canaan"). Thus, the possibility was opened up that some of the references to לֶאָן in the Hebrew Bible may have been somehow related to this proper name,¹³ even more so than had been realized by

⁹ Julius Lewy ("Les textes paléo-assyriens et l'Ancien Testament," *RHR* 110 [1934]: 29–65) names *Ilabrat il abīni*, and other similar titles, in texts dating to the Old Assyrian period. Also, in one of the inscriptions from Zençirli, Bar-Rākib refers to his god, Rākib-il, as 'lhy byt 'by (*KAI* 217:3). For a discussion and many other examples, see Cross, 9–11; J. Philip Hyatt, "Yahweh as 'The God of My Father,'" *VT* 5 (1955): 131–32; Rainer Albertz, *From the Beginnings to the End of the Monarchy* (vol. 1 of *A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period*; trans. J. Bowden; OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 28, 250, n. 19; Richard S. Hess, *Israelite Religions: An Archaeological and Biblical Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 148. It should be noted that Alt acknowledges some of these counter-examples, particularly those cited by Lewy (Alt, 40 n. 77).

¹⁰ Cross, 7–8.

¹¹ Throughout this study, I will use a simple English transliteration of common Hebrew terms, except for those places in which specific reference is being made to usage in a particular Semitic language. For example, לֶאָן /ilu shall be El, יהוָה/yhwh shall be Yahweh, and בָּעֵל/ba 'al/ba 'lu shall be Baal. This likewise goes for several of the El compound names (e.g., El Roi, El Shadday).

¹² Alt, 10–11.

¹³ The existence of *il* as a proper name is known primarily from Old Semitic personal names. J. J. M. Roberts (*The Earliest Semitic Pantheon: A Study of the Semitic Deities Attested in Mesopotamia before Ur III* [Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972], 31–35) points out names such as *Iš-lul-II* (WF 38, I 2; 72, vi 7) and *Iš-tup-II* (CT 32, 8, bottom iii 2; Ignace J. Gelb, *Glossary of Old Akkadian* [MAD 3;

previous generations of scholars.¹⁴ Moreover, the apparent conflict between El and the younger storm deity Baal in the Ugaritic texts resembles in many ways the struggle between Yahwism and Baal worship in Israel.¹⁵

This realization has led many scholars to equate the God of the early Israelites with the Canaanite deity El. Aside from a general awareness of El as a prominent deity in West Semitic pantheons, several other arguments are typically used to support the existence of El worship in Israel. First, whereas the Hebrew Bible is very outspoken in its condemnation of foreign deities, particularly Baal and Asherah, it is a curious fact that any polemic against El is entirely absent.¹⁶ Many times throughout the Hebrew Bible, ⲫ is even simply assumed to be a surrogate for Yahweh. Second, there are many places throughout the Bible where imagery, titles, functions, and terminology that are associated with El,

Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957], 291)—verbal-sentence names in which the absence of a case ending strongly suggests the presence of a proper name. See also Cross, 13–15 and Ignace J. Gelb, *Old Akkadian Writing and Grammar* (2d ed.; MAD 2; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), 6.

¹⁴ Julius Wellhausen, writing in the late nineteenth century, opined, “No essential distinction was felt to exist between Jehovah and El, and more than between Asshur and El; Jehovah was only a special name of El which had become current within a powerful circle, and which on that account was all the more fitted to become the designation of a national god” (*Prolegomena to the History of Israel* [New York: Meridian Books, 1957], 433 n. 1; repr. of *Prolegomena to the History of Israel* [trans. J. Sutherland Black and Allan Menzies, with preface by W. Robertson Smith; Edinburgh: Adam & Charles Black, 1885]; trans. of *Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels* [2d ed.; Berlin: G. Reimer, 1883]).

¹⁵ For a survey of this paradigm shift in the history of Israelite religion, see Thomas Edward McComiskey, “The Religion of the Patriarchs: An Analysis of the God of the Fathers by Albrecht Alt,” in *The Law and the Prophets: Old Testament Studies Prepared in Honor of O. T. Allis* (ed. John H. Skilton; Nutley, N. J.: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1974), 195–206, esp. 195–98.

¹⁶ Otto Eissfeldt, “El and Yahweh,” *JSS* 1 (1956): 26; Patrick D. Miller, *The Religion of Ancient Israel* (LAI; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 2–3; John Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan* (JSOTSup 265; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 14–15.

particularly at Ugarit, are applied to Yahweh (e.g., Isaiah 14; Ezekiel 28; Daniel 7).¹⁷ This includes bull imagery which, while routinely condemned in the Bible (Exod 32; 1 Kgs, 12:25–33), is commonly associated with El elsewhere.¹⁸ Yahweh's role as an old and wise creator deity, described as a compassionate father and dwelling in a tent shrine, is similar to descriptions of El in texts from Ugarit.¹⁹ Further, Yahweh's granting of progeny to the patriarchs in accordance with his promises to them is somewhat reminiscent of El's dealings with Keret and Aqhat.²⁰ Like El, Yahweh oversees a heavenly court, the members of which are referred to as sons of El (בְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים) (Gen 6:2, 4; Job 1:6; 2:2), (Deut 32:8 [LXX]; Job 38:7), sons of Zion (בְּנֵי צִוְּן) (Ps 82:6), and sons of God (בְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים), but never as the “sons of Yahweh.”²¹ Fourth, there are some places in the Hebrew Bible in which El supposedly appears as a distinct deity, and even may be regarded as superior to Yahweh (Deut 32:8–9; Psalm 82). Most relevant for our study, however, are the various El titles used for God throughout Genesis (El Elyon, El Roi, El Shadday, El Olam, El Beth-El, El Elohe Israel). Generally, it is agreed upon that at least some of these are vestiges of early El worship in

¹⁷ On Daniel 7, see John A. Emerton, “The Origin of the Son of Man Imagery,” *JTS* 9 (1958): 225–42; John Day, *God’s Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea: Echoes of a Canaanite Myth in the Old Testament* (UCOP 35; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 151–78.

¹⁸ See Patrick D. Miller, “Animal Names as Designations in Ugaritic and Hebrew,” *UF* 11 (1979): 177–86; Mark S. Smith, *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel* (2d. ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 49–50. Alt (33) called this “the mania amongst modern scholars for seeing bulls everywhere”!

¹⁹ See Day, 17–34; Hess, 97–98. For El’s old age, see *KTU* 1.3:V:2, 24–25; 1.4:IV:24; cf. Yahweh in Job 36:26; Ps 102:25; Dan 7:9. For El’s wisdom, see *KTU* 1.4:V:65; cf. Yahweh in Eze 28:2–5.

²⁰ Day, 16; Claus Westermann, *The Promises to the Fathers* (trans. David E. Green; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 165–84.

²¹ Day, 24. Other texts in which Yahweh’s heavenly court is likely present include Gen 1:26; 3:22; 11:7; 1 Kgs 22:19–22; Job 15:7–8; Pss 82:1; 89:6–8; Isa 24:21; 40:3; Jer 23:18, 22; Dan 4:17; 7:10, 21, 25, 27; 8:10–13; Zech 1:10–11; 14:5

Israel. Because **לֵאָן** can also function as a common noun, later, more monotheistic generations could claim these titles as mere epithets of their national deity Yahweh. It also seems to be the case that the combined testimony of Exodus 3 and 6 draws a distinction between pre- and post-Mosaic Israelite religion, which is also confirmed by the Israelite personal names preserved in the Hebrew Bible up through the exodus, in which **לֵאָן** dominates as the most common theophoric element, while Yahwistic theophoric names are lacking entirely.

Although the idea that El and Yahweh are somehow connected is common, specific models as to how and why this happened vary from scholar to scholar. The first truly substantial treatment of this subject was made by Eissfeldt.²² Pointing to passages such as Deuteronomy 32 and Psalm 82, he seeks to explain why “the Old Testament . . . does not know anything of a tension between Yahweh and El, and shows distinct traces of the thought that Yahweh at first acknowledged El’s authority and later appropriated this more and more and thus took El’s place.”²³ Eissfeldt sees the gods of Israel’s ancestors as anonymous gods of the fathers, along the lines of Alt’s central thesis, and contends that these ancestors became worshippers of El after their entry into Canaan, as can be seen in the patriarchs’ veneration of gods such as El Elyon, El Roi, El Olam, and El Beth-El.²⁴ He writes, “We thus see that Genesis retained more or less distinct memories that the pre-Mosaic Hebrews, or at least certain groups of them, were connected with the god El who was attached to several shrines in Canaan.” The “Yahweh cult,” which entered Canaan among the last major

²²Eissfeldt, 25–37.

²³Ibid., 30.

²⁴Ibid., 30–34.

migratory groups which comprised Israel, rose to prominence, assimilated the older El cults into its own religious formulation, and eventually condemned the older “father gods.”²⁵

De Vaux concurs with much of Alt’s reconstruction, yet augments it in light of newer theories regarding the relationship between Yahweh and El. According to him:

Each group forming part of the people of Israel had its own special traditions and above all its own ancestor, whose story was told and who was remembered in the group’s cult of the “god of the father.” Several of these groups later became united and three leading “patriarchal” figures emerged from this early multiplicity of ancestors—Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.²⁶

As with Alt, for de Vaux, the gods of the fathers were nomadic deities who made promises to the patriarchs. Once the tribes had settled in Canaan, a syncretism began to take place in which the gods of the fathers were merged with El. This early El worship was a religion of settled people, and El tended not to intervene in human history.²⁷ Speaking of the various sanctuaries at which the patriarchs worshipped, he writes, “They were really early Canaanite sanctuaries where the patriarchs discovered the cult of the great god El practiced in . . . various forms.”²⁸

Albertz regards El Elyon, El Beth-El, and El Olam as “local manifestations” of Canaanite El.²⁹ Also particularly suggestive of El worship is Jacob’s name for his altar in the vicinity of Shechem, El Elohe Israel (**אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל**, Gen 33:20). This, Albertz feels,

²⁵Ibid., 35–6.

²⁶Roland de Vaux, *The Early History of Israel* (trans. David Smith; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978), 167.

²⁷Ibid., 273–75, 281–82.

²⁸Ibid., 280.

²⁹Rainer Albertz, *From the Beginnings to the End of the Monarchy* (vol. 1 of *A History of Israelite Religion*; trans. John Bowden; OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 30.

provides “unavoidable” evidence that the element ™ in the name “Israel” is to be understood as a proper name, rather than as an appellative. He claims that it “points to a stage in its religious history in which El and not yet Yahweh was the god of the tribal alliance of Israel.”³⁰ The historical development envisioned by Albertz is one in which a rural, El-worshipping Canaanite tribal alliance was joined by an “exodus group” in the hill country of central Palestine, who introduced Yahweh worship in the area. This exodus group found a common bond with the Canaanite tribes in that both were marginalized, lower class factions who had been able to throw off the yoke of the oppressive upper levels of society, and were learning to live “as freely and unencumbered as possible.” However, because El, worshipped by these liberated peasants, was also the god of the Canaanite city-states from whom the peasants were liberated, El “was only suited to a limited degree for functioning as a symbol of opposition to domination apart from these states.” On the other hand, Yahweh was the perfect God for a confederation marked by egalitarian values and social structure, more so than El, who “remained involved in the divine world which was also worshipped in the Canaanite city states. . . . So we must assume that Yahweh was quickly taken over by the other tribes of the alliance as a welcome reinforcement of their world of religious symbols.”³¹

Smith’s central aim is to show that worship of El, Baal, and the Asherah³² alongside of Yahweh—practices which are considered syncretistic by many scholars—was a

³⁰Ibid., 76.

³¹Ibid., 76–77.

³²Smith tentatively suggests that Asherah was not worshipped during the monarchy as a goddess, but rather that her “symbol,” which “had earlier referred to the goddess by the same name . . . came to function by the time of the Kuntillet ‘Ajrud inscriptions as part of Yahweh’s symbolic repertoire” (Smith, xxxv).

normal, and even somewhat sanctioned, part of Israelite religion as early as the period of the Judges, and later under the guidance of the monarchy.³³ As for the relationship between Yahweh and El, Smith argues that “the original god of Israel was El.”³⁴ According to Smith, Yahweh, originally a southern warrior deity, appeared on the scene in Israel as a member of El’s pantheon. This, Smith claims, is supported by Deut 32:8–9, which supposedly envisions the “Most High” (עֶלְיוֹן) apportioning different nations to different deities, and that, among these, Yahweh received Israel. His theory is also heavily dependent upon Genesis 49, where he believes the mention of Yahweh in verse 18 and אֵל אָבִיךָ in verse 25 prove that the two deities were worshipped as distinct from one another.³⁵ Other texts of prime importance for Smith’s thesis are Exodus 15, Numbers 23–24, Judges 5, and Psalm 82. Eventually, Yahweh, who was identified with El during a period of “convergence” that took place in the period of the judges and the early monarchy, became a competitor with a fellow warrior god Baal, who also had belonged to El’s pantheon, but was seen as a threat to Yahweh, especially following attempts by Ahab and Jezebel to elevate him.³⁶ It is important to note that Smith, in contrast to scholars like Cross and de Moor, does not envision Yahweh as having

³³ Smith, 7, 9–11, 57. A similar view is expressed by Herbert Niehr, who states, “What the HB denounces in cultic matters was, in fact, the religious practice in Judah and Israel from pre-exilic to postexilic times and not apostasy in favor of a pagan Canaanite religion that never existed in this manner” (“The Rise of YHWH in Judahite and Israelite Religion: Methodological and Religio-Historical Aspects,” in *The Triumph of Elohim: From Yahwisms to Judaisms* [ed. Diana Vikander Edelman; Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1995], 51).

³⁴ Smith, 32.

³⁵ Ibid., 32, 52.

³⁶ Ibid., 8, 54–57, 65–107.

originally been a manifestation of El; Yahweh was originally distinct, and it was only after he rose in prominence that he assumed El's functions and titles.³⁷

Like Smith, Day sees El and Yahweh as having been initially distinct. In support of this, he notes Yahweh's "fierce as well as [his] kind side," as well as Yahweh's storm theophany, neither of which are consistent with El's portrait elsewhere.³⁸ Rather, El's traits as a supreme, wise, creator deity made him "wholly fit to be equated with Yahweh," while Baal's descent in the underworld made him unfit for such an honor.³⁹ As for the El names in Genesis, Day writes:

Although no one can today maintain that the patriarchal narratives are historical accounts, there are grounds for believing that their depiction of an El religion does at least in part reflect something of pre-monarchical religion, however much it has been overlaid by later accretions.⁴⁰

Hess, in his masterful survey of Israelite religion unfortunately does not devote a specific section to the relationship between Yahweh and El, but his opinions on the matter can be found throughout. He concurs with Day that El and Yahweh should be

³⁷ Mark S. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel's Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 54–55, 59–61. In this way, Eissfeldt's position can be classified alongside of Smith's, as can that of Albertz and Tryggve N. D. Mettinger, "The Elusive Essence: YHWH, El, and Baal and the Distinctiveness of Israelite Faith," in *Die Hebräische Bibel und ihre zweifache Nachgeschichte: Festschrift für Rolf Rendtorff zum 65. Geburstag* (ed. Erhard Blum, Christian Macholz, and Ekkehard W. Stegemann; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1990), 393–417.

³⁸ Day, 13–14. Day notes also the work of F. Løkkegaard, "A Plea for El, the Bull, and other Ugaritic Miscellanies," in *Studiea Orientalia Ioanni Pedersen septuagenario dicta* (ed. F. F. Hvidberg; Copenhagen: E. Munksgaard, 1953), 219–35, and dismisses Miller's contention that El is warlike in Philo of Byblos as being too dependent on late traditions (see Patrick D. Miller, "El the Warrior," *HTR* 60 [1967]: 411–33).

³⁹ Day, 15.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 16.

regarded as distinct deities who later became “amalgamated,” basing this largely on character traits shared between the two.⁴¹

All of the aforementioned scholars hold positions that are similar in that Yahweh and El are seen as having originally been distinct. Frank Moore Cross, by way of contrast, is perhaps the leading voice among those who envision Yahweh as having originally been identical with El. In his very influential work, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, Cross argues that the name Yahweh developed from one of El’s liturgical titles (*’el zū yahwī ḥ̄saba ’ōt*). The two eventually split “in the radical differentiation of [El’s] cultus in the Proto-Israelite league.”⁴² As for his treatment of the El compounds in Genesis, Cross is heavily influenced by his firm conviction that Hebrew prohibits proper names from standing in the construct state. Since the second element in several of these compounds (El Olam, El Shadday, El Beth-El) is often a noun, Cross is forced to admit that it is often ambiguous as to which ones should be construed as containing the proper name of El.⁴³ His arguments are often complex, making heavy use of comparative data, and will be detailed in the following chapters. For now, it must be enough to say that he is confident that El Olam, אֵל קָנִיה אֶרְצָה, El Elohe Israel, and El-Berith (Judg 9:46) “are epithets of ’Ēl preserved in Patriarchal

⁴¹Hess, 75, 97–98.

⁴²Cross, 71. Frank Moore Cross’ views on this were expressed in an earlier article by his, entitled, “Yahweh and the God of the Patriarchs,” *HTR* 55 (1962): 225–59. For the sake of convenience, I will refer to his later work, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*. A more detailed analysis of this reconstruction will be given in chapter 2.

⁴³Cross, *Canaanite Myth*, 49–50. One of Cross’ common moves is to regard names in which נָא stands as the *nomen regens* as containing an elided element (e.g., אֵל עַזְלָם < *’el dū ’olām*).

tradition,” and he is fairly confident that the same is true of El Elyon, El Beth-El, and El Shadday.⁴⁴

De Moor argues that the Israelites worshipped El while in Egypt, and, like Cross, that the name Yahweh is a shortened version of *yhw* ‘l. During what de Moor calls a “crisis of polytheism,” supposedly occurring in Egypt, Mesopotamia, and in Syria at Ugarit during the Late Bronze Age, *yhw* ‘l became accepted among the early Israelites as the incomparable head of the gods.⁴⁵ Because El began to be viewed as a weak deity, “on the brink of succumbing to Baal,” Yahweh’s identity became separated from El’s, and he assumed his titles and functions, as well as many which were ascribed to Baal.⁴⁶

Miller follows Cross’ proposal for the origin of Yahweh’s name more closely than de Moor. Although he is unsure as to how El and Yahweh eventually diverged, he claims there is evidence for this identification, particularly in the Priestly stratum of the Pentateuch (e.g., Exod 6:3) and in the El compounds found in Genesis.⁴⁷

⁴⁴Ibid., 60.

⁴⁵Johannes C. de Moor, *The Rise of Yahwism: The Roots of Israelite Monotheism* (rev. and enl. ed.; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1997), 41–102. This polytheistic crisis, according to de Moor, is observable in Akhenaten’s religious reforms in Egypt, the elevation of Marduk to the head of the Babylonian pantheon, and the virtual stalemate between Baal and El at Ugarit. William H. C. Propp acknowledges the possibility that Akhenaten’s religion influenced that of Israel (“Monotheism and ‘Moses’: The Problem of Early Israelite Religion,” *UF* 31 [1999]: 539–74). He notes many other scholars who do the same (541–42, nn. 23–4). Anson F. Rainey is heavily critical of de Moor’s work, and calls his analysis of these periods “meaningless oversimplifications” (review of Johannes C. de Moor, *The Rise of Yahwism: The Roots of Israelite Monotheism*, *JNES* 60 [2001]: 148).

⁴⁶De Moor, 312–13, 333–34, 361–62. Perhaps one of the most speculative aspects of this section of de Moor’s work is his contention that *yhw* ‘l was a deified ancestor of the early Israelite tribes.

⁴⁷Miller, *Religion*, 2–3, 24–25.

One very noteworthy exception to the trend of seeing the El names in Genesis as evidence of early pre-Yahwistic El worship is the brief work by Van Seters.⁴⁸ As part of his broader project to date the JE material after Deuteronomy and the prophets, his treatment of patriarchal religion is an attempt to show that these El titles, far from being vestiges of old Canaanite religion, actually fit well with the literary practice of Deutero-Isaiah, who uses the term 'אֵל frequently as possessing “more universal application,” having “become a general term for deity for a rather wide range of Semitic languages and dialects.” At the same time, “it also retained in some sense the meaning of supreme deity” (e.g., Isa 43:12; 45:22; 46:9).⁴⁹ This use of 'אֵל is not offered by Van Seters as primary evidence for his typically late dating of Genesis; instead, he seeks to show that it fits comfortably in the cultural milieu of the exile.

This brief and limited survey of scholarly positions shows that it is common among historians of Israelite religion to consider the early Israelites as having been worshippers of El, and to regard the presence of 'אֵל in both compound names and personal names in Genesis as evidence for this hypothesis. Others who hold this position will also be discussed in the following chapters. It is no exaggeration to call this situation a scholarly consensus.

The prevalence of polytheism in ancient Israelite religion is well-established, both in the pages of the Hebrew Bible itself, as well as by artifactual and epigraphic evidence from Iron Age Palestine.⁵⁰ Thus, it is both probable and uncontroversial that the Israelites

⁴⁸ John Van Seters, “The Religion of the Patriarchs in Genesis,” *Bib* 61 (1980): 220–33.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 230.

⁵⁰ I use “polytheism” simply as a convenient label for the veneration of multiple deities, although I am aware of the dissatisfaction many scholars have voiced with respect to this term. It is not my

would have worshipped the Canaanite deity El, although evidence for a specific cult of El is somewhat lacking. It is also very clear that Yahweh assumed many roles, functions, characterizations, titles, and symbols that originally belonged to other deities, including El. All of this is entirely consistent with the portraits of God that are painted in the Hebrew Bible. Though this may at times be troubling for the modern reader, it does not cause any real conflict with the biblical testimony.

Tension does arise, however, when scholars use this evidence to support inferences and hypothetical historical reconstructions that diverge significantly from what we find in the Bible. One such area of tension is caused by the various theories concerning the relationship between Yahweh and El. To be sure, there is much about Israelite religion that the Bible does not tell us, and it is of course possible that Yahweh was worshipped by different peoples and in different ways than we find described in the Pentateuch. But several of the theories imply situations that are difficult to reconcile with the biblical data, to say the least. What are we to make, for instance, of the idea that Yahweh was at one time a member of El's pantheon—powerful, yet subservient and subject to the whims and decrees of another? What are the implications of an originally polytheistic origin of Yahweh for later biblical monotheism? Or, consider those theories in which Yahweh was originally an El figure; while much of El's aged, wise, and compassionate character is certainly befitting of Yahweh, can the same be said of his drunkenness, or his raging libido? Lastly, to ask a question that is more relevant for this study, if we claim that the god of the early, pre-Mosaic

desire, however, to enter into the debate over which “-ism” (or “-atry”) best describes the various stages of religious development in ancient Israel.

Israelites was El, can we rest content that the God of the exodus was essentially fulfilling promises made by another?

We must, at every turn, be compelled by a desire to know the truth, and not by an impulse to preserve a particular conservative (or liberal) understanding of Israelite religion. It is my hope that this study will be marked much more by the former, than by the latter. History has shown that rigid conformity to the status quo of scholarly consensus is not conducive to truth, but neither is the desire to defend traditions in the face of counter evidence. The only way forward is the constant questioning of both dangerous impulses.

Goals and Methods of This Study

The primary question that this study will seek to answer is as follows: Does the biblical account of pre-Mosaic Israelite religion provide evidence that Canaanite El was worshipped among the Israelites or not? Although the majority of historians of Israelite religion would answer this question in the affirmative, my aim is to question this consensus.

Of course, it is the transparent and consistent testimony of the Pentateuch that the God of the patriarchs was identical with Yahweh; this is not in question. But, as we have seen, various features of the biblical text are often regarded as bearing witness to a stage in the development of Israelite religion that predates the religious views of the biblical authors. I concur that within the pages of Genesis and the early chapters of Exodus there is textual evidence that reveals the nature of pre-Yahwistic religion, yet I wish to challenge the ways in which this evidence is interpreted.

My inquiry into pre-Mosaic religion begins with two of Moses' encounters with God in the book of Exodus. This is logically the best starting point because it is here that we have the most transparent reflections on patriarchal religion from the perspective of those responsible for the transmission of Israel's traditions. With respect to the name and

identity of the God of those traditions, nowhere is this more obviously the case than in the exchanges between Moses and God in Exodus 3 and 6. The central issues will be whether or not Exodus 3 should be regarded as an initial revelation of the name Yahweh, and whether Exod 6:3 does in fact claim that the patriarchs were ignorant of the name Yahweh. This discussion is important because it is crucial to understand what the Hebrew Bible itself claims regarding the name of the God of Israel prior to the time of Moses.

These passages in Exodus are often the starting point for discussions of this sort because they profoundly impact how we read Genesis. It is important, for example, to determine whether there is an essential contradiction between Exodus and Genesis, or between different literary sources, regarding the antiquity of the divine name. Or, if it is determined that the pre-Mosaic Israelites were indeed privy to the name Yahweh, then the discussion would essentially revolve around whether the biblical testimony should be regarded as trustworthy. Then, however, we would have to account for the seemingly contradictory evidence in the onomasticon of Genesis, wherein we find no evidence of the Yawhistic theophoric element prior to the time of Moses. If, on the other hand, we conclude that Exodus denies that the patriarchs knew God as Yahweh, we are left with a different set of questions, not the least of which is why we find reference to Yahweh in Genesis.

I will argue that the testimony of Exodus 3 and 6 is that the patriarchs did not know the name Yahweh. I will also show that there is no compelling extra-biblical evidence for the existence of the name prior to its presence in the Mesha Stela. Having concluded that there is no reason to believe that the name Yahweh was known prior to its use among the Israelites, and that this was essentially the conviction of the biblical author(s), I will proceed to explain why it is found in the dialogue of Genesis, which is an important issue raised by my conclusions regarding Exodus and the extra-biblical evidence (or lack thereof).

Having laid the necessary groundwork for understanding the biblical testimony, the final chapter will be a comprehensive analysis of the word **לֵךְ** in Genesis, as it is found in Israelite personal names, and as it appears in compound designations for God, a sacred site, and, in one instance, an altar (Gen 33:20). This will comprise the heart of this study, since it will be the section that most directly relates to data employed in the common reconstructions of Israel’s religious history. The essential issue here will be whether to regard **לֵךְ** as a personal divine name or as a common noun, simply denoting “god.” Much attention will also be given to the broader ancient Near Eastern religious context that at times sheds light on these titles, but has often been used to support conclusions that are simply unwarranted.

Presuppositions

Although I concur with the basic thesis of the various diachronic methods (i.e., source, form, and traditio-historical criticism)—that there is likely a literary and oral prehistory behind the Pentateuch—I am skeptical of the claims of most source critics to be able to pinpoint the precise divisions of these sources within the text, the date of their composition and various redactional layers, and the precise historical circumstances from which they arose. Therefore, I do not make use of these methods in this study, and interact with them only when they are particularly relevant to the topic at hand.

I do not restrict the historical context of the Pentateuch to the first millennium B.C.E. Nor do I presuppose that its traditions are simply retrojections of later Israelite beliefs and stories. Rather, I affirm that it may contain traditions much older and accurate than is often assumed, the authenticity of which can only be evaluated by examining each case.

Further, I concur with Sternberg's observation, that biblical narrative is "regulated by a set of three principles: ideological, historiographic, and aesthetic."⁵¹ It is unacceptable to argue that the presence of any of these necessarily excludes another. Nevertheless, a commitment to the historicity of the biblical text under examination is not a necessary precondition for any of the arguments used in this study. Hopefully, then, individuals both inside and outside of the evangelical tradition within which I write will be able to benefit from the fruits of my labor.

Limitations

Most of the limitations of this study stem from the fact that the focus, biblically speaking, will be almost exclusively on Genesis and Exodus 3 and 6. This means that, if it is concluded that the evidence from these texts does not support El worship among the early Israelites, it may be the case that such evidence can be found elsewhere. There are many other biblical texts that are both relevant and important for determining what role, if any, El featured in early Israelite religion. Detailed exegesis of any number of these is beyond the scope of this study.

The subject matter is obviously closely related to theories regarding early Israelite history which give little to no historical value to the Bible's picture of the origins of the Israelite people, especially during the patriarchal era (ca. 2160–1800 B.C.E.). This study is devoted towards gaining an understanding of the biblical text. Whether or not my findings are compatible with a particular scholar's model of Israelite origins is not a primary concern.

⁵¹ Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 41.

Finally, many have drawn conclusions from the details given in Genesis describing the practice of patriarchal religion, such as marriage customs, incorporation of trees in worship, lack of reference to Baalism, lack of reference to the priesthood, which cities are frequented, etc. Such subjects will not be treated in this thesis. Nor is the historicity of the patriarchal narratives of primary concern.

Thesis

The central contention of this study is as follows: The biblical account of pre-Mosaic Israelite religion does not provide evidence that Canaanite El was worshipped among the Israelites. Exodus 3 and 6 are best understood as claiming that the name Yahweh was not known prior to the time of Moses. The appearance of this name in the dialogue of Genesis does not conflict with this, since it can be explained as a theological, rather than a historical, statement by the Yahwistic author. The prominence of Elohistic personal names among the Israelites in the pre-Mosaic era, coupled with the absence of Yahwistic names, strongly supports this conclusion. With the exceptions of El Elyon, creator of heaven and earth (Gen 14:19, 22), and El Elohe Israel (33:20), none of the El compounds in Genesis can convincingly be shown as having originally applied to Canaanite El. Further, with respect to the two exceptions, the first is used by a Canaanite priest and is employed by Abraham as an accurate description of his own God; the second, although possibly a statement affirming worship of El in Jacob's family, can just as easily be understood as an explicative apposition: "God—namely the God of Israel." Thus, if evidence for El worship in Israel is to be found in the Hebrew Bible, it must be sought outside of the pages of Genesis.

CHAPTER 2

GOD'S REVELATION IN A BURNING BUSH

Many important questions are both answered and raised by Moses' encounter with God in the burning bush theophany of Exodus 3, most of which cannot be addressed here. My concern is with the claim of this passage regarding the antiquity of the name Yahweh, and whether it predates the time of Moses.

Questions immediately arise as to whether there is anything to debate in this respect. After all, there is clearly a *prima facie* impression, both here and in chapter 6, that the name is being revealed for the first time. But the long history of scholarship on these two chapters has shown that this cannot simply be assumed, for if it is, several issues crop up for which there are no easy solutions. For example, the question arises as to why a name that nobody would have known can function as a “password” for Moses when addressing the disbelief of the elders of Israel, and as a confirmation that it was indeed the God of their fathers who was calling them out of Egypt. And of course there is the issue of why, if God had not revealed his name prior to the time of Moses, we find it on the lips of several characters in the pages of Genesis.

According to Exodus, Moses' initial encounter with God was as an old man, having fled Egypt at the age of forty and then having served his Midianite father-in-law as a shepherd for another forty years. While leading his flock “to the west of the wilderness, he

came to the mountain of God, Horeb,” and, we are told, “The angel of Yahweh appeared to him in a flame of fire, from the midst of a bush” (Exod 3:1–2).¹ In this passage, God identifies himself as “the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” (Exod 3:6)—a designation Moses apparently understands. God then commissions Moses to be his agent to bring the Hebrews out of Egypt and into the promised land.

Moses’ First Question

Moses’ response to God represents what some authors have considered a type-scene, wherein God’s chosen servant protests the divine appointment, as is evident in the call narratives of Gideon (Judg 6:11–18), Saul (1 Sam 9:1–10:16), and Jeremiah (Jer 1:4–19). Standard elements in such exchanges include the statement of the commission, the recipient’s protest (pointing out personal shortcomings), a divine promise, and the giving of a sign. The call of Moses fits this pattern, and his protests are numerous (Exod 3:11, 13; 4:1; 4:10; 4:13).² Particularly, it is the first two of these protests that are relevant to this study.

Moses’ first objection in verse 11 is a question regarding his own inadequacy: “Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the Israelites out of Egypt?” Surprisingly, God’s answer has little to do with Moses, but is rather a statement about God

¹For רַחֲמָנָה meaning “west,” see Deut 11:30; Judg 18:12; Isa 9:12; Eze 48:1.

²Tryggve N. D. Mettinger, *In Search of God: The Meaning and Message of the Everlasting Names* (trans. F. H. Cryer; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 22; R. W. L. Moberly, *The Old Testament of the Old Testament: Patriarchal Narratives and Mosaic Yahwism* (OBT; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 14. See also the more detailed treatment of the theophany form in Julian Morgenstern, “Biblical Theophanies,” ZA 25 (1911): 139–93 and “Biblical Theophanies,” ZA 28 (1913): 15–60, as well as in John Kenneth Kuntz, *The Self-Revelation of God* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1965), 73–102 and Jeffrey Jay Niehaus, *God at Sinai: Covenant and Theophany in the Bible and Ancient Near East* (SOTBT; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 30–42.

himself: “Surely I will be with you (**כִּי־אַהֲרֹן עַמְּךָ**)” (Exod 3:12). Although God also gives Moses a sign (i.e., “you will serve me on this mountain”), it is this initial statement which is of interest to us. The words, “I will be with you,” recall several statements made either by God to the patriarchs or by the narrator concerning their nearness to him (Gen 26:3, 24; 28:15, 20; 31:3, 5; 35:3; 39:2, 3, 21, 23; 46:4; 48:21). Of these, Gen 26:3 and 31:3 both explicitly promise **כִּי־אַהֲרֹן עַמְּךָ**, and so are the closest to Exod 3:12, which, we shall see, is extremely relevant to God’s answer to Moses’ next objection.

Moses’ Second Question

Having received this assurance of divine presence, Moses goes on to issue a second question to God: “Behold, if I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ they will say to me, ‘What is his name?’ What will I tell them?” In seeking to understand whether or not the text is claiming that name Yahweh was known before the time of Moses, three questions arise: (1) Does this conversation presuppose that the Israelites already know the name of God? (2) In what way is God’s response to Moses’ question in verse 14 an answer to his question? and (3) if **אַהֲרֹן אֲשֶׁר אַהֲרֹן** is not an answer to Moses’ question, does “Yahweh” in verse 15 fulfill this function?

Presupposing Knowledge of the Name?

Initially, the picture that appears to be painted here is that Moses is unaware of God’s personal name. Neither character in this episode uses the divine name to refer to God before verse 15.³ Instead, Yahweh refers to himself as “the God of your father, the God

³ As will be shown below, **אַהֲרֹן אֲשֶׁר אַהֲרֹן** is not to be regarded as a divine name.

of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” (Exod 3:6), and Moses adopts an abbreviated form of this in his hypothetical conversation with the Israelites in verse 13. Further, the very fact that Moses needs to ask God his name suggests that Moses is indeed ignorant of it.

On the other hand, various peculiarities in the text challenge this view. God’s reference to himself as “the God of your father” in Exod 3:6, for instance, is in the singular, which has led some to suppose that there was a tradition of Yahwistic worship in Moses’ family.⁴ Yet it is difficult to see why it would follow that they also knew his personal name, even if Moses’ nuclear family did worship the God of the patriarchs.⁵ Further, “the God of your father” only sometimes refers unambiguously to one’s biological father (Gen 26:24; 28:13; 32:10; 46:1, 3; 1 Chr 28:9), and when it does, קָבָן is always in apposition to the personal name of the addressee’s father, with the exception of 1 Chr 28:9.⁶ In all other cases the phrase can plausibly be interpreted otherwise (Gen 31:5, 29, 42; 43:23; 49:25; 50:17; Exod 15:2; 18:4), as “father” in the singular can denote one’s grandfather (Gen 28:13) or

⁴ William H. C. Propp, *Exodus 1–18: A New Translation with Commentary* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 1998), 201. G. May (“The God of My Father—A Study of Patriarchal Religion,” *JBR* 9 [1941]: 155–58) and Roland de Vaux (*The Early History of Israel* [trans. David Smith; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978], 268–69) attempt to draw a diachronic distinction between the singular and plural use of “father” in this collocation. This is disputed successfully by J. Phillip Hyatt (“Yahweh as ‘The God of My Father,’” *VT* 5 [1955]: 133). The Samaritan Pentateuch reads *btyk* here, but this can be attributed to the tendency to harmonize and to “correct” the text, found both in the Samaritan Pentateuch and in pre-Samaritan texts (see Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* [2d rev. ed.; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001], 85–100, esp. 85–89). The LXX does the same in 1 Chr 28:9. Julian Morgenstern (“The Elohist Narrative in Exodus 3:1–15,” *AJS* 37 [1920–21]: 248), seeking to add evidence to the Kenite hypothesis (see below), emends the text to read, “your father-in-law,” but the commonality of the expression as it is found in the MT makes his view improbable and unnecessary.

⁵ Pace Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus* (NAC 2; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 115 n. 27.

⁶ Genesis 46:3 closely follows 46:1, and so this observation holds in this case.

other distant ancestors (Gen 10:21; Deut 26:5; Isa 51:2); note especially the wording of Gen 31:42, where Jacob refers to אֱלֹהִי אָבִי אֱלֹהִים וֶפְתַּח יִצְחָק. At the very most, we can say that Exod 3:6 *may* refer to Moses' biological father, but there is no significant data based on usage that compels us in one direction or another. Nor can Moses' inquiry into the name of God be attributed to his polytheistic background, for any question as to which deity was speaking to him would have presumably been answered by God's initial identification as the "God of your father" (v. 6).⁷

The strongest indication that the text may be presuming prior knowledge of the divine name is, as mentioned above, the issue of what Moses' question in verse 13 is seeking to accomplish. Moses is asking for God's name so that he can demonstrate to the Israelites that it was in fact the God of their forefathers who had appeared to him. But how would the disclosure of a name that was, until then, unknown, fulfill this purpose?⁸ It is important to note that this view presupposes a certain ignorance on the part of Moses that is difficult to justify if, as the biblical storyline states, he spent four decades in Egypt having contact with the Hebrews, and if the divine name was known among them. Further, there is no evidence to suggest that the name Yahweh functioned as a secret cult name for God, hidden from laypersons.⁹

It seems we have two options: either all (or the majority of) Israelites, including Moses, knew the divine name, or none knew it. So perhaps the hypothetical question is one in which Moses' identity as a true Israelite, who would surely know the name

⁷Pace Sigmund Mowinckel, "The Name of the God of Moses," *HUCA* 32 (1961): 122.

⁸Nahum M. Sarna, *Exodus* (JPSTC; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 18.

⁹This is offered as a solution in *Šemot Rabba*.

of his God, is being tested by other Israelites who do know the name.¹⁰ Andersen, whose argument is similar, asserts, “The success of [Moses’] mission depended on the use of the familiar name for validation by the Israelites,” and that Moses made the inquiry, not to attain knowledge of a name he did not know, but as a test of the deity, who had to prove to Moses that he was whom he had claimed to be.¹¹ But again, since we cannot assume that the name of God was in some sense secret, this seems to be a rather poor test. Moberly, who believes that the claim of the text *is* that the name was first revealed to Moses, sidesteps this issue entirely, claiming, “The practical difficulties Moses might encounter by using a previously unknown name of God are simply of no concern to the writer.”¹²

Many who concur, largely on these grounds, that the name must have been known prior to the conversation of Exodus 3, often argue that, by asking God his name, Moses is actually inquiring into the deeper nature of God.¹³ Throughout the Hebrew Bible, the expression, “to know the name of Yahweh,” almost always denotes more than mere knowledge of the divine name,¹⁴ as does the much more frequent expression, to “know that I

¹⁰ Christopher Seitz, “The Call of Moses and the ‘Revelation’ of the Divine Name: Source-Critical Logic and Its Legacy,” in *Theological Exegesis: Essays in Honor of Brevard S. Childs* (ed. Christopher Seitz and Kathryn Greene-McCreight; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 152.

¹¹ Francis I. Andersen, *The Sentence in Biblical Hebrew* (The Hague: Mouton, 1974), 102. Also representative of this position is Nahum M. Sarna (*Exploring Exodus: The Origins of Biblical Israel* [New York: Schocken, 1996], 51).

¹² Moberly, 65.

¹³ Sigmund Mowinckel, *The Two Sources of the Predeuteronomic Primeval History (JE) in Gen 1–11* (Oslo: Norske Videnskaps-Akademi, 1937), 55 and “Name,” 124–26. Mowinckel assigns this passage to J, and therefore uses the statement in Gen 4:26b as evidence for the meaning of this text. Brevard S. Childs, who believes that the name is newly-revealed in Exodus 3, holds this to be true as well (*The Book of Exodus* [Westminster: John Knox, 1974], 60).

¹⁴ The expression, פָּנָים יְהוָה, where the פָּנָים belongs to Yahweh, occurs six times, all of which indicate knowledge of God’s power or similar attributes. 1 Kgs 8:43/2 Chr 6:33 has “that all the peoples of the

am Yahweh.”¹⁵ For example, Jer 16:21 uses “power (lit. “hand”) and might” parallel to the “name of Yahweh”: אָזְדִּיעַם אֶת־יְדֵי וְאֶת־אֲבוֹרָתִי וַיַּדְעַ כִּי־שְׁמִי יְהוָה; the second colon is surely not a promise that these people will simply gain knowledge about the proper designation for God.

To know the name of Yahweh, then, is to experience his attributes, particularly his power, which is certainly something that fits the context of Exodus, in which the character of God has been called into question, given the plight of the Hebrews during their stay in Egypt. The hypothetical question envisioned in verse 13, therefore, is not necessarily a test of Moses, nor of God, for a secret name to which only a select few are privy, but rather expresses a desire to learn something profound about God. As Durham comments, “This question has little to do . . . with identity, just as Moses’ parallel question in v. 11 can have little to do with identity.” Instead, Moses is interested in how God can be “expected to deal with a host of powerful Egyptian deities against whom, across so many years, he has apparently won no victory for his people.”¹⁶ Whereas Moses’ first question,

earth might know your name, fearing you (לִירְאָה אֶת־ךָ).” Ps 9:11 says that those who know God’s name put their trust in him. In Ps 91:14, knowing the name of God is parallel to intense love (קָשָׁר) and vouchsafes the Lord’s protection. In Isa 52:6, the Israelites will come to know God’s name through judgment, and in Isa 64:1 God makes his name known by rending the heavens and causing the mountains to tremble. In Exod 33:12 and 17, God is said to know Moses “by name,” which is clearly an expression of a close personal relationship.

¹⁵This occurs over eighty times (Exod 6:7; 7:5; 7:17; 8:18; 10:2; 14:4, 18; 16:12; 29:46; Deut 29:6; 1 Kgs 20:13, 28; Isa 45:3; 49:23, 26; 60:16; Jer 24:7; Eze 5:13; 6:7, 10, 13, 14; 7:4, 9, 27; 11:10, 12; 12:15, 16, 20; 13:9, 14, 21, 23; 14:8; 15:7; 16:62; 17:21, 24; 20:20, 26, 38, 42, 44; 21:5; 22:16, 22; 23:49; 24:24, 27; 25:5, 7, 11, 17; 26:6; 28:22, 23, 24, 26; 29:6, 9, 16, 21; 30:8, 19, 25, 26; 32:15; 33:29; 34:27, 30; 35:4, 9; 35:12, 15; 36:11, 23, 36, 38; 37:6, 13, 14, 28; 38:23; 39:6, 7; 39:22, 28; Hos 2:22; Joel 2:27; 3:17). To this can be added similar expressions, such as “to know Yahweh,” etc.

¹⁶John I. Durham, *Exodus* (WBC 3; Waco: Word, 1987), 37–38; Moshe Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus* (MRCS II.1; New York: Behrman House, 1969), 80–81; Waldemar Janzen, *Exodus* (BCBC; Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 2000), 63–4. Some scholars, in support of this position, have claimed that מַה is not typically used in Hebrew to inquire of a person’s name, but that מַיּ is used for this purpose. Rather, it is argued, מַה is often used in questions inquiring of the meaning of things (Martin Buber, *Moses: The*

“Who am I?”, was a question about his own qualifications, his question to God is similar—he wants to know what this seemingly absentee God’s qualifications are (“what is his name?”).

Moberly ultimately rejects the idea that, although the patriarchs knew the name Yahweh, they did not know its full meaning, because, he believes, it entails that for them, the name would have been meaningless, “a mere sound without significance.”¹⁷ By way of reply, we might point out that this objection seems to assume that God’s disclosure of his name to Moses did reveal the actual meaning of his name and was not, in fact, a pun (as will be argued below). The connection between the name Yahweh and אֱלֹהִים עֶמֶק in verse 12 or with אֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר אֱלֹהִים in verse 14 is necessary, neither to the patriarchs, nor to subsequent generations of Hebrews (and Christians), for their use of the name. Divine names are often used by worshipers who are completely unaware of their etymological origin.¹⁸

Revelation and the Covenant [New York: Harper, 1958], 48; Raymond Abba, “The Divine Name Yahweh,” *JBL* 80 [1961]: 323; Barry J. Beitzel, “Exodus 3:14 and the Divine Name: A Case of Biblical Paronomasia,” *TJ* 1 [1980]: 15; Charles R. Gianotti, “The Meaning of the Divine Name YHWH,” *BSac* 142 [1985]: 39; Shawn D. Glisson, “Exodus 6:3 in Pentateuchal Criticism,” *ResQ* 28 [1985–86]: 138). This cannot be supported as decisive evidence, however, since the only question in the Hebrew Bible in which מֵי is used to inquire into a name is in Judg 13:17, and since examples actually do exist with מה functioning this way, with little indication that the question being asked is an inquiry into meaning (Gen 32:28; Prov 30:4; see also Gen 2:19). A telling counterexample to this theory is Exod 5:2, where Pharaoh asks, מַיְהוּ אֲשֶׁר אָשָׁם בְּכָלָנוּ. Here, he is not asking for a name, for he knows that Yahweh is “the God of Israel” (Exod 5:1). Rather, he is rather challenging his authority. It is best to conclude that there is not enough data to determine rules as to what kind of name questions each interrogative can ask. J. A. Motyer (*The Revelation of the Divine Name* [London: Tyndale, 1959], 17–20) undertakes a survey of various usages of the two interrogatives, and only cautiously endorses the view of Buber and those who concur with him. Yet Motyer’s investigation is not restricted to name questions.

¹⁷ Moberly, 65.

¹⁸ Rainer Albertz observes, “Divine names are often very much older than the religions which use them, and ideas about a god change under the covering of the same name. It is relatively improbable that Israel was still aware of the meaning of the name Yahweh; the speculative allusion in Exod 3.14 stands in almost complete isolation” (*From the Beginnings to the End of the Monarchy* [vol. 1 of *A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period*, trans. by J. Bowden; OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994], 50–51).

Moberly asserts that “it is simply not the case that the name is used in Genesis with any difference of meaning from that which it customarily has elsewhere in the Old Testament.”¹⁹ But he confuses the significance attached to the name at the time of the exodus with its actual meaning. Can we assume that because the patriarchs were unaware of the information given to Moses in Exodus 3 they could not have actually known the name?

However, if we grant that Moses’ question in verse 13 expresses a desire to learn about God’s attributes (which, as we have seen, is entirely justified), it is important to note that this does not require us to adopt a position as to whether God’s name was known prior to Exodus 3 or not. Although this kind of argument is usually put forward by those who wish to argue that the name was already known, it is also a valid observation if one assumes that it was not. For the former, it explains how Moses can ask a question to which he seemingly already knows the answer. For the latter, it shows how Moses’ hypothetical question can be meaningful if the name Yahweh is, in fact, new; why else would the Israelites ask a question to which they did not know the answer?²⁰ Therefore, we must conclude that nothing thus far necessarily implies whether the name was already known or not.

God’s Enigmatic Answer

If Moses’ question is not decisive, perhaps God’s answer is. This naturally leads us into the second key question: How is God’s reply in verse 14 an answer to Moses’ question? The expression, **נָאֹתֶה אֲשֶׁר נִתְּנָה**, is puzzling, primarily because **נִתְּנָה** is used in

¹⁹ Moberly, 66.

²⁰ Childs, 75.

connection with God's name in only one other place (Hos 1:9, **וְאַנְבֵּי לֹא־אֱלֹהִים לְכֶם**, aside from the end of verse 14 **אֱלֹהִים שָׁלַחֲנִי אֲלֵיכֶם**), and in Hosea it is probably an allusion to this text.²¹ We do not have the luxury of simply explaining away verse 14 as a later gloss, as has been proposed in the past.²² Exactly what, then, does this verse mean?

Some have concluded that God is evading the question.²³ After all, he is asked his name in the Hebrew Bible two other times, and in both instances he refuses to give an answer (Gen 32:30; Judg 13:17–18). Yet in verse 15, God does seem to disclose his name, declaring, **זֶה־שְׁמִי לְעַלְמָן זֶה זְכָרֵי לְדֹר דָר**. Therefore, this passage cannot be taken as a complete divine refusal.²⁴ Also, Exodus 3 is not a precise parallel to Genesis 32 and Judges 13, since it is not a direct request for the deity's name.

God's statement, **אֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר אֱלֹהִים**, is an example of the Semitic *idem per idem* construction.²⁵ According to Ogden:

²¹ See, for example, Hans Walter Wolff, *Hosea* (ed. Paul D. Hanson; trans. Gary Stansell; Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974), 21. Anthony and Lucy Phillips argue that Exod 3:14 is an interpolation based on the pun of Hos 1:9 ("The Origin of 'I AM' in Exodus 3.14," *JSOT* 78 [1998]: 81–84). Psalm 50:21 has also been suggested as a place where **אֱלֹהִים** is used as a name for God (Gianotti, 40; Charles D. Isbell, "The Divine Name **אֱלֹהִים** as a Symbol of Presence in Israelite Tradition," *HAR* 2 [1978]: 102–5). If this is the case, it too is an allusion to Exod 3:14 (Ronald Youngblood, "A New Occurrence of the Divine Name 'I AM,'" *JETS* 15 [1972]: 144–46).

²² J. Phillip Hyatt, *Exodus* (NCBC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 77–8; G. H. Parke-Taylor, *Yahweh: The Divine Name in the Bible* (Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1975), 46–7. The typical way this conclusion is justified is to claim that, since verse 14 seems to be an explanation of the name Yahweh in verse 15, it could not have been original. This, however, is a non-sequitur.

²³ Bernardus Dirk Eerdmans, "The Name Jahu," *OtSt* 5 (1948): 2–29; Walther Zimmerli, *Old Testament Theology in Outline* (trans. David Eliot Green; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1978), 20–21; Propst (224–26) sees the evasion as sarcastic. Janzen sees it as a "refusal only in part" (64–65).

²⁴ Hyatt, *Exodus*, 76; Parke-Taylor, 55; Mettinger, 34–35.

²⁵ Hyatt, *Exodus*, 76; Theodorus C. Vriezen, "'Ehje 'Ašer 'Ehje,'" in *Festschrift, Alfred Bertholet zum 80. Geburstag gewidmet von Kollegen und Freunden* (ed. Walter Baumgartner, Otto Eissfeldt,

The *idem per idem* consists of a verb in the principal clause repeated in the subordinate clause, and linked by some form of the so-called relative pronoun. The number and person of the subject in the main clause is [sic] mirrored in the attached relative clause. Furthermore, the repeated verb has the same sense in both clauses, thus distinguishing it from the paronomasia, in which similarities of form do not have the same sense.²⁶

A good example of this would be Exod 33:19, where God tells Moses, וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֲלֵיכָם וְרַחֲמָתִי אֲתָּא שֶׁר אֲתָּא (‘and I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion’). The similarity between Exod 3:14 and statements like this must not be ignored. This explains the redundancy of אהיה אשר אהיה, which is otherwise hard to explain in light of the stand-alone אהיה at the end of the verse.²⁷

Many scholars, failing to appreciate this, have sought to explain the expression in other ways that supposedly clarify what is being said. Such is the logic behind the LXX’s ἐγώ εἰμι οὗτος, which assumes a third person form for the second verb.²⁸ To my knowledge, this was first proposed in modern times by Haupt, who emended the text to read אהיה אשר אהיה, which is slightly different than the LXX in proposing an initial causative verb: “ich rufe ins Dasein was da ist.”²⁹ Scholars who follow Haupt tend to see in the divine

Karl Elliger, and Leonhard Rost; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1950), 498–512; David Noel Freedman, “The Name of the God of Moses,” *JBL* 79 (1960): 153; Bertil Albrektson, “On the Syntax of אהיה in Exodus 3:14,” in *Words and Meanings, Essays Presented to David Winton Thomas* (ed. Peter R. Ackroyd and Barnabas Lindars; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 26–28.

²⁶G. S. Ogden, “Idem per Idem: Its Use and Meaning,” *JSOT* 53 (1992): 107. Ogden notes fourteen examples of this in the Hebrew Bible (Gen 43:14; Exod 3:14; 4:13; 16:23; 33:19; Deut 1:46; 9:25; 1 Sam 23:13; 2 Sam 15:20; 1 Kgs 8:63; 2 Kgs 8:1; Eze 12:25; 36:20; Esth 4:16), as well as three disputed examples (Deut 29:15; 1 Sam 1:24; Zech 10:8). This phenomenon was first discussed by Paul de Lagarde, *Psalterium Luxta Hebraeos Hieronymi* (Leipzig: B. G. Teubneri, 1874), 156–58.

²⁷Gianotti, 40.

²⁸Theodotion and Aquila have ἔσομαι οὖς ἔσομαι.

²⁹P. Haupt, “Der Name Jahwe,” *OLZ* 12 (1909): 211–14; William F. Albright, “Contributions to Biblical Archaeology and Philology,” *JBL* 43 (1924): 370–78. Freedman, 154–55; William F. Albright,

name a claim that Yahweh is the creator. Von Rad popularized the objection to this school of thought, namely, that it is “far too abstract and *recherché* for so early a time,”³⁰ but this clearly relies on a speculative reconstruction of the development of Israelite theology. The true weakness of such positions is that they require alterations of the text in order to make it fit with preconceived theories of what is actually being claimed.³¹

However, while emending the text to render the verb a causative is an unconvincing solution, the name itself should probably be regarded as having originally been a causative. Most often, scholars that do so seek to derive the divine name from the causative of an earlier form of the verb *hyh* (“to be”), which would have contained *waw* as the second root radical (*hwh/hwy*; cf. Akk. *ewûm*). The vocalization, Yahweh, is confirmed by evidence from Amorite personal names preserving imperfect *yaqtil* forms of **hwy/hwy* (see below), Greek transcriptions of the divine name reading Ιαονε and Ιαβε, and, most importantly, Akkadian renderings of the Yahwistic theophoric in Neo-Assyrian as *ia-u/ú* or *iu-u/ú* at the beginning of names and *i-a-ú*, *-ia-u*, or *ia-a-u* in other positions, and in Neo-Babylonian as (^d)*ia-a-hu-ú*, *ia-(a-)hu-u*, *ia-ku-ú*, or *ia- -ú* at the beginning of names and *ia-a-*

From Stone Age to Christianity (2d. ed.; Garden City: Doubleday, 1957), 15–16; 259–61. According to Albright (“Contributions,” 375), Le Clerc (Clericus) was the first to propose a causative meaning for נָהַי as early as 1700.

³⁰ Mowinckel, “Name,” 127; Gerhard von Rad, *The Theology of Israel’s Historical Traditions* (vol. 1 of *Old Testament Theology*; trans. D. M. G. Stalker; Edinburg: Oliver and Boyd, 1962), 11; J. Phillip Hyatt (“The Origin of Mosaic Yahwism,” in *The Teacher’s Yoke: Studies in Memory of Henry Trantham* [ed. E. Jerry Vardaman and James Leo Garrett, Jr.; Waco: Baylor University Press, 1964], 86) concurs, proposing “he brings to pass that which happens” as preferable. Walther Eichrodt (*Theology of the Old Testament* [trans. J. A. Baker; 2 vols.; OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox, 1967], 1:189) rejects the approach of Albright and others, claiming that נָהַי is not used in Hebrew to denote creative activity.

³¹ Parke-Taylor, 61–2; Phillip J. Hyatt, “Was Yahweh Originally a Creator Deity?” *JBL* 86 (1967): 374–75.

ma, *ia-ma*, and *iá-a-ma* elsewhere.³² The earlier form of a medial-*y* verb with a *w* is preserved, for example, in the personal name תְּנִיָּה (Gen 3:20), and the verb יְהִי is also extant in the Hebrew Bible (Gen 27:29; Isa 16:4; Neh 6:6; Eccl 2:22).³³ This is the approach of Albright, Freedman, Sarna, and many others.³⁴ Against this, of course, is the observation that יְהִי does not occur in the Hebrew Bible in the *hip'il*, including here in Exodus 3 (assuming the text should not be emended). However, because Exod 3:14 is not given as an explanation of the original meaning of the divine name (see below), and since the divine name predates classical Hebrew, objections to the proposed causative stem for Yahweh are not persuasive. Also, this verb does occur in the causative in both Aramaic and Syriac. Nevertheless, the objection of Beitzel, that divine names consisting only of verbal forms are unattested, save for ^dIksudum,³⁵ should be taken into consideration.³⁶

The root *hwh/hwy* can also mean “to fall” (1 Sam 1:18 [reading יְהִי for the LXX’s συνέπεσεν]; 2 Sam 11:23; 1 Kgs 11:15; Job 37:6; Prov 14:35). For the divine name, this would imply a meaning such as “the faller” (negatively, like a meteor,³⁷ or as a causative, “the one who causes [rain or lightning] to fall”).³⁸ But this meaning is unattested

³²For a detailed treatment of the Neo-Assyrian evidence, see K. Lawson Younger, Jr., “Yahweh at Ashkelon and Calah? Yahwistic Names in Neo-Assyrian,” *VT* 52 (2002): 207–218. For the Neo-Babylonian evidence, see Josef Tropper, “Der Gottesname *Yahwa,” *VT* 51 (2001): 81–106.

³³Pace Beitzel, 16–17.

³⁴Albright, “Contributions,” 374–75; Freedman, 152–53; Sarna, *Exploring*, 44.

³⁵ARM 8, 111:6.

³⁶Beitzel, 16.

³⁷A. Klostermann, *Geschichte des Volkes Israel* (Munchen: Beck, 1896), 70.

³⁸Robertson W. Smith, *The Old Testament in the Jewish Church* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1881), 423.

in Hebrew and is supported only by Arabic evidence. Goiten, appealing to evidence from the Arabic *hawiya* and the nominal **הַזֶּה** in Hebrew (“desire,” Prov 10:3; 11:6; Mic 7:3; cf. Ug. *hwj*, “to want”), suggests that it can also mean “to love.”³⁹ Any reading that requires the tetragrammaton to have originally been a G stem must account for the prefix *ya-* by assuming that the G stem’s *yi-* in the imperfect developed from an earlier *yaqtulu* form.

Obermann attempted to argue against taking **יְהוָה** as an originally verbal form, claiming that the expression, **אֵנִי יְהוָה**, would then be grammatically impossible, for, if Yahweh is indeed a third person verbal form, it could not take a first person subject. He then used evidence from the bilingual Phoenician Karatepe inscription (*KAI* 26), claiming that the Phoenician forms *yhw’ nk* (I.3), *yrhb’ nk* (I.4), *wytn’ nk* (I.9), *yrdm’ nk*, *yšbm’ nk* (I.20), and *yšb’ nk* (II.18) were actually causative participles with *y* preformatives, which is otherwise unattested in any Semitic language.⁴⁰ These forms, however, have been shown to be Yiphil infinitive absolutes.⁴¹ Further, the divine name would presumably have become frozen (and thus dislodged from its etymological origin),⁴² and its use as a predicate of **אֵנִי** would not

³⁹S. D. Goiten, “YHWH The Passionate: The Monotheistic Meaning and Origin of the Name YHWH,” *VT* 6 (1956): 1–9. See also W. R. W. Gardner, “The Name ‘Yahweh,’” *ExpTim* 20 (1908–09): 91–2 and G. A. Barton, *Semitic and Hamitic Origins, Social and Religious* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1934), 338.

⁴⁰Julian Obermann, “The Divine Name Yhwh in the Light of Recent Discoveries,” *JBL* 68 (1949): 303–309.

⁴¹Godfrey Rolles Driver, “Reflections on Recent Articles,” *JBL* 72 (1954): 125–31. For a more recent treatment, see K. Lawson Younger, Jr., “The Phoenician Inscription of Azatiwada: An Integrated Reading,” *JSS* 43 (1998): 114 n. 17, and sources cited there.

⁴²Gerald J. Janzen, “What’s in a Name? ‘Yahweh’ in Exodus 3 and the Wider Biblical Context,” *Int* 33 (1979): 228–29.

have posed a difficulty for Hebrew speakers.⁴³ This latter point is entertained by Obermann, but not appreciated.

Bowmen bases his proposed root for the name on the Ugaritic *hw*y and Akkadian *awātum*, indicating “speaker.”⁴⁴ Murtonen concurs, opining that the name’s original meaning was “the commander.”⁴⁵ Another oft-mentioned, yet widely dismissed theory is that the name was originally an unintelligible ejaculatory exclamation.⁴⁶ For Mowinckel, the name is an interjection (*ya*) followed by the personal pronoun, *hū*.⁴⁷

Of all these explanations, those that find the origin of the name to be a causative are most convincing. But since there is nothing that requires us to read אֹהֶה אֲשֶׁר אָמַתְּ as an explanation of the meaning of the name itself, those readings which preserve the MT are to be preferred, although they are not in agreement. Durham, drawing attention to the imperfective aspect of the prefix conjugation, translates the expression, “‘I am being that I am being,’ or ‘I am the Is-ing One,’ that is, ‘the One Who Always Is.’” These are intended to emphasize the idea of present action.⁴⁸ However, while the first translational option is a perfectly good rendering of the *idem per idem* statement, the two others, which are given as

⁴³Parke-Taylor, 58.

⁴⁴R. A. Bowmen, “Yahweh the Speaker,” *JNES* 3 (1944): 1–8.

⁴⁵A. Murtonen, *A Philological and Literary Treatise on the Old Testament Divine Names 'l, 'lwh, 'lhym, and Yhwh* (StudOr 18; Helsinki: Suomalais-Uuden Seuran Kirjapaino, 1952), 90.

⁴⁶Godfrey Rolles Driver, “The Original form of the Name ‘Yahweh’: Evidence and Conclusions,” *ZAW* 46 (1928): 7–25; H. Tur-Sinai, *Die Bundeslade und die Anfänge der Religion Israel* (2d ed. Berlin: Philo, 1930), 75; Rudolph Otto, *The Idea of the Holy* (trans. John W. Harvey; rev. ed.; London: Oxford University Press, 1946), 198 n. 1.

⁴⁷Mowinckel, “Name,” 121–33.

⁴⁸Durham, 39.

explanations for what this means, require taking the relative clause as if it were in the third person (cf. Haupt). Further, several scholars have dismissed present tense renderings of אֲנִי in the grounds that אֲנִי is only used in the first person imperfect with a future tense nuance.⁴⁹ This objection is an overstatement. The form occurs forty-two times (excluding *wayyiqtol*s),⁵⁰ three of which refer to the present (Job 12:4; Ps 102:8; Hos 1:9), and five or six of which refer to the past (Ruth 2:13;⁵¹ 2 Sam 15:34; Job 3:16; 10:19; 17:6; Ps 50:21). These examples notwithstanding, it is used denoting the future tense 33 times (excluding Ruth 2:13). Combined with the likely allusion to אֲנִי עַתָּה from verse 12 (see below), we can at least conclude that a present tense nuance is highly unlikely.⁵²

This is similar to the position maintained in the classic articles by Schild and Lindblom, both of whom argue points which are essentially the same.⁵³ Schild, appealing to Gesenius' treatment of relative clauses,⁵⁴ states, "If the governing substantive is the subject of a relative clause and is, in the main clause, equated with, or defined as, a personal pronoun, then the predicate of the relative clause agrees with that personal pronoun."⁵⁵ Accordingly, he translates the statement, "I am the one who is," which is neither inconsistent

⁴⁹ Abba, 324; Gianotti, 42–43; Propp, 204.

⁵⁰ Counting the synoptic 2 Sam 7:14/1 Chr 17:13 as one.

⁵¹ Daniel I. Block (*Judges, Ruth* [NAC 6; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999], 665 n. 70) considers אֲנִי in this verse to be future.

⁵² I acknowledge that the allusion to verse 12 may not be decisive in discerning the temporal-semantic meaning in verse 14.

⁵³ J. Lindblom, "Noch einmal die Deutung des Jahwe-Namens," *ASTI* 3 (1964): 4–15; E. Schild, "On Exodus iii.14—'I Am that I Am,'" *VT* 4 (1979): 70–79.

⁵⁴ GKC § 138.d.

⁵⁵ Schild, 298.

(as Durham), dependent on emendation, nor an adaption of an *idem per idem* translation.⁵⁶

Albrektson demonstrates that the arguments of Schild and Lindblom rely completely on questionable biblical parallels, all of which contain an expressed subject in the main clause, and are therefore unconvincing.⁵⁷

Yet another issue concerns how to translate the relative marker אֲשֶׁר.

Mettinger, following Shoneveld,⁵⁸ prefers rendering it causally, citing an etymology in Gen 31:48–49: עַל־כֵן קָרָא־שְׁמֹו גָּלְעִיד וְהַמִּצְפָּה אֲשֶׁר אָמַר יְצָרָה יְהוָה וּבִנְיִם וּבִינְךָ. He goes on to claim that, since אֲהֵיה does seem to function as a name for God at the end of 14, a proper translation would be “*Ehyeh!* Because I am.” In other words, God is claiming that his name is אֲהֵיה (which is a fitting first person expression in the mouth of God), and then gives the reason: “Because I am!”⁵⁹ It should be noted, however, that אֲשֶׁר without a preposition only very rarely carries the strong causal force this interpretation requires.⁶⁰

⁵⁶Ibid., 301.

⁵⁷Albrektson, 23–24; Childs, 50; contra Hyatt, *Exodus*, 77. One of Schild’s examples contains a vocative (Isa 51:17): קָוָמי יְרוּשָׁלָם אֲשֶׁר שְׂתִית מִצְדָּחָה.

⁵⁸J. Schoneveld, “Proeve van een nieuwe veraling van ‘èhjè ašer èhjè’ in Exodus 3:14,” *NedTT* 30 (1976): 89–98. See also W. A. Irwin, “Exod. 3:14.” *AJS* 56 (1939): 297–98.

⁵⁹Mettinger, 34–36.

⁶⁰Gordon J. Wenham (*Genesis 16–50* [WBC 2; Waco: Word, 1994], 262) translates Gen 31:49, “It is the Mispah, *as it is said*” (italics mine). All the examples for this causal sense cited in *HALOT* 1:99, are questionable (with the exception of 1 Kgs 15:5), not in the sense that there is no causal connection between the main clause and the relative clause that can be conceptually perceived, but because linguistically there is no compelling reason to believe that they carry that nuance. For example, 1 Sam 30:10 reads, “And David pursued—he, and four hundred men—and one hundred men remained behind, *who* (אֲשֶׁר) were too faint to cross the Besor brook.” *HALOT*’s other examples are Gen 30:18; 34:13; Josh 4:23; Eccl 4:9; 8:11.

A very unique explanation has been given in the well-known work by Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*.⁶¹ Cross holds that Yahweh was initially a cultic title of the Canaanite deity El.⁶² Basing his argument essentially on his masterful command of comparative evidence, he asserts, "West Semitic personal names normally begin in transparent appellations or sentence names and shorten or disintegrate," and holds that Yahweh is one such hypocoristic name that should be taken as "a causative imperfect of the Canaanite-Proto-Hebrew verb *hwy*, 'to be.'" In seeking to determine the original sentence from which only יְהוָה remains, Cross turns to Exod 3:14. The similarity between אֵלֶּה יְהִי in verse 14 and שְׁלֹחַנִּי . . . יְהִי in verse 15 indicates that both are "acceptable forms of the divine name," and thus justifies a conversion of the first person אֵלֶּה into the (allegedly) third person יְהֹוָה אֲשֶׁר is judged to be late, since it supposedly only began to replace *dū* (*zū*) at the beginning of the Iron Age, "to judge from its scant use in early Yahwistic poetry." In Ugaritic, *d* + *kn* is used several times of El, always with a direct object.⁶⁴ Seeking to find an element that can function as this direct object, Cross turns to the formula, יְהֹוָה צְבָאֹת, in which, he opines, the personal name cannot be in construct, and so may be regarded as having originally been a verbal clause, with צְבָאֹת functioning as the

⁶¹ Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973).

⁶² A similar, yet less elaborate, scenario is given by Mitchell Dahood in *Psalms I, 1–50* (AB; New York, Doubleday, 1966), 64, 177. See also H. H. Spoer, "The Origin and Interpretation of the Tetragrammaton," *AJS* 18 (1901): 35.

⁶³ Mettinger, 33; Janzen, *Exodus*, 65.

⁶⁴ KTU 1.3.V:36 = 1.4.I:6 (reconstructed as [*d yknnh . ys*]*h . at*) = 1.4.IV:48; 1.10.III:6; 1.117:3 (reconstructed as [*lk . d yknnh . ysh . atrt . jw bnh . ilt*]).

direct object of the originally causative *yahwī* (i.e., “Yahweh who creates hosts”).⁶⁵ The final step in his argument is to supply ‘ēl as the subject of this reconstructed clause: ‘ēl zū *yahwī* *saba’ōt*.⁶⁶

There are several shortcomings which render Cross’ hypothesis implausible. In general, his dissection of אֲהֵה אֲשֶׁר אֲהֵה seems rather arbitrary. Does the parallel between אֲהֵה in verse 14 and יְהוָה in verse 15 justify replacing the first person with the third person? And on what basis can we eliminate the אֲהֵה which precedes אֲשֶׁר? Also, his choice to import צְבָאֹת is not fully justified. Why not virtually *any* other object (e.g., the heavens and the earth, Israel)? In addition, his contention that Yahweh, as a personal name, cannot occur in the construct state may be false, or at least in need of some qualification.⁶⁷ His approach is similar to that taken by Gesenius, who explains problematic expressions such as אָוֶר פְּשָׁדִים, בֵּית לְחַם יְהוָה, אָרֶם נְהָרִים, and by suggesting that common geographical nouns, such as עִיר, have in these instances been conventionally elided,⁶⁸ which is also Cross’

⁶⁵In addition, the participial clause which follows in יְהוָה צְבָאֹת in 1 Sam 4:4, 2 Sam 6:2, and Isa 37:16, יְשִׁיב הַכְּרָבִים (see also 2 Kgs 19:15; 1 Chr 13:6; Pss 80:2; 99:1), is reminiscent of El iconography, in which he is often shown accompanied by cherubim (Cross, 70). A similar theory was offered by Albright (review of B. N. Wambacq, *L’epithète divine Jahve s̄ebā’ōt*, *JBL* 67 [1948]: 377–81).

⁶⁶Cross, 60–71. He is followed by Janzen (“Name,” 228) and Patrick D. Miller (*The Religion of Ancient Israel* [LAI. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000], 2, 213 n. 10).

⁶⁷This point is controversial. Mayer Lambert, on the one hand, believes it possible for toponyms to be in the construct state, while of proper names he writes, “On ne trouve pas de nom propre de personne à l’état construit” (*Traité de grammaire hébraïque* [Hildesheim: Gerstenberg, 1971] § 228 n. 2; cited by John A. Emerton, “New Light on Israelite Religion: The Implications from Kuntillet ‘Ajrûd,” *ZAW* 94 [1982]: 4). This issue is a subset of the broader grammatical observation, which is well-stated by Matatiahu Tsevat: “Hebrew and other ancient Semitic languages avoid certain kinds of overdetermination of substantives” (“Studies in the Book of Samuel IV,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 36 [1965]: 52).

⁶⁸GKC (§ 125.d, h) offers יְהוָה אֱלֹהִי צְבָוֹת as the original form, but Emerton (4) proceeds with caution on this because of the frequency of the shorter collocation. Paul Joüon (*A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* [trans. and rev. T. Muraoka; 2 vols.; SubBi 14; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1993] § 131.o), takes יְהוָה צְבָאֹת as appositional: “Yahweh (the) hosts” [*sic!*]; see also § 137.b.

approach with several El compounds (e.g., אל עזָלָם [Gen 21:33] < *'el du 'olām*; אל ברית; *אֵל בְּרִית*; [Judg 9:46] < *אֵל בַּעַל בְּרִית*).⁶⁹ This grammatical view now seems less inflexible, in light of the Kuntillet ‘Ajrud inscriptions, which include the designations, *ywhh tmn* (“Yahweh of Teman”) and *ywhh šmrn* (“Yahweh of Samaria”).⁷⁰ What this shows, better than any Hebrew evidence adduced before it, is that it may be possible for a proper name to stand in the construct state.⁷¹ Of course, these texts came to light in the mid-seventies, after the publication of both Cross’ work and the latest revision of Gesenius’ grammar (the same cannot be said for Muraoka’s revision of Joüon). This evidence should also instigate a reconsideration of Cross’ treatment of the similar construction, *יְהוָה אֱלֹהִי צְבָאוֹת* (2 Sam 5:10; 1 Kgs 19:10, 14; Ps 89:9; Jer 5:14; 15:16; 35:17; 38:17; 44:7; Amos 4:13, 14, 15, 16, 27; 6:8), which would seem to indicate that *יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת* was understood as a construct chain at some point in classical Hebrew. Of course, *יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים צְבָאוֹת* also occurs (Pss 59:6; 80:5, 20; 84:9), as does *אֱלֹהִים צְבָאוֹת* (Ps 80:8, 15), which led Cross to conclude that *יְהוָה*

⁶⁹ Cross, 49.

⁷⁰ Emerton, 8–9; John Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan* (JSOTSup 265; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 14. For *ywhh tmn*, see *KAjr* 19A.5–6 (numbering according to F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp, J. J. M. Roberts, C. L. Seow, and R. E. Whitaker, *Hebrew Inscriptions: Texts from the Biblical Period of the Monarchy with Concordance* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005], 277–78). The toponym occurs with the article in *KAjr* 20.1. The variant spelling *tymn* occurs at the same site (*KAjr* 14.1). For *ywhh šmrn* see, *KAjr* 18.2. In the original announcements of his finds, the excavator, Z. Meshel, understood *ywhh šmrn* to mean, “Yahweh our guardian” (*šōmērēnū*; “Kuntillet ‘Ajrûd—An Israelite Site from the Monarchical Period on the Sinai Border,” *Qad* 9 [1976]: 23–24). It was not until over two years later, following the publication of M. Gilula, “To Yahweh Shomron and to his Asherah,” *Shn* 3 (1978/79): 129–37, that scholars began to form the virtual consensus on the reading *ywhh šōm'rōn*. See also *hdd skn* in the Aramaic-Akkadian bilingual inscription at Tell Fekheriyeh (*KAI* 309.1). The Akkadian clarifies this, identifying the same deity as ^d*Adad a-śib ^{URU}si-ka-ni* (“Adad, who dwells in Sikan”). See also *atrt šrm* in *KTU* 1.14.IV:38, as well as *il brt* and *il dn* in the Hurrian tablet *KTU* 1.128:14–16.

⁷¹ Before the evidence from Kuntillet ‘Ajrud became available, Driver tried to use Eze 38:2 and the LXX of Ps 38:23 as examples of personal names in the construct state (“Reflections,” 125). For Ugaritic examples, which are clearer than the Hebrew, see Emerton, 8.

אֱלֹהִי צְבָאות is secondary.⁷² Therefore, although the grammatical rule that a proper noun cannot stand as *nomen regens* in a construct chain can still serve as a general guideline, we must always be open to the possibility of exceptions.

In sum, explanations which respect the semantic force of the *idem per idem* construction are to be preferred.⁷³ This figure of speech is clearly attested elsewhere, both within and outside of the Hebrew Bible, and these examples must be taken into account in the interpretation of אֲהֵינוּ אֲשֶׁר אֲהֵינוּ. The way to appreciate the semantic force of this statement is not to attempt to define each term so precisely that we yield translations that make better sense (to our minds),⁷⁴ but to realize that the illocutionary force of this expression is precisely to be indeterminate,⁷⁵ it is a purposeful tautology,⁷⁶ employed “where the means or the desire to be more explicit does not exist.”⁷⁷ J. R. Lundbom has argued that the use of *idem per idem* here is simply to forbid further discussion.⁷⁸ This is because Moses

⁷² Cross, 49–70, whose position on this matter is also held by William F. Albright (review of Wambacq, 38) and William H. Brownlee ("The Ineffable Name of God," *BASOR* 226 [1977]: 39).

⁷³ For a discussion of other views not discussed in this study, see Gianotti, 38–51.

⁷⁴ Albrekton (26–28) comments that the syntax is actually very straightforward; it means, “I am what/who I am.”

⁷⁵ Joüon § 158.o. For a discussion of various ways texts engage in communicative action, see J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1962); John R. Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 36–41 and *Expression and Meaning: Studies in the Theory of Speech Act* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 29.

⁷⁶ Chaim Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation* (trans. John Wilkinson and Purcell Weaver; Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1971), 214–18; Jack R. Lundbom, “God’s Use of the Idem per Idem to Terminate Debate,” *HTR* 71 (1978): 193.

⁷⁷ Samuel Rolles Driver, *The Book of Exodus* (CBC; London: Cambridge University Press, 1911), 362–63.

⁷⁸ Lundbom, 196–98. Ogden’s point (119), that this is “at best” a “secondary aspect of its function,” does not invalidate Lundbom’s conclusion.

has already been told all he needs to know about this God. It is no coincidence that אֱלֹהִים has already appeared two verses earlier in the reply to his first question: אֱלֹהִים עַמְּךָ אֶת. It is quite probable, therefore, that God's answer in verse 14 is meant to allude to this slightly earlier statement.⁷⁹ Similar assurances are given later in this same dialogue: אֱלֹהִים עַמְּךָ פֵּיקָ (Exod 4:12, 15). Von Rad summarizes this well: "Here Jahweh certainly imparts his name. But in the words 'I will be what I will be' there also lies censure of Moses' question. At all events, in giving the information which he does, Jahweh reserves his freedom to himself, a freedom which will be displayed precisely in his being there, in his efficacious presence."⁸⁰

One more word is in order regarding the relationship between the divine name and אֱלֹהִים אֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר אֱלֹהִים. Frequently, biblical name etymologies are based, not on literal meaning, but rather on literary puns (e.g., Gen 17:5; Gen 25:26; Gen 27:36; Exod 2:10).⁸¹ Hence, this statement is not meant to be an etymological explanation of יהוָה,⁸² although it is a comment about something considered essential to the nature of God, possibly his freedom (cf. the *idem per idem* in Exod 33:19), his presence (Exod 3:12), or both.

⁷⁹Buber, 52; Motyer, 23–24; Abba, 325–26; von Rad, 180; Brownlee, 45; Mettinger, 42; Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (trans. Israel Abrahams; Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1967), 38.

⁸⁰Von Rad, 182. See also Greenberg, 81–3.

⁸¹Von Rad, 181; Janzen, "Name," 229–30; Menahem Haran, "The Religion of the Patriarchs: An Attempt at a Synthesis," *ASTI* 4 (1965): 38; Jeffrey H. Tigay, *You Shall Have No Other Gods: Israelite Religion in the Light of Hebrew Inscriptions* (HSS 31; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), 5.

⁸²Pace Mowinckel, "Name," 124; Parke-Taylor, 51; Gianotti, 39; Seitz, 154.

Yahweh in Verse 15

If Moses' question to God in verse 13 does not assume prior knowledge of the tetragrammaton, and if God's reply in verse 14 is not an actual disclosure of the divine name, but is rather an ambiguous tautology that alludes to an earlier statement in verse 12, can we hold that Exodus 3 is the initial disclosure of God's name? Recall that our third question is whether יְהֹוָה in verse 15 functions as an answer to Moses' request for God's name. This verse explains that Yahweh is both the God of Israel's fathers, that he is the one who is sending Moses (cf. אֲהֵיה שֶׁלְחָנִי), and that יְהֹוָה אֲהֵיה is to be his name, his זֶבַר, forever. If anything, it is this last statement that might clarify the issue, indicating that this is indeed the initial revelation of God's name,⁸³ even though, as we have argued, God is also revealing crucial information regarding his nature.⁸⁴ Yet even here, however, things are not so transparent, for it may be that God is simply telling Moses that Yahweh is his preferred name, and that this name is especially appropriate, given the nature of the covenant.

Conclusions on Exodus 3

I have examined Moses' question in verse 13, God's answer in verse 14, and the inclusion of the name Yahweh in verse 15, and have found that, given the evidence presented, it is impossible to determine, on the basis of this chapter, whether or not the divine name was known prior to the time of Moses. Because Moses' question in verse 13 ("what is his name?") is a theologically-loaded inquiry into the nature of God, it makes sense under both scenarios. If the Israelites already knew the name, it is doubtful that Moses would not

⁸³ Moberly, 24.

⁸⁴ This combination is acknowledged by Seitz (153), who also thinks that the Hebrews (although not Moses) previously knew the name.

have, and so his request for information that he already would have known becomes a request for divine assurance. On the other hand, if the name was not already known, nobody would have known the answer, and it is difficult to see how Moses' question makes sense. The question is therefore only intelligible if it is seen as a probe into God's very character and a request for assurance that he can be trusted to act on their behalf. God's answer to this question in verse 14 provides no additional clarity on the issue, since it is not technically his name, but rather a conversation-ending *idem per idem* reply, alluding to what he has already told Moses ("I will be with you"). God finally answers Moses in verse 15, telling him that the Israelites will now know him by the name Yahweh, but this makes sense under either assumption—prior ignorance of the name or prior knowledge of it. If they are ignorant of it, then this is indeed the initial revelation; if they already know it, then it is simply an indication that this is his preferred name for future generations, since it is most consistent with his divine character.

Although inconclusive, an analysis of this chapter has been necessary because, just as it is important to understand what Scripture affirms, it is equally important to be aware of those issues on which Scripture is silent or, in the case of Exodus 3, ambiguous. In this way, our journey thus far has been anything but fruitless. Fortunately, it may be that we will not have to remain content with an ambiguous answer to the question of whether or not the biblical narratives affirm pre-Mosaic knowledge of the divine name Yahweh, for it is still possible that an answer to our question may lie within the testimony of the next passage with which we are concerned: Exodus 6.

CHAPTER 3

I AM YAHWEH

In the last chapter I came to the conclusion that exegesis of Exodus 3 cannot answer definitively whether or not the name Yahweh was known among the Israelites prior to the time of Moses. We do not have sufficient warrant for reading Exod 3:13–15 as the initial revelation of Yahweh’s name. This chapter will deal with Exodus 6, the other major text that is relevant to the issue of the antiquity of the divine name. As was stated earlier, this is an important inquiry, for it greatly impacts how the book of Genesis is to be read, and how the data there concerning the identity of the God of the patriarchs should be interpreted.

After the dialogue between God and Moses in Exodus 4 is completed, Moses and his brother Aaron enter Egypt and succeed in persuading the Hebrews that Yahweh had indeed “visited the people of Israel and that he had seen their affliction” (Exod 4:31). Yet they are unable to convince the Pharaoh to allow them to journey into the wilderness to sacrifice to their God. Instead, the Pharaoh increases the Hebrews’ burdens, causing the Hebrew foremen to lash out against Moses and Aaron, blaming them for worsening their plight. Moses in turn complains to God, accusing him of failing to deliver on his promises. God responds by (re-)announcing his plan to compel the king of Egypt to release his people. This reply begins with the following words: “I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as El Shadday (**אֵל שָׁדָי**), but by my name Yahweh I did not make myself known to them”

(Exod 6:2b–3).¹ God goes on to explain the importance of his covenant with Israel’s forefathers, his fidelity to that covenant, and his intentions to fulfill his promises bound up in it.

Issues Raised by God’s Speech

Whereas Exod 3:13–15 is ambiguous regarding whether the burning bush theophany was the initial revelation of the divine name Yahweh, it would seem that now in Exodus 6 we have some evidence that indeed it was.² Here, we apparently learn that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob did not know God by the name Yahweh, but that he was rather known to them by the designation, El Shadday. While there is no indication in the text that the reader is to view this scene in itself as an initial revelation of the divine name,³ a

¹This statement appears to be a direct reference to Gen 17:1, where we read, “Yahweh appeared [אֵל יְהוָה] to Abraham and said to him, ‘I am El Shadday; walk before me and be blameless.’”

²From the source critic’s point of view, Exodus 6 does not really inform our understanding of chapter 3, since E (the Elohist) is usually held to be responsible for the latter. But this is not the method adopted in this study.

³Nahum M. Sarna, *Exodus* (JPSTC; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 31; R. W. L. Moberly, *The Old Testament of the Old Testament: Patriarchal Narratives and Mosaic Yahwism* (OBT; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 33. Pace Martin Noth, *Exodus: A Commentary* (trans. J. S. Bowden; OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster 1962), 33, 58, and Immanuel Lewy, “The Beginnings of the Worship of Yahweh: Conflicting Biblical Views,” *VT* 6 (1956): 429–35. The introductory formula, “I am x,” is used frequently in the Hebrew Bible, as well as in many extrabiblical texts, and is never an introduction of a previously unknown name. Extra-biblically, this is a particularly common way in which many monumental inscriptions begin, such as the Moabite Mesha inscription (*KAI* 181:1). In Phoenician, this expression is found in the inscriptions of Yehawmilk (*KAI* 10:1), the Tabnit sarcophagus (*KAI* 13:1), and Kulamua (*KAI* 24:1, 9), as well as on a white marble funerary text from Cyprus (*KAI* 35:1), various brief inscriptions (*KAI* 49:1, 4, 6–9, 11–13, 19, 21, 22, 25–28, 34–37, 40, 41, 46–49), and a grave stelae (*KAI* 54:1, 2; 57; 59). Both versions of the bilingual Phoenician-Hieroglyphic Luwian inscription of Azatiwada also contain it (*KAI* 26:1, 19–20; CHLI 1 I Karatepe 1:1), and is quite common in general in Hittite Hieroglyphic Luwian inscriptions (e.g., CHLI 1:II.4–5 Karkamiš A14a:1, b:1; 7 Karkamiš A1b:1; 8 Kelekli 1; 9 Karkamiš A11a [A8]:1; 13 + 14 Karkamiš A2:1, to name a few). In Aramaic, we find this formula in the beginning of the Hadad inscription (*KAI* 214:1, 19), both Bar-Rakib inscriptions (*KAI* 216:1; 217:1), as well as those of Serapitis (*KAI* 276:1) and Zakkur (*KAI* 202.A:2).

difficulty is raised, for throughout Genesis we find the name, Yahweh, spoken by several important characters. In addition, in Gen 4:26b we are told that “people began to call upon the name of Yahweh” as early as the first generation after Adam.

The first clause of Exod 6:3 is straightforward and provides no real challenge in terms of syntax: “I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as El Shadday” (**בָּאֵל שַׁדְּיָה**). The preposition, **בָּ**, after verbs of “appearing” is to be taken as a *bêt essentiae*, meaning, “in the capacity, or character, of.”⁴ The second clause, however, is more difficult, literally reading, “But my name (**וְשִׁמִּי**) Yahweh, I was not known (**לֹא נִזְדַּעַת**) to them.” Here we encounter two grammatical difficulties that have provided interpreters with opportunities to explain the text in various ways. First, the preposition does not precede **שִׁמִּי**, making it possible to claim that it is not truly parallel to **אֵל שַׁדְּיָה**. Still, most English translations translate the second half of the verse, “By my name Yahweh I did not make myself known to them.”⁵ Such a reading would require us to either take the preposition as elided,⁶ or to understand **שִׁמִּי יְהֹוָה** as an adverbial accusative. Second, the *nip'al* **נִזְדַּעַת**, is first person, and therefore contains its own subject, leaving it unclear as to how to fit **וְשִׁמִּי יְהֹוָה** into the clause. With a *qal* or *hip'il* verb, the latter could easily be explained as a direct

⁴GKC § 119.i; Raymond Abba, “The Divine Name Yahweh,” *JBL* 80 (1961): 323; Francis I. Andersen, *The Sentence in Biblical Hebrew* (The Hague: Mouton, 1974), 102; Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus* (Westminster: John Knox, 1974), 110; Bill T. Arnold and John H. Choi, *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 106.

⁵ASV, ESV, KJV, NASB, NET, NIV, NJPS, NKJV, NRSV, RSV.

⁶J. A. Motyer (*The Revelation of the Divine Name* (London: Tyndale, 1959), 14–15; Shawn D. Glisson, "Exodus 6:3 in Pentateuchal Criticism," *ResQ* 28 (1985–86): 141.

object.⁷ Here, however, we are inclined to take the *nip‘al* as passive, middle, or, preferably, reflexive (cf. Ruth 3:3), all of which seem to exclude this possibility.

Propp stresses the conceptual equivalence between Yahweh and his “name,” reading the clause as a *casus pendens* construction: “But I—my name Yahweh, was not known to them.”⁸ This is an appeal to typically-Deuteronomic name theology; to “know the name of Yahweh” is to know Yahweh intimately,⁹ which was discussed earlier under our analysis of Moses’ question in Exod 3:13, and need not be rehearsed in detail. This explains well the absence of the preposition, and provides an adequate explanation of how **וַיְשִׁמֵּן יְהֹוָה** fits with the first person *nip‘al* verb. It also has the benefit of accounting for how a statement such as this fits with the broader context of Exodus 6—it is not merely a bit of trivia concerning what the patriarchs did and didn’t know, but rather shows how the knowledge of God’s name is bound up with knowledge of him as Israel’s redeemer and deliverer. As

⁷The LXX attempts to do just this, rendering נָזְדַעַתִּי with the active ἔδηλωσα. The Syr., Vg., and Tg. *Onq.* have similar readings. See also NAB, NJB, NLT. Although these may reflect a *hip‘al*, the MT is supported by Tg. *Ps.-J*, and is the *lectio difficilior* (William C. Propp, *Exodus 1–18: A New Translation with Commentary* [AB; New York: Doubleday, 1998], 263).

⁸Propp, 261, 272. *Pace* D. A. Garrett, *Rethinking Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 21 n. 24. See also W. Randall Garr, “The Grammar and Interpretation of Exodus 6:3,” *JBL* 111 (1992): 394–5. Childs (110) takes a similar approach, appealing to König’s description of what Childs terms an “accusative of specification” (Eduard König, *Historisch-kritisches Lehrgebäude der hebräischen Sprache* [3 vols.; Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1881–97] § 328.g). Childs illustrates this by citing GKC § 144.1, where two subjects, “one of the person and the other of the thing,” relate to one verb. GKC notes that “the subject denoting the thing takes a suffix in the same person as the personal subject.” This is a related, but imprecise explanation of Exod 6:3, which GKC does not cite as an example. For Gesenius, this “peculiar idiom” is “always confined to poetic language.” Also, in Exod 6:3, **וַיְשִׁמֵּן יְהֹוָה** does not fit easily as the subject of the first person נָזְדַעַתִּי.

⁹For particularly close identification of Yahweh and his “name,” see, for example Deut 12:5, 14, 21; 16:2, 6; 26:2; 28:58; Ps 5:12; Isa 24:15. Several theologians see this as a strategy employed by Deuteronomic theologians to avoid domestication of God’s transcendent presence (Gerhard von Rad, *Studies in Deuteronomy* [trans. David Stalker; Chicago: H. Regnery, 1953], 38–39; Ronald Ernest Clements, *God and Temple* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1965], 94–5; Ernest W. Nicholson, *Deuteronomy and Tradition* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967], 53–56).

Propp observes, “The new appellation betokens, among other things, deeper intimacy with the Deity.”¹⁰ At the same time, this understanding of the syntax allows for the verse to claim that the revelation of the divine name is something new in Moses’ era. Both this explanation, as well as that which reads the הָאֵל as having been elided make good sense of the passage and are perfectly acceptable grammatically. We must therefore conclude that the name Yahweh was first revealed to Moses; the patriarchs did not have knowledge of the proper divine name Yahweh.

Attempts at Harmonization

For many centuries, theologians have noted the discrepancy caused by reading Exod 6:3 in light of the patriarchal narratives. Interpreters such as Rashi and Ibn Ezra argued that the patriarchs did know God as Yahweh, but did not understand the full nature of God that was contained in his name. Thus, it was the meaning of the name and its implications, rather than the name itself, which were unknown to the patriarchs. Perhaps the earliest representation of this view can be found in Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, which reads, **בְּאָפִי שְׁכִינָתִי לֹא אִתְּהִדַּעַת לָהּוּן** (“by the face of my shekinah I did not make myself known to them”) for Exod 6:3.¹¹ Many centuries later, when this verse was being used as a foundational text for source criticism, Hengstenberg stood his ground on virtually the same interpretation:

The name had been known to Israel long before; but now for the first time, and from this time through all centuries, the essence of which it was the expression was to be fully revealed to Israel, and at the same time the name

¹⁰ Propp, 283.

¹¹ The earlier *Tg. Onq.* and *Tg. Neof.* are more literal.

was to lose that sporadic character which it had hitherto borne, and was to pass into common use.¹²

In support of this interpretation, others have pointed out that mere information regarding the use and/or nonuse of the divine name in the patriarchal age appears unimportant, given the context of Exodus 6.¹³ Seitz comments, “The issue is not knowledge of the name *per se* but how God most fully makes himself known as YHWH.”¹⁴ How does a seemingly trivial comment about the name of God during the patriarchal era possibly address the issues raised by Moses’ complaint to God after the first failed confrontation with Pharaoh (Exod 5:22–23), and how does it fit into God’s subsequent assurances regarding his fidelity to the covenant made with Israel’s forebearers? Yet if we assume that God’s making his name known entails acting on behalf of his people in a way never before experienced, we fall much more in line with the contrast brought out in verses 4–8. God made his covenant with the patriarchs, yet they lived as mere sojourners (v. 4). Although the patriarchs enjoyed God’s presence, received protection, and were blessed with offspring and possessions, they did not experience him in the way the Israelites are about to. God is now “remembering” his covenant, delivering his people, judging their oppressors, and fulfilling his promises made to

¹²E. W. Hengstenberg, *History of the Kingdom of God under the Old Testament* (2 vols.; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1871), 1:258–59; another example from this tradition is Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch* (trans. James Martin; vol. 1 of *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951), 467. A more recent example, aside from the ones cited below, is Lyle Eslinger, “Knowing Yahweh: Exod 6:3 in the Context of Genesis 1–Exodus 15,” in *Literary Structure and Rhetorical Strategies in the Hebrew Bible*; ed. L. J. de Regt, J. de Waard, and J. P. Fokkelman; Assen: Van Gorcum & Company, 1996), 193–96. See also Glisson, 135–43.

¹³Childs, 113.

¹⁴Christopher Seitz, “The Call of Moses and the ‘Revelation’ of the Divine Name: Source-Critical Logic and Its Legacy,” in *Theological Exegesis: Essays in Honor of Brevard S. Childs* (ed. Christopher Seitz and Kathryn Greene-McCreight; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 157–59. See also Andersen, 102.

their ancestors. Also, his words in verse 7 echo “the heart of the covenant”,¹⁵: “And I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall *know that I am Yahweh your God*, who brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians” (cf. Gen 17:7–8).

The distinction between the roots רָאַה and יְדֻעַּת is telling: God “appeared” to the patriarchs and made a covenant; the Hebrews will now “know” God by his fulfillment of the covenant.¹⁶ Moreover, יְדֻעַּת appears in both verses 3 and 7. In its first occurrence, God indicates, “I did not make myself known to them [the patriarchs].” Then, God mentions his covenant with them, to give them the land of their sojournings (v. 4), just before addressing the current situation, wherein he has “heard the groaning of the sons of Israel” (v. 5). “Therefore” (לְכָן), according to verses 6 and 7, Moses is to speak to the Israelites and tell them what God now plans to do, employing a series of *weqatal* verbs, all with a second person plural object: “I will bring you up (וְהִזְצַאֵתִי אֶתְכֶם) from the midst of the burdens of Egypt, and I will rescue you (וְהִצְלַתִּי אֶתְכֶם) from their bondage, and I will redeem you (וְגַאלֵתִי אֶתְכֶם) with an outstretched arm and with mighty judgments, and I will take you (וְהִיִּתִי לְכֶם) for myself as a people, and I will be God to you (וְלֹקַחְתִּי אֶתְכֶם).”¹⁷ Then, the *weqatal* sequence shifts to the second person: “And you will know (וַיַּדְעַתֶּם) that I am Yahweh your God, who brought you up from the midst of the burdens of Egypt” (v. 7). This sequence then reverts back to the first person, and is continued through verse 8. The move from the first person to the second in verse 7 causes וַיַּדְעַתֶּם to stand out, highlighting the

¹⁵ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50* (WBC 2; Waco: Word, 1994), 22.

¹⁶ Seitz, 159–60; Propp, 271. As is well known, the verb, יְדֻעַּת, has strong covenantal connotations.

¹⁷ The first four verbs are commemorated in the traditional Seder celebration with four separate cups of wine (Jonathan Magonet, “The Rhetoric of God: Exodus 6.2–8,” *JSOT* 27 [1983]: 60).

contrast between what the patriarchs didn't know (v. 3) and what will now be known by the Israelites as a result of God's mighty acts of salvation and redemption—that he is Yahweh their God.¹⁸ This contrast is also evident in the subtle shift from “to them” (לָהֶם) in verses 3 and 4, and the repeated “you” up through verse 8.¹⁹ The final clause of verse 3, far from being parenthetical and even incidental, is key for the purpose of this distinction.²⁰

Andersen attempts to offer grammatical support for this time-honored position in his discussion of “declarative conjunctive sentences.” His proposal contains two steps. First, he reads Exod 6:2c–3 as containing poetically parallel lines, in which אָנִי יְהוָה is parallel to וָשָׁמִי יְהוָה, making the latter a “conjunctive clause of identical structure, and not an apposition [sic] phrase.” In other words, because אָנִי יְהוָה is a verbless subject-predicate clause of identification (“I am Yahweh), וָשָׁמִי יְהוָה is too (“and my name is Yahweh”), and must be separated from לֹא נִזְדַּעֲתִי לָהֶם as its own clause. Hence, “my name Yahweh” cannot be considered to be that which “was not known to them.” Second, Andersen believes that the verse’s final clause is parallel with אָנֹרָא, and that this suggests לֹא should be taken as “assertative” (i.e., asseverative): “Surely I made myself known to them.”²¹

¹⁸Ibid., 65–6.

¹⁹The alliteration of suffixes makes this feature more transparent in Hebrew than it is in English: *lākem*, *lāhem*, *'etkem*, *'etkem*, *'etkem*, *lākem*, *wida 'tem*.

²⁰Pace Greenberg, 133–4.

²¹Andersen, 102. Since he gives no translation of his own, I have given my understanding of the type of English rendering his proposal would produce. See also W. J. Martin, *Stylistic Criteria and the Analysis of the Pentateuch* (London: Tyndale Press, 1955), 18–19, who believes this to be an orthographic error, obscuring the original אָנֹרָא, and Godfrey Rolles Driver, "Affirmation by Exclamatory Negation," *JANES* 5 (1973): 109.

Unfortunately, Andersen's treatment is convincing with respect to neither point. It is highly questionable whether אָנִי יְהוָה and וַשְׁמֵי יְהוָה should be read as being grammatically parallel. Of course, this is not impossible, but what argument can be offered in favor of reading the text this way rather than not? Exodus 6:2–3 is not poetry, and even if it were, there is no rule that requires us to read parallel noun collocations as syntactically identical. It seems that Andersen's desire to harmonize this passage with statements made in Genesis is the determining factor for his interpretation. As for his second point, it is true that forms similar to this proposed asseverative use of אֶל are attested elsewhere in virtually all other Semitic languages (e.g., Akk. *lu*²² and Ug. *l-*²³), although these forms do not always carry asseverative force; their “most basic function,” according to Huehnergard, is to mark hypothetical statements.²⁴ An asseverative meaning has, indeed, been proposed for אֶל in the Hebrew Bible in passages such as Exod 8:26 (יְסַקְלָנוּ וְלֹא), 1 Sam 20:9 (וְלֹא אֲתָה אָגִיד לְךָ),

²² CAD 9:224–25.

²³ DULAT, 484–85.

²⁴ John Huehnergard, “Asseverative **la* and Hypothetical **lu/law* in Semitic,” JAOS 103 (1983): 592–93.

Consider also *la* in Arabic and Ge'ez, and *lw* in the Aramaic inscriptions from Zincirli. Huehnergard (573) argues that these are from a common proto-Semitic form, which may have been *lū* or *law*, while Daniel Sivan and William M. Schniedewind argue for separate proto-Semitic forms (“Letting Your ‘Yes’ Be ‘No’ in Ancient Israel: A Study of the Asseverative אֶל and אֶלְלָה,” JSS 38 [1993]: 219–20).

In Hebrew, confusion over this particle would have arisen when the Canaanite shift caused the negative *lā* to change to *lō()*, resulting in a similar sound between the negative and the asseverative particle *lū*. Sivan and Schniedewind argue that homonymy eventually led to the disappearance of the form in common parlance, which caused scribes to mistake it for the negative particle אֶל, and resulted in the variant spellings לֹא, אֶלְלָה, and אֶלְלָה. A classic example of a text where confusion arising from these forms has led commentators and earlier scribes astray is Abraham's purchase of the cave of Machpelah in Gen 23:5–15, where the asseverative particle occurs four times (vv. 5 [לֹא, BHS n. a–a], 11 [אֶלְלָה, BHS n. a and Tg. Ps.-J], 13 [לֹא], and 14 [לֹא, BHS n. a]). Mention should also be made of the proclitic לְ, which is sometimes used with asseverative force (e.g., Pss 89:19; 135:11–12; Isa 38:20; Eccl 9:4; Lam 4:3; 1 Chr 28:21).

2 Sam 18:12 [Q reads וְלֹא אָנֹכִי שָׁקַל עַל־כֶּפֶר אֶלְךָ בְּסֶף], and 2 Kgs 5:26 לֹא־לְבֵבִי (�ְבֵבִי). Yet because the only evidence for a separate (i.e., non-proclitic) asseverative particle *lū* comes to us from East Semitic (Akk.), where it seems to have developed this usage which is not found in other Semitic languages,²⁵ I am reluctant to accept its use in Hebrew, preferring rather to see examples such as the ones cited above as rhetorical uses of the negative particle, akin to הַלֹּא.²⁶ While I disagree with his labeling of לֹא in Exod 6:3 as asseverative, I concede that it is possible that it is used here rhetorically (“did I not make myself known to them?”). Yet, as with the first point, what is possible is not necessarily probable. We must ask whether there is anything in Exod 6:3 to compel us to read לֹא in this manner.²⁷ Again, other than a desire to resolve the tension created by this verse, it seems that there is not. Eslinger, in his discussion of this issue, writes, “The verse has become difficult for translators, if only because of their unavoidable consciousness of the issues in pentateuchal criticism.”²⁸

Motyer’s treatment of Exod 6:2c–3 is more convincing. He translates this passage as follows: “I am Yahweh. And I showed myself to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob in the character of El Shaddai, but in the character expressed by my name Yahweh I did not make myself known to them.” Such a rendering, according to Motyer, “allows for a truly

²⁵ Huehnergard, 571 n. 21, 592–94.

²⁶ Pace Sivan and Schniedewind, whose work is nevertheless helpful, citing the parallel between the following two texts to illustrate the interchangeability between לֹא and הַלֹּא:

(Jer 49:9) אִם־בָּצָרִים בָּאוּ לְךָ לֹא יִשְׁאַרְוּ עַזְלָזָת
(Obad 1:5) אִם־בָּצָרִים בָּאוּ לְךָ הַלֹּא יִשְׁאַרְוּ עַזְלָזָת

²⁷ Moberly, 57.

²⁸ Ibid., 55–56; Eslinger, 189.

biblical progressive revelation.”²⁹ The real burden of this interpretation is placed, neither on his interpretation of the בְּ preposition, nor on whether to import it into וָשָׁמִי יְהוָה, but rather on the theological weight he attaches to what it means to know the name of Yahweh (see above).³⁰ Without rehearsing all the points of this earlier discussion, we will simply reiterate that Motyer appeals to the fact that, in the Hebrew Bible, to “know the name of Yahweh” means to know something about God’s nature; a name is not “merely a sound by which that other is fixed as a distinct object for the person.”³¹

Source-Critical Solutions

Another way modern scholars have sought to address this dilemma has been through source criticism. The Priestly writer is held to be responsible for the material in Exodus 6, since it bears much of the stock terminology normally associated with P, not least of all the popular designation for God throughout Genesis, El Shadday (Gen 17:1; 28:3; 35:11; 48:3; but note 43:14; 49:25).³² Whereas the J source (the Yahwist) believed that the name Yahweh was known before the time of Moses (Gen 4:26b),³³ the P source, as

²⁹Motyer, 12.

³⁰Ibid., 15–17.

³¹Ibid., 15.

³²Walter Brueggemann, “The Kerygma of the Priestly Writers,” *ZAW* 84 (1972): 405 n. 28; Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12–36* (trans. J. J. Scullion; CC; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985), 258; Thomas B. Dozeman, *Exodus* (ECC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 164–67.

³³Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973), 6. This is not generally regarded as a revelation of the divine name along the lines of Exodus 3 (Seitz, 150; Westermann, 339–40). Although this verse is the stock example of the Yahwist’s belief in the antiquity of the name, it is found even earlier in the mouth of a human character, as Eve declares, “I have created a man with [the help of] Yahweh” (Gen 4:1).

traditionally understood, only uses the divine name twice in Genesis, and both times it is in narrated discourse, rather than direct speech (Gen 17:1; 21:1); P's preference is אֱלֹהִים, which is primarily why it was identified by early source critics as E¹. Exodus 6:3, then, gives the reason for this—namely, that P, in contrast to J, did not believe that the divine name had been revealed before it was spoken to Moses. E concurs with P on this point, offering his own “call narrative” in chapter 3.³⁴ It is hardly an exaggeration to say that these texts provide the major justification for using the various names for God as a criterion for distinguishing literary sources in Genesis. Their use and nonuse, particularly throughout Genesis and the early chapters of Exodus, of יהוה and אֱלֹהִים, supposedly reflect their convictions regarding the antiquity of the divine name.³⁵ Likewise, after Exodus 6, both E

³⁴ The classic formulation of this is given in Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Israel* (New York: Meridian Books, 1957), 338–39; repr. of *Prolegomena to the History of Israel* (trans. J. Sutherland Black and Allan Menzies, with preface by W. Robertson Smith; Edinburgh: Adam & Charles Black, 1885); trans. of *Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels* (2d ed.; Berlin: G. Reimer, 1883). See also Roland de Vaux, *The Early History of Israel* (trans. David Smith; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978), 267–68. The sections of chapter 3 with which we are concerned are identified as Elohistic primarily because of the presence of אֱלֹהִים, Jethro, Hobab, the repetitive call in verse 4b (cf. Gen 22:11 and 46:2), the portrayal of Moses as a prophetic figure, and his fear of God. It is important to note, however, that the existence of a distinct E source is a question widely debated among adherents to the Documentary Hypothesis, mainly because of its sparse and fragmentary nature. Some have denied its existence altogether (e.g., P. Volz and W. Rudolph, *Der Elohist als Erzähler: Ein Irrweg der Pentateuchkritik?* [Geissen: Töpelmann, 1933]). Those who still adhere to its existence are typically forced to admit that the majority of the source is absent from the Pentateuch (Hans Walter Wolff, “The Elohist Fragments in the Pentateuch,” *Int* 26 [1972]: 158–73; Alan W. Jenks, “Elohist,” *ABD* 2:478–82), while those who reject its existence prefer rather to speak of it in terms of a supplement to the J source (Wilhelm Rudolph, *Der “Elohist” von Exodus bis Josua* [BZAW 68; Berlin: Töpelmann, 1938]). Some scholars, on the other hand, assign this passage to J (Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11* [trans. John J. Scullion; CC; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994], 339).

³⁵This is held to be true, despite the inconsistency with which this rule actually applies. However, this would seem to seriously undermine the entire divine name criterion, for, as R. N. Whybray (*The Making of the Pentateuch: A Methodological Study* [JSOTSup 53; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994], 66–67) observes, “If these authors were prepared, on what seemed to them to be sufficient grounds, to alter their usage on one occasion, they may have had other grounds, unknown to the modern critic, for altering it at other points in their work.” We must also consider the possibility that a redactor may have changed certain divine names, as is generally assumed, for example, in the “Elohistic Psalter” (George Foot Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era: The Age of the Tannaim* [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1927],

and P use יהָנָה regularly.³⁶ Yet it would be incorrect to say that the entire validity of the documentary hypothesis rests upon the shoulders of this one verse, for even if it were removed from the discussion, observations elsewhere which establish the character of the various sources would still stand or fall on their own merit.³⁷

There are several problems with this approach. As was mentioned earlier, it is unattested for “I am x” to be used as an introduction of an individual whose name is not already known to his audience. Yet this is precisely what is required in order to view Exodus 6 as P’s initial revelation of the divine name.³⁸ There are also problems with finding confirmation of the so-called priestly opinion of Exod 6:3 in the use of the divine name in Genesis, since it is highly questionable whether the use of one term for God over against another can be used as a criterion by which to identify literary sources. Cassuto, Brichto, and

424; see also John Skinner’s discussion of Gen 22:11, 14; 28:21; 31:49 in *Genesis* [2d ed.; ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark 1930], I–II). Johannes Dahse (*Die Gottesnamen der Genesis: Jakob und Israel; P in Genesis 12–50* [vol. 1 of *Textkritische Materialien zur Hexateuchfrage I*; Giessen: Alfred Töpelmann, 1912]; see also S. R. Driver, *An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament* [9th ed.; International Theological Library; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1913], xxviii) attempted to argue a similar position; namely, that the LXX, which at times disagrees with the MT as to which names are used where (i.e., κύριος for מֶלֶךְ and θέως for יהָנָה), is a better witness to the early Hebrew text than the MT. This has been refuted, to the satisfaction of most scholars, by Skinner, largely by appeal to agreement between the MT and the SP, which indicates that translations are more susceptible to the shift in names than are transmissions of the text in the same language (*The Divine Names in Genesis* [London: Hodder & Soughton, 1914]; see also P. Vetter, “Die litterarkritische Bedeutung der alttestamentlichen Gottesnamen,” *TQ* 85 [1903]:12–47, 202–35, 520–47). The SP does, however, differ from the MT in Genesis in 7:1, 9; 14:22; 20:18; 28:4; 31:7, 9, 16a; 35:9b.

³⁶ Menahem Haran, “The Religion of the Patriarchs: An Attempt at a Synthesis,” *ASTI* 4 (1965): 38–39; Otto Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction* (trans. Peter R. Ackroyd; New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 182–83.

³⁷ Pace W. J. Martin, *Stylistic Criteria and the Analysis of the Pentateuch* (London: Tyndale Press, 1955), 16–19; Raymond F. Surburg, “Did the Patriarchs Know Yahweh? Exodus 6:3 and Its Relationship to the Four Documentary Hypothesis,” *Springfielder* 36 (1972): 122–23.

³⁸ See 46 n. 3. Dozeman acknowledges this, and yet still insists that “the P author does intend for the self-introduction of Yahweh to function as a new revelation of the divine name” (165).

Wardlaw have all shown that there are specific reasons why an author may choose יְהוָה in one context, as opposed to אֱלֹהִים, and vice versa.³⁹ Thus, for example, the virtual absence of Yahweh from the beginning of the Joseph cycle through Moses' encounter with God at Horeb may be due to a desire to depict a perception of God as being distant during his people's ordeal in Egypt. Accordingly, “Yahweh” occurs only twelve times in these chapters: eight are used to describe how “Yahweh was with Joseph” and was actively blessing him (Gen 39:2, 3[2x], 5[2x], 21, 23[2x]); three describe God’s displeasure with Judah’s wicked sons (Gen 38:7[2x], 10); one is in a spontaneous remark in the “testament of Jacob” (Gen 49:18).⁴⁰ Another reason for this may be the Egyptian setting, in which God’s personal name would presumably have been used less frequently. Examples of this could be multiplied, but the point is that the appearance of one divine designation instead of another can be, and often is, explicable through means other than the positing of distinct sources. This literary contextual explanation can also account for why God seems to be characterized in ways that correspond to which names are used. It is worth pointing out as well that variation between divine names used to refer to the same deity is not uncommon in ancient Near Eastern literature.⁴¹

³⁹ Umberto Cassuto, *The Documentary Hypothesis and the Composition of the Pentateuch* (trans. Israel Abrahams; New York: Shalem, 2006), 32–49 and *From Adam to Noah* (vol. 1 of *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis*; trans. Israel Abrahams; 3d ed.; Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1961), 87–88; Herbert Chanan Brichto, *The Names of God: Poetic Readings in Biblical Beginnings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Terrance R. Wardlaw, *Conceptualizing Words for “God” within the Pentateuch: A Cognitive-Semantic Investigation in Literary Context* (LHBOTS 495; New York: T. & T. Clark, 2008).

⁴⁰ Many scholars (e.g., Ephraim A. Speiser, *Genesis* [AB; New York: Doubleday, 1964], 367; Claus Westermann, *Genesis* [trans. David E. Green; London: T. & T. Clark, 1988], 330–31) regard Gen 49:18 as a later gloss. Whether this is the case or not has little bearing on the discussion at hand.

⁴¹ See Kenneth A. Kitchen, *Ancient Orient and Old Testament* (London: Tyndale, 1966), 121–25. For some examples, see Wardlaw, 173–79. Wardlaw writes, “Source critics have traditionally assumed that

Of course, the various divine names and titles are not the only ways in which literary sources are identified. The reason I have focused so sharply on this issue is because it bears directly on both the interpretation of Exod 6:3, as well as how to deal with the tension created between this text and the use of the name Yahweh in Genesis.

Finally, source critics must answer the question of why the redactors were comfortable with this tension created between Exodus 6 and the use of the divine name Yahweh in Genesis. If this apparent contradiction posed no problem for them, why should we assume differently for the authors of the so-called source material?⁴² Here, the words of Cassuto, writing on another conflict explained poorly by source critics, are appropriate:

By exculpating the author from the responsibility for the contradiction and putting the blame on the redactor, we gain nothing. We have merely shifted the problem from one place to another without solving it. An editor who does his work conscientiously is obliged to avoid inconsistencies no less than the author, possibly even more so. Nor is it feasible to maintain that the redactor was aware of the disparity but did not dare to tamper with the sources, for on other occasions we are told repeatedly that he erased or omitted or altered or added exactly as he was minded.⁴³

This sentiment has been echoed by Whybray: “Thus the hypothesis can only be maintained on the assumption that, while consistency was the hallmark of the various documents, inconsistency was the hallmark of the redactors.”⁴⁴

the use of a particular name for God is associated with an underlying literary source without first establishing that interchange of words for ‘God’ indicated literary sources elsewhere in the ancient Near East” (177).

⁴²Gordon J. Wenham, "The Religion of the Patriarchs," in *Essays on the Patriarchal Narratives* (ed. A. R. Millard and D. J. Wiseman; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1980), 180. This problem poses a serious threat to source-critical analysis in general, and has been called the “disappearing redactor” by John Barton (*Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Study* [rev. ed.; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996], 56–58, 254 n. 24), who attributes the term to Wright, who in turn attributes it to Motyer.

⁴³Cassuto, *The Documentary Hypothesis*, 81.

⁴⁴Whybray, 49.

I do not wish to deny that different sources may be at work behind sections of Exodus 3 and 6, or in Genesis; this possibility is affirmed by the Scriptures themselves (e.g., Gen 5:1; Num 21:14; Num 33:2), and is virtually required in many places (e.g., anachronisms). Yet I am reluctant to turn to this as the sole explanation for the alleged conflict between Exod 6:3 and the patriarchal narratives. This is because it does not actually offer an answer to the difficulty. At the very most, it pushes the problem back to having to account for why a later redactor did not see the kind of difficulty perceived by millennia of exegetes, spanning from Pseudo-Jonathan to the present day.⁴⁵ While we may add to this critique the transparently speculative nature of diachronic methods in general, and the methods used to identify and describe the P and E sources in particular,⁴⁶ this is essentially our reason for refusing to accept source criticism as an answer to the conflict caused by Exodus 6. Regardless of the prehistory of the traditions contained in chapters 3 and 6, the view of those responsible for the text as we have it is that these passages were somehow compatible with the storyline of Genesis. For this reason, it is wise to be cautious in allowing source-critical solutions to play too significant a role in determining the relationship between this passage and Genesis.

A Synthesizing Approach

Having reviewed several of the ways in which this passage has been understood, I am now in a position to offer my own conclusions. Attempts to recalibrate the

⁴⁵ Surburg, 122.

⁴⁶ Cross, 293–325. See Rolf Rendtorff, *The Problem of the Process of Transmission in the Pentateuch* (trans. by John J. Scullion; JSOTSup 89; Sheffield: Shefffield Academic Press, 1990), 156–75.

syntax of this verse in ways drastically different from the manner in which it has been traditionally understood are ultimately unpersuasive. Those who propose reading the final clause as a rhetorical question or as an asseverative statement fail to demonstrate how an author could have expected his readers to realize this. There is nothing in the context to commend this, and Andersen's attempt to avert this problem by reading the verse virtually as poetry smacks of special pleading. Nor do such approaches fare any better by pointing out the conundrum created by the final *nip 'al* verb. Since nearly all interpreters (save, perhaps, Andersen) must read יְשַׁמֵּי יְהוָה as either implying an elided בְּ preposition, or as a *casus pendens* construction, this objection resolves no difficulties.

Motyer's approach depends on what it means to “know the name of Yahweh,” and amounts to the strongest defense of all the attempts at harmonization. Observations raised in support of this position provide a satisfying analysis of what is going on in this text. It makes more sense to affirm that a distinction is being drawn between the patriarchs and the Israelites of Moses' time which rests upon the imminent demonstration of God's power, than to say that Exod 6:3 is simply a disclosure of seemingly trivial information concerning various designations for God. While the patriarchs did receive some of God's blessing (e.g., births of children, accumulation of wealth), nothing in their experience was truly on a level with the power demonstrated in the plagues, the Sinai theophany, God's provision during the wilderness wanderings, or the conquest of Canaan.

Nevertheless, arguments based on this line of reasoning fail to provide adequate grounds for the position their proponents hope to defend. While it is true that much more is involved in knowing the name of Yahweh than mere knowledge of the proper way to address God, there is no reason to think that this is *all* Exod 6:3 is claiming. It remains true that this verse says that the patriarchs did not know the name Yahweh. To run the risk of sounding presumptuous—this is the face value of the text. Had the author wished to

communicate that the patriarchs knew the actual name, but simply had not experienced his might in the way the Israelites were soon to witness, surely there would have been a clearer way to say it.

With this in mind, is it not preferable to conclude both that God is about to act in an unprecedented way in history, and that with this he is assuming a new name, without erecting a false dichotomy between the two?⁴⁷ Childs, who comes to the same conclusion, is correct in saying, “The traditional interpretation was clearly wrong in trying to avoid the implications plainly in the text that a new name was given to Moses.”⁴⁸ At the same time, the points made by Motyer and others, that “knowing” God’s name is a theologically loaded concept, should be appreciated. This is not an “either/or” scenario, but a “both/and.”

Conclusions on Exodus 3 and 6

I have examined the two texts at the center of the debate over whether or not the patriarchs knew the name Yahweh, and the major interpretations pertaining to them. This is a necessary step in determining whether the narratives of Genesis and Exodus can be used as evidence for El worship in Israel because it is essential to discern the claims of the biblical texts themselves, and because these passages contain the most direct reflections on the knowledge that the patriarchs had concerning the identity of their God. If it could be shown that these chapters do not in fact endorse, either implicitly or explicitly, what they appear to affirm—that the divine name Yahweh was originally given to the Israelites via Moses—then we would be able to say that knowledge of God as Yahweh was widespread at a much earlier

⁴⁷ Moberly, 59.

⁴⁸ Childs, 113.

point in history, or at least that the Bible endorses this view. Then, it would be difficult to account for the absence of the Yahwistic theophoric element in personal names in this early period. Now, however, we are faced with a different set of issues. While it was argued that Exodus 3 does not give firm testimony one way or the other, we have seen that Exodus 6 does, and that the position of the author of this material is that the patriarchs did not possess knowledge of the divine name. If these two passages are connected, even if only by a redactor, we must say that chapter 3 contains the revelation of the divine name to which chapter 6 refers.

My study shall now focus on two issues: First, if it was the contention of the biblical author(s) that the patriarchs did not know the name Yahweh, why do we find the name in the dialogue of Genesis? Second, is there evidence in Genesis that these early Israelites actually worshipped El, and that the identification of the El compounds of Genesis with Yahweh is a secondary alteration of this historical reality?

Before attending to the relevant texts of Genesis, I must first take a brief detour in order to address two additional matters. The first of these concerns is the Kenite hypothesis, which is a popular scholarly theory regarding the possible origin of Yahwism. After this, we will have to explore various suggestions that have been made for possible early extrabiblical attestations of the name Yahweh. If it can be shown that Yahweh was worshipped among the Kenites, the Amorites, or at Ebla or Ugarit, this may lend credence to certain theories attempting to explain the appearance of Yahwism in Israel, which, to one

degree or another, attempt to invalidate or re-conceptualize the biblical testimony of Exodus 3 and 6.⁴⁹

⁴⁹I am referring to theories such as that which can be found, for example, in Johannes C. de Moor, *The Rise of Yahwism: The Roots of Israelite Monotheism* (rev. and enl. ed.; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1997).

CHAPTER 4

POSSIBLE EARLY ORIGINS OF YAHWEH

We have found that, according to Exodus 3 and 6, the name Yahweh was first revealed among the Israelites to Moses. Several proposals have been made by scholars who have sought to locate the origins of Israelite Yahwism apart from God's revelation to Moses in the book of Exodus. This chapter will review these proposals, which, if true, would have to be integrated into any theory concerning the origins of Israelite religion. The first proposal, the Kenite hypothesis, is supported by inferences made from various biblical texts, and from extra-biblical evidence, while the others—which will be grouped together as early attestations of the divine name—come from other written materials that have been interpreted as evidence for Yahweh worship among peoples prior to the emergence of Israel.

The Kenite Hypothesis

Originating with the work of W. Ghillany, who wrote under the pseudonym of Richard von der Alm,¹ the Kenite (or Midianite) hypothesis is the theory that Yahweh was worshiped by the Kenites,² a Midianite subgroup, before he became the national God of

¹Richard von der Alm, *Theologische Briefe and den Gebilden der deutschen Nation, I* (Lepizig: Otto Wigan, 1862); G. H. Parke-Taylor, *Yahweh: The Divine Name in the Bible* (Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1975), 20.

²It has been speculated that the Kenites may have been descents of Cain, due to the phonetic relationship between קְנִים and קָנִים (see Baruch Halpern, “Kenites,” *ABD* 4:17–18).

Israel.³ This clan is often associated with regions by the southeastern border between Judah and Edom (Num 24:21; Josh 15:57; Judg 1:16, 1 Sam 17:10; 30:29), although in Judg 4–5, Heber, a Kenite, is found dwelling as far north as Hazor in the territory of Naphtali (Judg 4:11; also 1 Chr 2:55).⁴ At times, they are also associated with the Amalekites (Gen 15:19; 1 Sam 15:6).

This theory would give credence to the general position of the hypothetical J source, that worship of Yahweh preceded the Mosaic age.⁵ However, it would not invalidate our findings thus far, since, while Yahweh may have been worshipped and known by name outside of Israel, Exodus 3 would still function as the initial revelation of the divine name to Moses, and to the Israelites as well. Thus, although the biblical storyline does not explicitly affirm the Kenite hypothesis, it does not contradict it. In fact, one may argue, from a biblical standpoint, that the Midianites were connected to the Ishmaelites⁶—descendents of Abraham

³ Advocates of this position include C. P. Tiele, *Vergelijkende Geschiedenis van de Egyptische en Mesopotamische Godsdiensten* (Amsterdam: P. N. Van Kampen, 1872); Bernhard Stade, *Geschichte Israels unter der Königsherrschaft* (vol. 1 of *Geschichte des Volkes Israel*; Berlin: G. Grote, 1887); Karl Budde, *The Religion of Israel to the Exile* (ALHR 4; New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1899), 17–25; Julian Morgenstern, "The Oldest Document of the Hexateuch," *HUCA* 4 (1927): 1–138; Georg Beer, *Exodus, mit einem Beitrag von Kurt Galli* (HAT 3; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1939), 30; Harold Henry Rowley, *From Joseph to Joshua: Biblical Traditions in the Light of Archaeology* (London: Oxford University Press, 1950), 143–61; Roland de Vaux, "The Revelation of the Divine Name YHWH," in *Proclamation and Presence: Old Testament Essays in Honour of Gwynne Henton Davies* (ed. John I. Durham and J. R. Porter; London: SCM, 1970), 56; André Lemaire, *The Birth of Monotheism: The Rise and Disappearance of Yahwism* (trans. André Lemaire and Jack Meinhardt; ed. Jack Meinhardt; Washington, D.C.: Biblical Archaeological Society, 2007), 19–28; with caution, J. Maxwell Miller and John H. Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah* (2d ed.; Louisville: Westminster John Knox), 104–105.

⁴The text depicts Heber the Kenite as having separated himself from his kinsman in order to dwell in this remote location.

⁵ Parke-Taylor, 30.

⁶ Ernst A. Knauf, "Midianites and Ishmaelites," *Midian, Moab and Edom: The History and Archaeology of Late Bronze and Iron Age Jordan and North-West Arabia* (JSOTSup 24; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1983), 147–62), denies any connection between these two groups, but his argument rests almost entirely on

who shared a knowledge of the God of their ancestor with other Midianite clans. Nor is the Kenite hypothesis directly threatening to models of early Israelite history that see Israel as indigenous to Palestine, for it is still possible, under this scenario, that the Kenites, or a similar group, simply exerted religious influence on Israelite religion.⁷

Van der Toorn notes, “The strength of the Kenite hypothesis is the link it establishes between different but converging sets of data,”⁸ both biblical and extrabiblical. First, we may note the absence of the name of Yahweh in West Semitic epigraphy until the ninth century (see below). Since it is difficult to explain the appearance of this deity in Israel *ex nihilo*, efforts have been made by some scholars, many of whom are dissatisfied with the biblical account of Yahweh’s revelation of himself to Moses, to explain how Yahwism may have arisen out of Canaanite religion. Such theories are often difficult to verify, causing the cumulative case for the Kenite hypothesis to be more persuasive in the estimation of many.

Biblically, the earliest support for this scenario comes from Gen 4:15, where Cain is given the mark of Yahweh. This story is seen as an etiology to explain the presence of some kind of marking on all Kenites.⁹ Of course, whether this story is etiological in the

speculation and the assumption that the Qedar tribe, which, according to Assyrian inscriptions, conducted raids west of the Arabian peninsula, is to be equated with the Midianites/Ishmaelites in Judges 6–8.

⁷Pace Budde, 22–24; Marlene E. Mondriaan, “Yahweh and the Origin of Yahwism: A Critical Evaluation,” *OTE* 17 (2004), 586–87.

⁸Karel van der Toorn, “Yahweh יהוה,” *DDD*, 912.

⁹Sigmund Mowinckel, “The Name of the God of Moses,” *HUCA* 32 (1961): 124.

first place is questionable. There is no reference elsewhere to a special marking on Cain's descendants.¹⁰

Jethro, Priest of Midian

In Exodus, Moses' father-in-law is identified three times as "the priest of Midian" (Exod 2:16; 3:1; 18:1). Nowhere does the text identify the deity for whom he serves as priest. Moses' encounter with the burning bush at "the mountain of God" occurred while he was tending Jethro's flocks, although two texts seem to locate Sinai outside Midianite territory (3:1; 18:27).¹¹ Later, after the defeat of the Amalekites at Rephidim, Jethro, accompanying Moses' wife and their two sons, comes to meet Moses at Sinai, where he is delighted to hear of Yahweh's provision for the Israelites on their journey. After blessing Yahweh for his acts of deliverance, he declares, "Now I know that Yahweh is greater than all the gods" (18:11).¹² He then initiates a sacrificial meal with Moses, Aaron, and the elders of Israel (18:12), suggesting that the anonymous deity before whom Jethro serves as a priest is none other than Yahweh himself.¹³ Aside from the offerings mentioned in Genesis, this is

¹⁰ Mondriaan, 587; Roland de Vaux, *The Early History of Israel* (trans. David Smith; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978), 333–34.

¹¹ De Vaux, *Early History*, 333, 337; Rainer Albertz, *From the Beginnings to the End of the Monarchy* (vol. 1 of *A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period*; trans. J. Bowden; OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 52.

¹² Martin Buber (*Moses: The Revelation and the Covenant* [New York: Harper, 1958], 95) believes such a statement would not have been uttered by a deity's own priest. On the contrary, a polytheistic setting makes it entirely plausible. Nor does he take into account the rhetorical understatement of "now I know" (cf. Gen 22:12; 1 Kgs 17:24; 2 Kgs 4:9; Ps 20:7; de Vaux, *Early History*, 335).

¹³ Albertz, 51–52; Johannes de Moor, *The Rise of Yahwism: The Roots of Israelite Monotheism* (rev. and enl. ed.; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1997), 335.

the first recorded sacrifice to Yahweh.¹⁴ The next day, Jethro instructs Moses to appoint judges to lessen Moses' burden—an office that has religious implications here, despite the frequent use of **נָפֶשׁ** in the Hebrew Bible to denote leadership more generally (*Exod* 18:13–27).¹⁵

Yet none of these elements require us to understand this character as a Yahwist prior to his encounter with the Israelites at Mount Sinai. Exodus 18 could just as easily be read as his “conversion” upon having heard of the greatness of Israel’s God.¹⁶ After all, the Hebrew Bible often places confessions of Yahweh’s superiority on the lips of non-Yahwists (e.g., *Gen* 26:28; *Num* 22–24; *Josh* 2:9–11).¹⁷ To allege that in *Exod* 18:12 he “presides [as priest] at the sacred meal” is to claim that the text is saying something it doesn’t actually say. We are simply told that he “brought a burnt offering and sacrifices to God.”¹⁸ And what is the significance of the fact that, aside from his confession of Yahweh’s superiority in *Exod* 18:10–11, Jethro and Moses only use **אֱלֹהִים** to refer to God in their conversation in verses 13–23? Lastly, there is also some evidence that the Midianites were polytheists, which may present a difficulty for the Kenite hypothesis;¹⁹ this much is implied

¹⁴Lemaire, 26.

¹⁵Rowley, 149–53; Mowinckel, 124. On judges in the Hebrew Bible, see Temba L. J. Mafico, “Judge, Judging,” *ABD* 3:1104–6.

¹⁶De Moor, 311; Mondriaan, 586.

¹⁷De Vaux, *Early History*, 335–36.

¹⁸Pace Rowley, 150–51.

¹⁹De Moor, 311; Bill T. Arnold, “Religion in Ancient Israel,” in *The Face of Old Testament Studies: A Survey of Contemporary Approaches* (ed. David W. Baker and Bill T. Arnold; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 402.

in Jethro's statement in Exod 18:10–11.²⁰ Of course, if it is postulated that the Yahwism allegedly practiced by the Kenties may have been polytheistic, this would not be a problem for the theory *per se*.

Yahweh's Theophany from the South

Another line of evidence for the Kenite hypothesis is the fact that, in texts that are often regarded as being among the earliest writings in the Hebrew Bible, Yahweh is commonly associated with mountains located in southern regions typically ascribed to the Kenites.²¹ Deuteronomy 33:2 describes Yahweh as coming from Sinai, appearing from Seir, and shining forth from Mount Paran.²² In Judg 5:4–5, Yahweh emerges from Seir (cf. Gen 32:4; 36:8–9), an act which it places side by side with the Sinai theophany. Habakkuk 3:3 tells of Yahweh's march from Teman²³ and Mount Paran. Also, Hab 3:7 reads, “I saw the tents of Cushan (**כּוֹשֵׁן**) in affliction; the curtains of the land of Midian trembled.” Cushan is mentioned only here in the Hebrew Bible. Because of its connection to Midian in this text, it is possible that this is a Midianite tribe or a clan, possibly related to the Kenites. This would explain the criticism of Aaron and Miriam that Moses had married a “Cushite woman”

²⁰Lemaire, 27.

²¹See, for example, Lemaire, 21; Tryggve Mettinger, *In Search of God: The Meaning and Message of the Everlasting Names* (trans. F. H. Cryer; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 26.

²²Some have suggested emending “from ten thousand holy ones” (**מִרְבָּבַת קָדֵשׁ**) in this verse to read **מִעֲרֻבּוֹת קָדֵשׁ** (I. L. Seeligman, “A Psalm from Pre-Regal Times,” *VT* 14 [1964]: 76), or repointing it as **מִפְרָבּוֹת קָדֵשׁ** (Lars Eric Axelsson, *The Lord Rose up from Seir: Studies in the History and Traditions of the Negev and Southern Judah* [ConBOT 25; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1987], 49, 58–59). Axelsson’s suggestion would add one extra southern location (Meribat Kadesh) to the list.

²³For Teman, see Ernst A. Knauf, “Teman,” *ABD* 6.347–48.

(הָאֲשֵׁית הַכְּשִׁית, Num 12:1), who was the daughter of a Midianite priest (Exod 2:21).²⁴

Psalm 68:8–9,18 also contains similar ideas, yet because it only mentions Mount Sinai, it is most persuasive for the Kenite hypothesis if this mountain can be plausibly located in the southern Transjordan. In addition to these biblical references, we may also add the mention of “Yahweh of Teman” among the Kuntillet ‘Ajrud inscriptions.²⁵

Scholars who use these texts in support of this theory often use the quasi-circular argument that, because several of these verses refer to Sinai, Sinai must therefore be located in the vicinity of these other locations, despite the fact that the biblical data seems to require a location somewhere in the Sinai peninsula. The mention of Sinai, then, is taken as further evidence confirming Yahweh’s Transjordanian origin.²⁶

There are at least two ways to understand these passages that do not imply the conclusions of the Kenite hypothesis. Perhaps they are meant simply to recall the route taken by the Israelites, who were being led by Yahweh, into the promised land.²⁷ Or, some may contain a polemic against Baal, who was usually associated with Mount Zaphon in the north.²⁸ Whereas Baal’s storm theophany comes from the north, Yahweh’s comes from the

²⁴Lemaire, 22–23.

²⁵For references, see chapter 2 n. 57. See also John A. Emerton, “New Light on Israelite Religion: The Implications from Kuntillet ‘Ajrûd,” *ZAW* 94 (1982): 9–13.

²⁶Albertz, 52–53; Gösta W. Ahlström, *Who Were the Israelites?* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1986), 59. For a discussion of the possible locations of Sinai, see James K. Hoffmeier, *Ancient Israel in Sinai: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Wilderness Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 112–48.

²⁷Robert G. Boling, *Judges: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary* (AB 6A; Garden City: Doubleday, 1975), 108.

²⁸Daniel I. Block, *Judges, Ruth* (NAC 6; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 223; Trent Butler, *Judges* (WBC 8; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 138.

south. Emerton also notes that the Kuntillet ‘Ajrud inscriptions may in fact count as evidence against the Kenite hypothesis, since they too can speak of “Yahweh of Teman” as late as ca. 800 B.C.E., and since this does not necessarily mean that there was a Yahwistic cult operating in Teman (probably Edom) at this time. Rather, it may simply mean that “it is from the southern region that Yahweh has come, and it belongs in a special way to him.”²⁹

Also noteworthy in these biblical texts is the amount of stock language they share. All of them speak of Yahweh’s “coming” (**בָּאֵם**), and three have repetition of the divine name at the end (Deut 33:2; Judg 5:5; Ps 68:9). The highest degree of similarity is evident in Ps 68:8–9 and Judg 5:4, which share several elements virtually verbatim and in the same order: **ךְעַשְׂתָּה אֶרְצָה בְּצִדְקָה** and **שְׁמִים נִטְפּוּ**, preceded by an asseverative particle. Additionally, these are the only two places in the Hebrew Bible that we encounter the epithet, “the one of Sinai” (**זְהַ סִינֵּי**).³⁰ These elements demonstrate some degree of literary dependence,³¹ and so we are probably not dealing with early independent traditions, each separately containing references Yahweh’s appearance from southern mountains.

Yahweh of the Shasu Land?

Yet another attempt to connect Yahweh with this region comes from two Egyptian topographic lists dating from the New Kingdom, which mention several locations

²⁹Emerton, 9–10.

³⁰Boling, 108; Frank Moore Cross, "Yahweh and the God of the Patriarchs," *HTR* 55 (1962): 137–38.

³¹Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 51–100* (WBC 20; Dallas: Word, 1990), 176–77. This Psalm also has affinities with Num 10:35–36; Ps 29; Deut 33:2–5.

associated by the Egyptians with the Shasu.³² The first of these has been dated to the time of Amenhotep III (ca. 1390–1352 B.C.E.),³³ and is located in the temple of Amun at Soleb in Nubia. This brief list reads as follows: šsw smt, šsw yhw, šsw twrbr.³⁴ The first toponym has been identified with the Shimeathites (שִׁמְעָתִים), a clan of the Kenites in 2 Chr 2:55.³⁵ The third is unidentified. The second is obviously of great interest and relevance. A copy of this inscription, attributed to Rameses II, has also been found at Amarah West (ca. 1279–1213 B.C.E.).³⁶ Here, we find the toponyms šsw s'rr, šsw rbn, šsw psp, šsw smt, šsw yhw, and šsw wrbwr. The first has been identified as Seir,³⁷ the second as probably referring to Laban (Deut 1:1 = Libnah, Num 33:20–21),³⁸ and the third is unidentifiable. The fourth, fifth, and sixth parallel the Soleb inscription. Giveon favors translating šsw yhw in both instances as

³²For example, see Rowley, 153; Mettinger, 26; Albertz cautiously, 51. The Shasu, a group mentioned in other Egyptian texts as well, are usually identified as nomadic or seminomadic tribes located east of the Nile Delta and in the area southeast of Palestine, in the general vicinity of Edom, and are usually enemies of Egypt (Arnold, 401). See also Raphael Giveon, *Les Bédouins Shosou des Documents Égyptiens* (Leiden: Brill, 1971), 235–71.

³³For dating here and for Rameses II, see Kenneth A. Kitchen, “Egypt, History of (Chronology),” *ABD* 2.327–28. For text, see Giveon, 26–28.

³⁴There is another inscription as well at the Soleb temple that reads, šsw yh[w] (Giveon, 26).

³⁵Donald B. Redford, *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992), 272.

³⁶Giveon, 74–76.

³⁷Ibid., 76; Shmuel Ahituv *Canaanite Toponyms in Ancient Egyptian Documents* (Jerusalem: Magnes; Leiden: Brill, 1984), 169.

³⁸Giveon, 76; Ahituv, 129. This toponym is also attested on the lower register of Shishak’s list from the southwestern wall of the Karnak temple and is probably to be identified with Tell Abū Seleimeh (Ahituv, 129; Anson F. Rainey and R. Steven Notley, *The Sacred Bridge: Carta’s Atlas of the Biblical World* [Jerusalem: Carta, 2006], 188). Sargon II mentions it as well, placing it by “the Brook of Egypt” (Hayim Tadmor, “The Campaigns of Sargon II of Assur: A Chronological Historical Study,” *JCS* 12 [1958]: 77–78.).

“Yahwe en terre de Shosu” (“Yahweh in the Shasu land”).³⁹ Many scholars concur, seeing *yhw*, a toponym, as being related to Yahweh.⁴⁰ An analogy to this would be the Mesopotamian city of Aššur (*āl aššur*) and the land of Assyria in general (*māt aššur*), both of which were named after their patron deity. Mettinger is representative of this school of thought, when he opines, “From a linguistic point of view there can be no objection to any connection between the name of the Hebrew God and the *Yhw-* region, which was located in the reaches controlled by the Shasu bedouins.”⁴¹ If true, this places the earliest attestation of the divine name in the first half of the fourteenth century B.C.E.

Most notably, Astour has questioned the common contention that *s rr* in the Rameses II list is a reference to Seir, which is not expected to have a double *r*. Instead, he believes this location is to be found in the Beqa‘-Orontes region in the north.⁴² This is taken to undermine the contention that *yhw* is to be located in the vicinity of Edom. Ahituv objects to this on the grounds that the supposedly erroneous duplication of *r* is actually characteristic of the entire Amarah West list.⁴³ Redford also concurs with the identification as Seir, placing

³⁹ Giveon, 415–16. Giveon (“‘The Cities of Our God’ (II Sam 10:12),” *JBL* 83 [1978]: 28) postulates that this location may have originally been Beth Yahweh, named after a sanctuary in that area (contra de Vaux, *Early History*, 224). Johannes de Moor (125), on the other hand, believes that the determinative requires us to understand *yhw* as a people group, rather than a deity or a mountain.

⁴⁰ Knauf, “Midianites,” 46–47; Redford, 272–73; van der Toorn, 911; Lemaire, 23; Axelsson, 60; also Richard S. Hess, “The Divine Name Yahweh in Late Bronze Age Sources” *UF* 23 (1991): 182, with caution.

⁴¹ Mettinger, 26.

⁴² Michael C. Astour, “Yahweh in Egyptian Topographic Lists,” in *Festschrift Elmar Edel: 12 März 1979* (ed. M. Görg and E. Pusch; ÄAT 1; Bamberg: Görg, 1979), 17–34, esp. 20–24; Ahlström, 59–60; de Moor, 124, 310–11. Giveon (“Cities,” 415) is aware of Astour’s criticism, yet maintains that this is Seir.

⁴³ Ahituv, 169. Giveon’s documents 67, 97, and 103 all have a double ‘ in the spelling of *kn n*, “Canaan.” See also Axelsson, 60.

his argument in the more general context of Late Egyptian orthography, which, he claims, often distinguished trilled *r* sounds by writing *r* twice.⁴⁴ Finally, the Shasu are connected with the Seir/Edomite region in several other places in Egyptian writing.⁴⁵ Although it is the basis of Giveon's proposed southern location for *yhw*,⁴⁶ Seir is not required for this, for the same inscription mentions Laban. Even if *s rr* is to be located in the north (assuming Astour's identification is correct), this would simply mean that we have both northern and southern locations associated with *ssw*, and that we cannot be sure about *yhw*. Astour's criticism therefore provides insufficient warrant for rejecting a southern location for *yhw*.⁴⁷ It should be remembered, however, that, although linguistically similar, it is far from clear that *yhw* in these texts is indeed related to the Israelite deity Yahweh. Unless more data becomes available, this evidence remains confined to the realm of mere possibility.⁴⁸

Conclusions on the Kenite Hypothesis

It should be emphasized that there is no direct evidence, biblical⁴⁹ or extrabiblical, that the Kenites ever worshiped Yahweh. The entire case is circumstantial conjecture. It is the general dearth in knowledge regarding Midianite religion that has

⁴⁴ Redford, 272 n. 67.

⁴⁵ See, for example, "A Report of Bedouin," translated by James P. Allen (*COS* 3.5:4.13), as well as the other examples cited in Redford, 272 n. 70.

⁴⁶ Giveon, "Cities," 415.

⁴⁷ Henry O. Thompson, "Yahweh," *ABD* 6:1012.

⁴⁸ Ahlström, 60; Richard S. Hess, *Israelite Religions: An Archaeological and Biblical Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 159 n. 51; David Noel Freedman and Michael Patrick O'Connor, "יהוָה YHWH," *TDOT* 5:510.

⁴⁹ De Vaux, *Early History*, 334.

granted scholars the opportunity to speculate in the direction of the Kenite hypothesis.⁵⁰ While statements in Judges 5, Deuteronomy 33, and Habakkuk 3 do contain traditions of Yahweh's march from the south, and while *yhw* in the Egyptian topographical lists may place the earliest attestation of the divine name in the same region, the crucial link—the *Kenite* link—rests entirely on a questionable interpretation of Jethro's role in Exodus 18. Therefore, I cannot accept it as a viable option for explaining the origins of Israelite Yahwism.

Early Extra-biblical Attestations of Yahweh

I now turn to examine several proposals that have been made concerning alleged early attestations of the name Yahweh. It is not my intention to give an exhaustive survey of all occurrences of the tetragrammaton outside of the Bible. Rather, my objective is to determine whether there is any evidence of worship of Yahweh prior to the time of the early Israelites.⁵¹ Many attempts to find such attestations have had a very minor impact, and do not warrant detailed discussions.⁵² After presenting the earliest uncontroversial occurrence of the divine name, my brief discussion will be limited to those that are judged to have attracted a reasonable amount of scholarly attention.

The first unambiguous epigraphic reference to Yahweh is in the famous Mesha Stela, which was inscribed by the Moabite king Mesha in the latter half of the ninth

⁵⁰ Axelsson, 61.

⁵¹ This means that certain controversial proposals, such as the effort to find references to Yahweh in later names such as Azrī-Iāū, Iāū-bi'di/Ilu-bi'di, and Iāū-idrī, will not be discussed. For these names, see the relevant entries in *PNAE*.

⁵² For most, see A. Murtonen, *A Philological and Literary Treatise on the Old Testament Divine Names 'l, 'lwh, 'lhym, and Yhwh* (StudOr 18; Helsinki: Suomalais-Uuden seuran kirjapaino, 1952), 43–54.

century B.C.E.⁵³ In it, we learn of the liberation of Moab from the Omride kings of Israel. In lines 17–18, the Moabite king claims to have removed cultic objects of *yhw* during his liberation of Nebo.⁵⁴ Although there are certainly other early examples that can be cited,⁵⁵ this gives us a terminus ante quem for the worship of a deity explicitly known as Yahweh in Israel. Obviously, the biblical data would require us to push this date back several centuries earlier. We now turn to much earlier proposed evidence.

Mention should be made of two personal names, preserved for us from the Old-Babylonian period (ca. 1800–1600 B.C.E.), both of which have been taken to include the Yawhistic theophoric: *Ia-ú-um-DINGIR* and *Ia-wa-um-DINGIR*. Yet this has been shown to be a first person possessive pronoun instead.⁵⁶

⁵³ Freedman and O'Connor, *TDOT*, 5:502. For the text of the inscription, see *KAI* 181.

⁵⁴ *w'q̪ mšm '[t k]ly yhwh w'shb hm lpny kmš* (“and I took from there the vessels of Yahweh and I dragged them before Chemosh”).

⁵⁵ Shalmaneser III’s famous Black Obelisk, which dates to 828–27 B.C.E., spells the name of the Israelite king, Jehu, *"ia-ú-a* (RIMA 3:62–71; see “The Black Obelisk,” translated by K. Lawson Younger, Jr. [*COS* 2.113F:]). Note also, for example, the Miqneyahu seal, which Frank Moore Cross dates to the eighth century, that reads *lmqnyw/’bd . yhwh* (*Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* [Cambridge, Mass.; Harvard University Press], 61; see “Seals and Seal Impressions,” translated by Jeffrey H. Tigay and Alan R. Millard [*COS* 2.70.S]; *CWSSS*, 27). The Kuntillet ‘Ajrûd Inscriptions, which date from the early eighth century, contain the Yawhistic names *bdyw* (*KAjr* 9), *šm ’yw* (*KAjr* 10), *hlyw* (*KAjr* 11), *yhl[yw]* (*KAjr* 18; but see “Kuntillet ‘Ajrûd: Inscripted Pithos 1,” translated by P. Kyle McCarter [*COS* 2.47A], who reads *yhl[’l]*), *šknyw*, *šmryw*, *’yw*, and *’zyw* (*KAjr* 21), as well as the tetragrammaton itself (*KAjr* 9, 14, 19, 20) and the abbreviated form *yhw* (*KAjr* 20). Two of the inscriptions found at Khirbet el-Qôm have also been dated to the late eighth century. *Qom* 3 contains the personal names *’ryhw* and *’nyhw*, and the tetragrammaton itself (*lyhwh*). *Qom* 9 contains the personal name *yhzyhw*. *Qom* 1 and 2 date to the first half of the seventh century and contain the name *ntnyhw*. Other texts can be cited as well (see Freedman and O’Connor, *TDOT* 5:506–508).

⁵⁶ For the first, see *CT* 4:27a, 3. Apparently, some earlier scholars were attracted to reading this as an early occurrence of Yahweh, for the view is mentioned (and dismissed) by W. F. Albright, “Contributions to Biblical Archaeology and Philology,” *JBL* 43 (1924): 370 and *From the Stone Age to Christianity* (2d. ed.; Garden City: Doubleday, 1957), 259; de Vaux, “Revelation,” 52; Parke-Taylor, 43. Yet these sources give no references. For the second, see Theophilus G. Pinches, *The Babylonian Tablets of the*

Yahweh Among the Amorites?

The archives from Mari (Tell Harīrī) attest to thousands of Amorite personal names that constitute the bulk of data for the current scholarly understanding of the Northwest Semitic Amorite language.⁵⁷ Included among these names are certain elements, such as *ia-wi*, which, some have argued, should be identified with the name Yahweh.⁵⁸ This conclusion is unnecessary, for these elements are much more convincingly explained as imperfect forms of III-weak verbs.⁵⁹ In addition, in some of these names, another divine name follows this element, making it impossible to maintain that the initial element is a reference to Yahweh.⁶⁰ Prominent examples of this include *Ia-wi-^dIM* (*Yahwī-IŠKUR = Yahwī-Adad*), *Ia-wi-AN/DINGIR* (*Yahwī-Anum/ilum*), and *Ia-wi-^dD[a-gan]* (*Yahwī-Dagan*). Other names have the same verb, plus a hypocoristic ending (*Ia-wi-i-la*, [*I*]a-wi-ú-um). To both of these groups can be added those names such as *Ia-ah-wi-na-si* and *Ia-ah-wi-*

Berens Collection [London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1915], 126) for a drawing, and the translation, “Yahwah [*sic*] (Jehovah) is God.” Both forms were recognized as personal pronouns early by Benno Landsberger, “Solidarhaftung von Schuldern in den babyl.-assyrischen Urkunden,” *ZA* 35 (1924): 24 n. 2; see *CAD* 7:330.

⁵⁷ George E. Mendenhall, “Amorites,” *ABD* 1:200.

⁵⁸ J. Philip Hyatt, *Exodus* (NCB; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 79–80; Friedrich Delitzsch, *Babel and Bible* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1903), 61–62; A. Finet, “Iawi-ilā, roi de Talhayum,” *Syria* 41 (1964): 118–22.

⁵⁹ Semantics is the only way to distinguish the G stem of this verb from the causative in Amorite, since, for these III-*y/w* verbs, both forms would be *yaqtil*. As an imperfect, the translation would be “DN exists.” As a causative, these names would mean “DN gives life” (Herbert Bardwell Huffmon, *Amorite Personal Names in the Mari Texts: A Structural and Lexical Study* [Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press 1965], 71–72; de Vaux, “Revelation,” 54 and *Early History*, 342–43). The apocopated jussive variant is attested in the Amorite names *ya-u-i-lí* and *ya-ḥi-DINGIR* (Cross, *Canaanite Myth*, 63). For a similar PN in Ugaritic, *hy’il*, see *KTU* 2.26:3; 4.32:2; 7.14:1.

⁶⁰ John Gray, “The God YW in the Religion of Canaan,” *JNES* 12 (1953), 279.

AN/DINGIR, whose verb is clearly from the root **hwy*.⁶¹ It is likely that this is the verbal root of all these names, given that **hwy* is unattested in early West Semitic,⁶² and although a similarity in meaning exists with Akkadian *bašūm* and Ugaritic *kn*, both of which are used in personal names, the two are phonetically unrelated to **hwy*. It is better therefore to simply read these forms as exhibiting orthographic variation.⁶³ Whatever the case may be, it remains that there is no reason to see any relation between these names and the tetragrammaton, other than that the former can give clues as to the understanding of the morphological form of the latter.⁶⁴ Freedman and O'Connor observe, “Amorite contains a verb form remarkably similar to the reconstruction of the Tetragrammaton, but there is no reason to ‘identify’ the two.”⁶⁵

The Ebla Texts

A much greater stir in this respect has been caused by the tablets found at Ebla (Tell Mardikh). Pettinato, who is most-often associated with this controversy, observes the fact that virtually the same personal names will be written in one place with a final *-il*, and in

⁶¹ In Amorite orthography *h* is represented with *ḥ*. *H* is only rarely represented, and when it is we also find *ḥ* (de Vaux, “Revelation,” 54; Cross, *Canaanite Myth*, 62–63).

⁶² Freedman and O’Connor, *TDOT* 5:512; Huffmon (72) notes as the only examples Yahweh and *yhw* from the Egyptian topographical lists discussed earlier.

⁶³ Huffmon, 72. *Pace* Gray, “God,” 279 and Freedman and O’Connor, *TDOT* 5.512, both of whom prefer **hwy*. To this list of names, Cross (*Canaanite Myth*, 62) adds those names with forms such as *La-wi-AN*, *La-wi-la^dIM*, arguing that they derive from **Lā-yahwi-x*. Initial *lw*', however, simply means “pledged person” or “priest” (see Huffmon, 225–26).

⁶⁴ De Vaux, *Early History*, 342–43.

⁶⁵ Freedman and O’Connor, *TDOT* 5:512. See also Parke-Taylor, 44–45 and Michael P. Streck, “Der Gottesname ‘Jahwe’ und das amurritische Onomastikon,” *WO* 30 (1999): 35–46.

others with a final *-ià* (e.g., *Mi-kà-il/Mi-kà-ià*, *En-na-il/En-na-ià*, *Iš-ra-il/Iš-ra-ià*), and suggests that *ià* is to be understood as either a divine name or a hypocoristic element.⁶⁶ One name, which Pettinato transliterates as ^d*Ià-ra-mu* and likens to Joram (*Yôrām*) of the Bible, seems to tip the scales in favor of reading this as a divine name, which leads Pettinato to posit a deity *Yaw* at Ebla.⁶⁷ He also sites as support ^d*iá* (*sic*) in two god lists from Fara, and in Sumerian personal names from the Third Dynasty of Ur.⁶⁸ To be fair, Pettinato does not equate this deity with Yahweh of the Bible⁶⁹—but the potential to infer in this direction is obviously there. Shortly after the initial embroilment, he became “convinced that both elements [-il and -ià] are generic terms for ‘God’ and do not indicate, at least not always, a particular divinity.”⁷⁰ This has not stopped others from maintaining his initial hypothesis.⁷¹

Pettinato’s analysis of these personal names, and the conclusions he draws regarding them, have been widely rejected by many scholars. The use of *ià* as a hypocoristic

⁶⁶ Giovanni Pettinato, “Royal Archives of Tell Mardikh-Ebla,” *BA* 39 (1976): 48 and “Ebla and the Bible,” *BA* 43 (1980): 205.

⁶⁷ According to Pettinato, “The form *Ya* may be considered a shortened form of *Yaw*, as may be inferred from such personal names as *Šu-ma-a-ù*” (“Archives,” 48).

⁶⁸ Pettinato, “Ebla,” 205; Mitchel Dahood, afterword to *The Archives of Ebla: An Empire Inscribed in Clay*, by Giovanni Pettinato (New York: Doubleday, 1981), 277. ^d*Ià-ra-mu* is found in TM 75 G 1357. For Fara, see Pietro Mander, “Brevi considerazioni sul testo lessicale SF 23 = SF 234 e paralleli da Abu Salabikh,” *OrAnt* 19 (1980): 190–91. For the Sumerian names, see Giovanni Pettinato, Hartmut Waetzoldt, and Francesco Pomponio, *Testi Economici di Lagaš del Museo di Istanbul, Parte I: LA. 7001–7600* (MVN 6. Roma: Multigrafica Editrice, 1977), 339.

⁶⁹ See his very emphatic statements in Pettinato, “Ebla,” 203–204.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 205.

⁷¹ Dahood, for example, confidently states “The evidence for the pre-Israelite existence of the name *Ya* for a Canaanite deity grows ever more impressive” (277).

ending at Ebla, acknowledged by Pettinato himself, must be taken into account.⁷² Also the sign which Pettinato reads as *ià* can also be read as *ni*, *i*, *lì*, or the logogram NI.⁷³ Further, it has been shown that this sign is also often short for NI-NI, standing for *i-lì* (“my god”).⁷⁴ As for the example of ^d*Ià-ra-mu*, it is curious why Pettinato and Dahood do not read it as either DINGIR-*lì-ra-mu* or ^d*ili_x-ra-mu* (“my god is exalted”), which seems preferable to positing a deity whose existence is elsewhere suggested in only a handful of highly debatable personal names.⁷⁵ Finally, we note the observation and conclusion of van der Toorn: “In no list of gods or offerings is the mysterious god *Ya ever mentioned; his cult at Ebla is a chimera.”⁷⁶

⁷²Van der Toorn, *DDD*, 910–11; Chaim Berman and Michael Weitzman, *Ebla: A Revelation in Archaeology* (New York: Times Books 1979), 181–82; Kenneth A. Kitchen, *The Bible in Its World: The Bible and Archaeology Today* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1977), 47.

⁷³Berman and Weitzman, 180; Robert Biggs, “The Ebla Tablets: An Interim Perspective,” *BA* 43 (1980): 82.

⁷⁴Hans-Peter Müller, “Gab es in ebla ein Gott ja?” *ZA* 70 (1980): 83 and “Der jahwenamen und seine Bedeutung. Ex 3.14 im Licht der Textpublikationen aus Ebla,” *Bib* 62 (1981): 305–307; van der Toorn, *DDD*, 911; Arnold, 403. The preference for NI.NI to write *iłi* is explained by Biggs: “The evidence is overwhelming that *i* is often not expressed in the writing at the beginning or end of a syllable. Thus *i* can be simply a short writing for *iłi*. It seems likely that *i* for *iłi* in personal names (where II is a very common element) is especially frequent, because the sign NI (i.e., *i*) is very simple (4 easy stulus strokes) whereas *iłi* is a complicated sign (usually made up of 15 or more wedges at various angles)” (Robert D. Biggs, “Ebla Texts,” *ABD* 2:265).

⁷⁵Alfonso Archi, “The Epigraphic Evidence from Ebla and the Old Testament,” *Bib* 60 (1979): 47; van der Toorn, *DDD*, 911. Giovanni Garbini also criticizes this as the sole attestation of the form which supposedly proves Pettinato and Dahood’s theory (*History and Ideology in Ancient Israel* [New York: Crossroad 1988], 187–88, n. 6).

⁷⁶Van der Toorn, *DDD*, 911; Archi, 560.

Yahweh at Ugarit?

In a damaged portion of the Ugaritic Baal Cycle, El, speaking to a goddess (probably Aṭiratu), makes the comment, “The name of my son is *yw*, O Elat.”⁷⁷ It is not surprising that some scholars have sought to equate this mysterious *yw* with Yahweh.⁷⁸ De Moor attempts to support this reading by claiming that the earliest attested form of the Yhwistic theophoric is also *yw*, as it is found on an inscribed arrowhead dating to the eleventh century B.C.E.⁷⁹ This, coupled with some general similarities between Yahweh and Yammu,⁸⁰ leads him to suggest that Yammu, who is favored in this text above Ba‘lu, is possibly being purposely portrayed “as a deliberate caricature of YHWH,” and to basically attribute all actions of Yammu in this section of the Baal cycle to the deity he calls “Yawē/Yammu.” The fragmentary nature of this text has led many to skepticism regarding this interpretation,⁸¹ although it is widely acknowledged that Virolleaud’s photographs seem

⁷⁷ The text reads, *šm bny yw il[. . .]* (*KTU* 1.1:IV:14). For a brief survey of the literature and the various positions that have been taken on this issue, see *RSP* 3, 367–68.

⁷⁸ This connection was made early on by R. Dussaud, “Le Sanctuaire et les dieux phéniciens de Ras Shamra,” *RHR* 105 (1932): 247, and Charles Virolleaud, *La Déesse Anat, poème de Ras Shamra publié, traduit et commenté* (MRS 4; BAH 28; Paris: Geuthner, 1938), 98. See also Murtonen (90–92); E. C. B. MacLaurin, “YHWH: The Origin of the Tetragrammaton,” *VT* 12 (1962): 449–50. Virolleaud also attempted to find *yw* in a personal name in a fragmentary list of personal names (Charles Virolleaud, “États nominatifs et pièces comptables provenant de Ras Shamra,” *Syria* 18 [1937]: 159–73).

⁷⁹ De Moor, 164–71. This is a departure from De Moor’s previous skeptical stance towards this (Johannes C. De Moor, *An Anthology of Religious Texts from Ugarit* [Leiden: Brill 1987], 25 n. 116 and *The Seasonal Pattern in the Ugaritic Myth of Ba‘lu, According to the Version of Ilimilku* [AAOT 16; Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker, 1971], 119). On the arrowhead, see Frank Moore Cross, “An Inscribed Arrowhead of the Eleventh Century B.C.E. in the Bible Land Museum in Jerusalem,” *ErIsr* 23 (1992): 21, 26 n. 3; Robert Deutsch, and Michael Heltzer, *New Epigraphic Evidence from the Biblical Period* (Tel Aviv: Archaeological Center Publications 1995), 33.

⁸⁰ Both are designated *mlk*, *b’l*, *’adn*, and *špt/tpt*, both acquire gold and silver for their people, both desire control of Mount Zaphon, and neither have a consort or offspring (de Moor, *Rise*, 167–69).

⁸¹ Hess, “Divine Name,” 183; Albright (*Stone Age*, 259) reads *yr* (cf. Akk. *arum*, “offspring”), a suggestion also made in *KTU* (n. 2).

quite clearly to read *yw*.⁸² Needless to say, this theory has been widely criticized.⁸³ Some prefer to identify *yw* with Iεvω of Philo Byblos' *Phoenician History*⁸⁴—a deity who is probably to be identified with *yammu*.⁸⁵ Any proponent of this position must reckon with the fact that a deity *yw* is completely absent from all other Ugaritic texts, and that, despite de Moor's claim, the longer form *ywhh* seems to be earlier than the abbreviated form *yw*.⁸⁶ It is more likely that there is some type of wordplay going on between *yw* and *ym* (Yammu).⁸⁷ Pope's words of caution are in order: “In hinblick auf alle diese Unsicherheiten ist es nicht greateren, diese Namen untereinander und mit dem Gott Israels in Verbindung zu bringen.”⁸⁸

⁸² Viroilleaud, *La Déesse*, pl. XIII; Gray, 279; de Vaux, *Early History*, 341; Murtonen, 49; Cyrus Herzl Gordon, *Ugaritic Textbook* (AnOr 38; Rome: Pontifico Biblico, 1965), 410; Freedman and O'Connor (*TDOT* 5:510) call *yw* “indisputable.” Albright, observing this photo, did not think so (*Stone Age*, 259 n. 83).

⁸³ Albright, *Stone Age*, 197, 328; Rowley, 148; Gray, 278–83; van der Toorn, *DDD*, 911. Anson F. Rainey (review of Johannes C. De Moor, *The Rise of Yahwism: The Roots of Israelite Monotheism*, *JNES* 60 [2001]: 150) asks, with respect to de Moor's argument: “Does he really expect a trained readership to countenance such a ploy?”

⁸⁴ Garbini, 57; Mark S. Smith, *The Ugaritic Baal Cycle, Volume 1: Introduction with Text, Translation and Commentary of KTU 1.1–1.2* (VTSup 55; Leiden: Brill, 1994), 151–52. The *Phoenician History* is preserved in extensive quotations by Eusebius of Caesarea in his fourth century A.D. work, *Praeparatio Evangelica*, which is an attempt to summarize the writings of the otherwise unknown Phoenician priest Sanchuniathon. For the relevant text, see *Praep. ev.* I:9:21.

⁸⁵ Freedman and O'Connor, *TDOT* 5:510.

⁸⁶ De Vaux, “Revelation,” 50, 53 and *Early History*, 342.

⁸⁷ Freedman and O'Connor, *TDOT* 5:510; de Vaux, *Early History*, 342.

⁸⁸ Marvin H. Pope, “Syrien: Die Mythologie der Ugariter und Phönizier,” in *Götter und Mythen im vorderen Orient* (vol. 1, part 1 of *Wörterbuch Der Mythologie*; ed. H. W. Haussig; Stuttgart: Ernst Klett Verlag, 1965), 291–92.

Again the Egyptian Topographical Lists

The Egyptian topographical lists, dating to the reigns of Amenhotep III and Rameses II, which mention the toponym *šsw yhw*, were discussed earlier. The fact that we know absolutely nothing about this place (if indeed it is a place, rather than a people group)—even its location is not absolutely certain—means that we have no way to ascertain whether it is in fact somehow related to the deity Yahweh. If it is, then we would have evidence of Yahwistic worship in the fourteenth century B.C.E. But until more evidence becomes available, this remains an unresolved issue.

Conclusions on Early Extra-biblical Attestations of the Name Yahweh

Given the present state of research, we must therefore conclude that, both epigraphically and biblically, it cannot be successfully demonstrated that Yahweh was worshipped anywhere in the ancient Near East before the Israelites arrived in Palestine in either the fifteenth or thirteenth century B.C.E.⁸⁹ Taken alongside of the testimony of Exodus 3 and 6, this means that, as far as we can tell, the divine name Yahweh was first revealed to Moses, who led the Hebrews out of Egypt under God's guidance. It was during this formative period that knowledge of the name of God was mediated by Moses to the Israelite people, who adopted Yahweh as their God, were in Palestine by the time of Merneptah's Libyan campaign, and continued to practice Yahweh-worship. The first

⁸⁹Extrabiblically, the Merneptah Stele requires us to regard the Israelites as a people group living in Palestine by 1208 B.C.E. (Kitchen, 215). For the text, see *KRI* 4:12–19.

epigraphic attestation to the tetragrammaton is in the Mesha Stela, which demonstrates that Yahweh was already a significant Israelite deity by the mid-ninth century B.C.E.⁹⁰

⁹⁰Lemaire, 19–20.

CHAPTER 5

THE NAME YAHWEH IN GENESIS

Having examined the origins of the name Yahweh in light of the testimony of Exodus, as well as proposals based on extrabiblical data, we are now prepared to focus on the narratives of Genesis. Since I have concluded that Exod 6:3 indicates that the name Yahweh was revealed for the first time in Israelite history to Moses, and that there is no compelling evidence that the name was known prior to this, we are faced with the following question: If the name Yahweh was not known before the time of Moses, why is it found abundantly throughout the pages of Genesis? Is this counterevidence against my conclusions so far?

The Yahweh Problem

The name Yahweh occurs 165 times in MT in the book of Genesis, fifty-three of which are in direct speech. In primeval history (Gen 1–11), it is used by Eve (4:1), Lamek (5:29), and Noah (9:26). It is found on the lips of all three patriarchs: Abraham (14:22; 15:2, 8; 22:14; 24:3, 7),¹ Isaac (26:22; 27:7, 27), and Jacob (27:20; 28:16, 21; 30:30; 32:10; 49:18). Of the patriarchal wives, Sarah (16:2, 5), Leah (29:32, 33, 35), and Rachel (30:24) use it. Several of the patriarchs' close associates also use the divine name: Lot (19:14) and the angels who are sent to him (19:13 [x 2]), Abraham's servant (24:12, 27 [x 2], 31, 35, 40, 42,

¹For the sake of convenience, I use the names “Abraham” and “Sarah,” which they are granted in Genesis 17, throughout this chapter, even when describing their words and actions prior to this name change.

44, 48 [x 2], 56), Abimelek and Phicol (26:28, 29), and Laban (25:50, 51 [both along with Bethuel]; 30:27; 31:49). Finally, God refers to himself as Yahweh when speaking to Abraham (15:7; 18:14; 22:16 [**מֶלֶךְ יְהוָה**]), Hagar (16:11 [**מֶלֶךְ יְהוָה**]), in a soliloquy (18:19 [x 2]), and to Jacob (28:13).² As a result, the initial impression is given that the characters do know the divine name, and use it freely, which is problematic, given what we are told in Exod 6:3. There are basically two ways to resolve this difficulty.

Once Again Source Criticism

This first solution was discussed in chapter two, and claims that there were essentially two different views in ancient Israel concerning the revelation of God's name. One was held by the Yahwist, who believed that Yahweh was known by name to humanity since the dawn of time (Gen 4:26). The other, maintained by both the Elohist and Priestly writers, insists that the name originated during the time of Moses (Exod 3:14 and 6:3, respectively). The discrepancy is created by the fact that both views are represented in the biblical text. Therefore, it is the Yahwist who is responsible for the vast majority of occurrences of the divine name throughout Genesis, with only a small handful either ascribed to the Elohist or the Priestly writer, or explained away as later glosses. Skinner, who may be taken as representative of this position, confidently asserts:

“It is not only possible, but *certain* that at least two writers were concerned in the composition of Genesis. That is an inevitable inference . . . from the express statement of Exodus 6:2–3. The writer of Exodus 6:2–3 could neither

²The two other occurrences in speech are proverbial, and therefore belong more properly to the time of the author(s) of those statements (Gen 10:9 and the last clause of 22:14). See Umberto Cassuto, *The Documentary Hypothesis and the Composition of the Pentateuch* (trans. Israel Abrahams; New York: Shalem, 2006), 43–44.

have recorded previous revelations of the Deity under the name of Yahweh, nor have put the name into the mouth of any of the patriarchs.³

My dissatisfaction with this theory was voiced in the earlier discussion of Exod 6:3, and will not be repeated here.

Theological Retrojection

The other way to address this problem is to claim that those responsible for the composition of the Pentateuch believed that it was their national deity who had guided the patriarchs as sojourners in the promised land long before the time of Moses, and that they had no problem calling him by his unique name in these early narratives, even though they did not believe that the name had actually been revealed at the time they were describing.⁴ By including the name Yahweh in these narratives, the author is making a theological statement, not a historical one. Moberly, arguing along these lines, while seeking to maintain source-critical distinctions, claims that the Yahwist thought the same way with respect to this subject as did the Elohistic and Priestly writers, yet did not share their reservations about introducing this anachronism into the text.⁵ To be sure, all three hypothetical authors have inserted anachronisms into Genesis, both implicitly (J in Gen 13:18; 26:1–33; E in 21:32;

³ John Skinner, *The Divine Names in Genesis* (London: Hodder & Soughton, 1914), 12.

⁴ Waldemar Janzen, *Exodus* (BCBC; Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 2000), 65–66; Richard E. Averbeck, “Factors in Reading the Patriarchal Narratives: Literary, Historical, and Theological Dimensions,” in *Giving the Sense: Understanding and Using Old Testament Historical Texts* (ed. David M. Howard, Jr. and Michael A. Grisanti; Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2003), 130. This view was expressed as early as medieval times by Rabbi Yehoshua, as indicated by Abraham ibn Ezra (Moshe Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus* [MRCS II.1; New York: Behrman House, 1969], 132).

⁵ R. W. L. Moberly, *The Old Testament of the Old Testament: Patriarchal Narratives and Mosaic Yahwism* (OBT; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 70–78.

21:34; 40:15; 50:10b–11) and explicitly (J in Gen 12:6; 13:7; 28:19; 32:32; E in 22:14; 35:20; P in 23:2, 19; 35:6).⁶

Many of the references to the divine name in Genesis occur in narrated discourse, and fall under the category of what Motyer calls “the historian’s use.”⁷ Even on the most conservative account of the composition of Genesis, Moses would have known the name of God and would understandably have used it frequently outside of direct speech, since, by his time, it was believed that Yahweh was the deity who had dealings with the patriarchs. These verses present no clear contradiction when compared to Exod 6:3 because they neither imply nor explicitly claim that the patriarchs knew God by the name Yahweh, and can be explained on analogy to some of the other anachronisms in Genesis, such as the mention of Dan in Gen 14:14 and the early references to Bethel (Gen 12:8; 13:2; cf. 28:19; 35:6). McKeown comments, “If the narrator was willing to replace an ancient city name with a name that the readers would be familiar with to avoid confusion, then it is likely that the same principle applied to the name of God.”⁸ The more difficult passages are those in

⁶ By “anachronisms,” it is my intention to indicate places, people, and states of affairs which are referred to differently in the text of Genesis than they would have been during the time of the patriarchs. The source divisions used here follow the analysis given in Martin Noth, *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions* (trans. Bernhard W. Anderson; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1981). Authorship is controversial for chapter 14, which contains both explicit anachronisms (vv. 2, 3, 8, 17) and a single implicit one (v. 14). Genesis 49:7 is also typically considered to belong to a separate source spanning 49:1b–28. Noth considers 36:31 to be an addition to P. The E sections are notoriously controversial; for example, Alan W. Jenks would exclude Gen 35:20 and 50:10b–11 (“Elohist,” *ABD* 2:480).

⁷ J. A. Motyer, *The Revelation of the Divine Name* (London: Tyndale, 1959), 25; Allen P. Ross, “Did the Patriarchs Know the Name of the Lord?” in *Giving the Sense: Understanding and Using Old Testament Historical Texts* (ed. David M. Howard, Jr. and Michael A. Grisanti; Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2003), 330–31.

⁸ James McKeown, *Genesis* (THOTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 45; Moberly, 77–78.

which the divine name occurs in direct speech, since this seems to affirm that the narrator presupposed that the name was known to the characters of Genesis.

This distinction between narrated discourse and direct speech is entertained by Wenham as an initial methodological proposal for dealing with the issue of the presence of the divine name in Genesis. Towards the beginning of his essay, he sets his task as follows:

. . . to distinguish carefully between the various usages of the divine names, i.e. whether they occur in the framework of the story and therefore represent the editor's understanding of the situation or whether they form part of the dialogue in the story and therefore may represent the wording of the source, rather than an editor's understanding of his source.⁹

This approach is based on an assumption that the presence of a particular divine name in dialogue is a strong enough indicator to determine that an editor has not modified his source—an assumption that I do not share. More significantly, the many references to the divine name in direct speech make it almost unavoidable to conclude that “later editors have not only reworded the narrative framework but also the dialogue,” which basically renders this method useless, causing Wenham ultimately to jettison this approach.¹⁰ At the very most, this may represent the practice and view of the author of the Joseph cycle (if he is to be distinguished from the other hypothetical authors of Genesis), since there we have a complete lack of use of the name Yahweh in direct speech (excluding Gen 49:18). While this may bring us closer to understanding the use of the divine name in Genesis, the numerous exceptions to this general hypothesis remain its primary problem.

⁹Gordon J. Wenham, "The Religion of the Patriarchs," in *Essays on the Patriarchal Narratives* (ed. A. R. Millard and D. J. Wiseman; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1980), 159.

¹⁰Ibid., 160, 181–83.

Wenham, seeking to show that the author was hesitant to insert this anachronism into his received traditions containing the speeches of God, demonstrates convincingly that some of the divine speech in Genesis does not imply a contradiction to Exod 6:3. He sees God's statement in Gen 15:7, for example, as a formula parallel to "Yahweh, who brought you out of the land of Egypt," and therefore due to the narrator's desire to establish a parallel between Abraham's journey from his homeland and the Israelites' exodus from Egypt. The two occurrences of "Yahweh" in Gen 18:19 are part of a soliloquy, and therefore do "not imply that Abraham either heard these words or knew the divine name," which is more convincing than when he attempts to use this same argument to explain Gen 18:14 ("Is anything too difficult for Yahweh?").¹¹ While these explanations are helpful, it is impossible to explain all occurrences of the divine name in the direct speech of Genesis in a similar fashion.¹²

Wenham is successful therefore in explaining some of the occurrences of the divine name in the dialogue of Genesis. Yet his most insightful contention is set forth when he writes:

What seems more compatible with the evidence is that the Yahwistic editor of Genesis was so convinced of the identity of Yahweh and the God who revealed himself to the patriarchs, that he not only used Yahweh in the

¹¹ Ibid., 182. Ross (331) is likewise unconvinced by this latter example. Some of Wenham's other explanations are also dubious. For example, he deals with Gen 14:22 by claiming it as a later addition (on this, see my treatment below), and the occurrences in chapter 24 as part of the narrator's "frequent use of Yahweh in the opening and closing episodes of the Abraham cycle" (181–82). As for the latter, it is difficult to see how this helps.

¹² Ross (328 n. 22) takes note of this, saying, "The survey is necessarily selective, but some critical passages were not discussed that perhaps should have been."

narrative, but also more sparingly in reporting human and angelic speech. He showed even more restraint in modifying divine utterances.¹³

Moberly's answer to the question bears much similarity to the solutions offered by Wenham. He states his thesis as follows:

In principle the use of YHWH in Genesis 12–50 conveys the perspective of the Yahwistic storytellers, who are retelling originally non-Yahwistic traditions in a Yahwistic context, and as they appropriate the stories for Yahwism, so they tend to use the familiar name of their God.¹⁴

While we disagree with Moberly's contention that it follows that these authors had “little interest in maintaining historical perspective in *any* modern sense,”¹⁵ his observations are nevertheless helpful. It is simply too rigid to insist that the ancient authors restricted themselves to giving verbatim dictation of what they believed the characters of Genesis actually said.

Eslinger refers to Moberly's theory as “mediacy of presentation,” which takes into account “the possibility that a narrator . . . may codify a biblical character’s words or thoughts in language appropriate to the world view of the narrator, but not that of the character.”¹⁶ He goes on to criticize Moberly, arguing that this places us upon a slippery slope to saying that narrative is only capable of speaking monophonically. He complains, “Simply to assume that expressions containing the name Yahweh represent exclusive

¹³ Wenham, 183. This approach is similar to the one developed in Fred G. Smith, “Observations on the Use of the Names and Titles of God in Genesis,” *EvQ* 40 (1968): 103–109.

¹⁴ Moberly, 70.

¹⁵ Ibid., 69, emphasis mine.

¹⁶ Lyle Eslinger, “Knowing Yahweh: Exod 6:3 in the Context of Genesis 1–Exodus 15,” in *Literary Structure and Rhetorical Strategies in the Hebrew Bible* (ed. L. J. de Regt, J. de Waard, and J. P. Fokkelman; Assen: Van Gorcum & Company, 1996), 192.

authorial perspective is too weak to withstand any amount of scrutiny”¹⁷—exactly what scrutiny this may be, he never says. Perhaps he has in mind the kind of criticism offered by Ross, that reducing the statements in Genesis simply to narrative art somehow diminishes the historicity of the text.¹⁸ This is certainly a valid objection, although it would probably not be very troubling for Moberly, who seems to show little concern for such issues.

In my opinion, the approach of Moberly and Wenham is the best answer to the problem posed by the use of the divine name Yahweh in Genesis. This also is the view ultimately endorsed by Hess:

From the standpoint of the history of Yahwism, it is important to note that Exodus 6:2–3 confirms that Yahweh originally revealed himself as El, the traditional *name of* the chief god of the West Semitic pantheon. This was evident whether he was manifest as El Shaddai, El Elyon, or another El figure. The Middle Bronze Age (c. 2000–1550 BC) origins of the name Yahweh . . . place the identification with El in this period, traditionally associated by some with the Genesis ancestors, when Yahweh was known by these El names.¹⁹

The idea that the narrator inserted the name Yahweh into the direct speech of the characters of Genesis, while understanding that they would not have actually have known the name, is analogous to the situation with the name Joshua, which is changed by Moses just prior to his sending of the spies into the promised land (Num 13:8, 16), and yet is used in direct speech even before the people reach Sinai (Exod 17:14). The biblical writer apparently allowed himself enough freedom with his source material—whether oral or written—to make changes that cast these traditions in light of the theology that was current in

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Ross, 331.

¹⁹Richard S. Hess, *Israelite Religions: An Archaeological and Biblical Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 174, emphasis mine.

his own day, and which would not have substantially altered the meaning of the traditions themselves.

Objections to Theological Retrojection

If my analysis of Exodus 6 is correct, and if source-critical solutions to the tension created between it and the narrative of Genesis fail to provide satisfactory answers, it seems that the presence of the name Yahweh in the direct speech of Genesis must be accounted for along the lines of theological retrojection. In other words, the use of the divine name by the characters of Genesis is a form of prolepsis—for theological reasons, it anticipates a way of speaking common at the time of the author of Genesis, but not at the time of its characters. But this view is not without its own difficulties. Such a conclusion, for example, will probably not sit well with those who have a view of biblical inerrancy that does not allow for modifications in speech reported by Scripture. It is important to note, however, that this is not the manner in which the doctrine of inerrancy is typically understood. The “Exposition” section of the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, for example, drafted in 1978, contains the following:

Differences between literary conventions in Bible times and in ours must also be observed: Since, for instance, nonchronological narration and imprecise citation were conventional and acceptable and violated no expectations in those days, we must not regard these things as faults when we find them in Bible writers. When total precision of a particular kind was not expected nor aimed at, it is no error not to have achieved it. Scripture is inerrant, not in the sense of being absolutely precise by modern standards, but in the sense of making good its claims and achieving that measure of focused truth at which its authors aimed.²⁰

²⁰“Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy with Exposition,” n.p. [cited 10 May 2010]. Online: <http://www.bible-researcher.com/chicago1.html>.

A distinction is often made by theologians when dealing with imprecise quotations in Scripture between *ipsissima vox* (“the exact voice”) and *ipsissima verba* (“the exact words”).²¹ The proposal that I have made in this chapter is essentially that those responsible for the composition of the text of Genesis were concerned with presenting the former. In fact, in light of the Yahwistic theology of their own day, the inclusion of the name Yahweh may even be considered a more faithful rendering of the *ipsissma vox* of the patriarchs, since it provided greater theological clarity to the statements uttered by them.

Having stated my general stance towards this issue, the implications for many texts in particular should be fairly clear. Yet some specific statements require explanation in order for our theory to be compelling. I shall now address the two passages that present the greatest difficulty for my view.

Calling upon the Name of Yahweh

Genesis 4:26b tells us that it was in Enosh’s generation that “people began to call on the name of Yahweh.” This is commonly understood as claiming that it was then that mankind first engaged in worship of God, specifically employing the name Yahweh.²² This is why the author, whether it be the Yahwist or Moses, freely places the divine name in the mouths of his characters thereafter. If this interpretation is correct, then we would either have to reconsider our understanding of Exodus 6, or we would have to conclude that there is a contradiction between these two passages. This would also mean that the many other

²¹ See Paul D. Feinberg, “The Meaning of Inerrancy,” in *Inerrancy* (ed. Norman L. Geisler; Grand Rapids: Zondervan 1979), 301.

²² Ross (2003), 324; Ephraim A. Speiser, *Genesis* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 1964), 37; Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis* (trans. Mark E. Biddle; Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1997), 54–55.

occurrences of “Yahweh” throughout Genesis—particularly ones that use the same expression as 4:26—may reflect the perspective of this verse.

Yet there are several factors that call this interpretation into question.²³ Some have argued that Gen 4:26b is not a theophany and that therefore it is therefore hardly comparable to Exodus 3 or 6.²⁴ In my opinion, this is the least persuasive of the arguments offered. Fortunately, other observations can be made that are more helpful.

The question of whether calling upon the name of Yahweh should be understood as necessarily indicating the actual use of the name is one that requires examination.²⁵ In BDB’s entry for בָּשָׁם קָרְאָה, we are told that “use the name”

²³ For the most part, the Hebrew of this verse is relatively straightforward. The *hop ‘al* perfect, הַזְּהִלָּל, which has no expressed subject, is an example of the “impersonal” use of the passive (cf. Exod 10:5; IBHS § 4.4.2.a.2). The heavy theological implications of this passage, however, have been the cause of much speculation. For example, *Tg. Onq.* renders the clause, “Were lax from in their prayers” (see Bernard Grossfeld, *The Targum Onqelos to Genesis: Translated, with A Critical Introduction, Apparatus, and Notes* [ArBib 6; Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1988, 50]). *Tg. Ps.-J.* has “they began to go astray, making idols for themselves and calling their idols by the name of the *Memra* of the Lord.” This was probably due to the Targumists’ desire to portray Enosh’s generation as wicked, rather than to resolve what they thought to be a contradiction with Exodus 3 and 6 (Michael Maher, *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: Genesis: Translated, with Introduction and Notes* [ArBib 1B; Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1992], 35 n. 54; S. D. Fraade, *Enosh and His Generation* [Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1984], 112–119, 200–201). Also popular in rabbinic interpretation of this verse is taking הַזְּהִלָּל in its homonymic meaning, “to pollute,” in which case this verse marks the beginnings of idolatry. The LXX has οὗτος ἡλπισεν ἐπικαλεῖσθαι τὸ ὄνομα κυρίου τοῦ θεοῦ, apparently reading זָהָל for זָהָל, יִתְהַלֵּל (the הַזְּהִלָּל is “to wait, hope”) for הַזְּהִלָּל, and also apparently יְהֹוָה אֱלֹהִים. Aquila is more in line with the MT. For a good survey of the various interpretations of this verse, see Samuel Sandmel, “Genesis 4:26b,” *HUCA* 32 (1961): 19–29.

²⁴ Moberly, 68; Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15* (WBC 1; Waco: Word, 1987), 116; Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11* (trans. John J. Scullion; CC; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 339–41.

²⁵ The clause, קָרְאָה בָּשָׁם יְהֹוָה, occurs in Gen 4:26; 12:8; 13:4; 21:33; 26:25; 2 Kgs 5:11; 1 Chr 16:8; Ps 105:1; Isa 12:4; 41:25; 64:6; 65:1; Joel 3:5; Zeph 3:9; Zech 13:9, including instances in which a pronoun stands for יְהֹוָה. Since Exod 33:19 and 34:5 are not in the context of worship, these two verses should not be used as evidence for what the phrase means elsewhere. Psalm 99:6 (וַיְשִׁמְעוּאָל בְּקֹרְאִי שֶׁמֶן) and Lam 3:55 (קָרְאָתִי שָׁמֶךְ יְהֹוָה) are also noteworthy, yet these are problematic because they lack the preposition. The LXX of both of these verses renders קָרְאָה בָּשָׁם with ἐπικαλέω, which is the same way it translates קָרְאָה in other passages.

in worship.”²⁶ If this is the true meaning, then, in this construction, the בְּ preposition is being used to mark the direct object of the verb,²⁷ which seems to be its function in Exod 33:19 and 34:5 (both of which refer to the same event).²⁸ The second option would be to translate the clause, “to make proclamation of Yahweh by name.” Thirdly, it may be that the expression, which is formulaic, is simply used to describe acts of prayer and worship,²⁹ and does not denote audible use of the divine name; perhaps individuals are said to have called on the name of Yahweh simply to avoid giving the implication that worship of false gods is being described.³⁰

²⁶BDB 1028; Ross, 335.

²⁷See *IBHS* § 11.2.5e. But the בְּ in this expression is not required to do this, which is clear from the many instances in which קָרְאָה takes שֶׁם as its direct object without a preposition (the semantic equivalent of the reading proposed by those who read the phrase as denoting the utterance of the name during worship). Moreover, it is also clear that, even in passages in which בְּ does appear, it often has other functions (i.e., as a common prepositional phrase). This can be seen in those occurrences where we find collocation, קָרְאָה + בְּ, in which there is a separate specified direct object (Exod 31:2; 35:30; Num 32:38; Josh 21:9; 1 Chr 6:50; Ps 49:12; Isa 42:6), which can sometimes also be a relative clause (1 Kgs 13:32), the subject of a passive verb (Esth 2:14; Isa 43:7; 48:1), or may be specified with a preposition alongside of בְּ (Isa 45:4). A very clear example is Jer 44:26, which reads אַמְתִּיהָ עַד שֵׁם נִקְרָא בְּיַהוָּה עִשְׂלָא (“no longer shall my name be invoked by the mouth of any man of Judah”). This expresses precisely what some claim is being said in Gen 4:26b, without a prefixed preposition on שֶׁם.

²⁸These two verses are unique, in that God himself is the subject of the verb.

²⁹G. H. Parke-Taylor, *Yahweh: The Divine Name in the Bible* (Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1975), 13; Kenneth A. Matthews, *Genesis 1–11:26* (NAC 1A; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 294; Bill T. Arnold, *Genesis* (NCBC; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 82.

³⁰Moberly, 68; Westermann, 339–40; McKeown, 42–45; Martin Kessler and Karel Deurloo, *A Commentary on Genesis: The Book of Beginnings* (New York: Paulist, 2004), 69; John C. Collins, *Genesis 1–4: A Linguistic, Literary and Theological Commentary* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P& R Publishing, 2006), 207. Nahum M. Sarna (*Genesis* [JPSTC; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989], 40) believes the text is claiming that monotheism predates various forms of polytheism, a view that has been expressed by some religious anthropologists, most notably Wilhelm Schmidt, *The Origin and Growth of Religion: Facts and Theories* (trans. H. J. Rose; New York: Cooper Square, 1926). For a brief discussion of this, see Ninian Smart, *The Religious Experience* (4th ed.; New York: MacMillan, 1991), 33–34.

Methodologically, this question is virtually impossible to answer. Even if the evidence indicates that, in some instances, audible use of the name Yahweh does indeed occur (only 1 Kgs 18:24–26, 36–37 and Zech 13:9), the majority of occurrences are silent about the matter. Therefore, it does not seem possible to determine whether Gen 4:26b indicates that people were using the name Yahweh in worship in the generation of Enosh. This means it is illegitimate to cite definitions such as the one offered in BDB as evidence, since such definitions are based on only a small sampling of the relevant data. It is not therefore evident that there is a clear conflict between Gen 4:26b and our interpretation of Exod 6:3. This also applies to the other places in Genesis where the patriarchs are said to have done the same (Gen 12:8; 13:4; 26:25; 21:33). None of the evidence currently available requires us to see any of these as an actual proclamation of the divine name. What is clear is that this was the author’s way of indicating that the patriarchs were engaging in the worship of Yahweh, as opposed to some other deity.³¹

Yahweh Yir’eh

The following chapter will address the issues raised by the various El compounds found in Genesis. This refers to the instances in which the characters of Genesis give names to God, places, and, in one instance, an altar. In contrast to the name Yahweh, which we have argued was not known during the time of the patriarchs, these names employ

³¹This is similar to a way in which the articular form, מֶלֶךְ־יְהוָה, is sometimes used, referring to the one and only God—the God of Israel (e.g., Gen 5:22, 24; 6:11). Waltke and O’Connor comment, “Sometimes, through usage, the article not only points out a particular person or thing, but it also elevates it to such a position of uniqueness that the noun + article combination becomes the equivalent of a proper name” (*IBHS* § 13.6.a). Other examples of this include הַגִּבְעָה (Gibeah, literally “the hill”) and נַילָּה (the Nile, literally “the stream”).

the designation לְאָהֶן. Aside from attempts to discount the historicity of the patriarchal narratives in general, which I find rather unconvincing, it is quite plausible to hold that these names reflect pre-Mosaic usage that was common among the historical patriarchs. Yet there is one name that includes the name Yahweh rather than לְאָהֶן, and this is the name given by Abraham to the place where he was tested by God during the “almost” sacrifice of Isaac.

After proving himself faithful to the divine command, Abraham is directed to sacrifice a ram instead of his son. In commemoration, we are told, “Abraham called the name of that place יְהוָה יִרְאָה (“Yahweh will provide”), where it is said this day, ‘On the mountain of Yahweh, he will appear (יַרְאָה)’” (Gen 22:14).³² We have maintained that occurrences of the name Yahweh in direct speech in Genesis are due to the Yahwistic author’s desire to draw a connection between the God of the patriarchs and Yahweh, rather than an indication that the author actually believed “Yahweh” was spoken by the patriarchs. This verse provides perhaps the greatest challenge to this view. Ross presses this point as a difficulty for those who hold a position similar to the one taken in this study. He writes:

The text says that Abraham named the place *YHWH Yir’eh*. . . . That is either a true statement or it is not. If Abraham did not name it that, but some editor has inserted the name *Yahweh* to replace the word *God*, then we have to harmonize that kind of editing with our theological understanding of narrative reports in the text.³³

³²The double use of רְאָה is a play on the meaning of the word. In its first occurrence in this verse (the *qal*), it is to be taken as close to its meaning in verse 8: “God will *provide* (i.e., “choose” or “select”) for himself a lamb.” The second clause, as it is pointed in the MT, does not have Yahweh as its subject, because יְהוָה functions as the genitive of רְאָה, which is in construct (בְּרֹאָה יְהוָה יִרְאָה). Therefore it can mean “on the mount of Yahweh it will be provided” (John H. Walton, *Genesis* [NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001], 511), or “he will appear” (with the implied subject being Yahweh). The latter is more probable, given the common way the *nip’al* of this verb is used to refer to Yahweh’s “appearing” (e.g., Gen 12:7; 17:1; 18:1; Exod 6:3; Matthews, 297; Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50* [WBC 2; Waco: Word, 1994], 98).

³³Ross, 333. See also G. T. Manley, “The God of Abraham,” *TynBul* 14 (1964): 6.

It is certainly not my desire to put forward a position that would undermine the credibility or the authority of the Scriptures. It is with caution therefore that I make the following two points. First, if we are persuaded by the hypothesis being advocated in this study, that the author did take the liberty to insert the name Yahweh into the dialogue of Genesis, even though he believed it had not yet been revealed at the time at which those narratives would have taken place, then it is not unreasonable to accept that this may have happened here as well. This instance is not substantially different than all the others, where it might also be possible to use a modified version of Ross' same objection: "The text says that x said 'Yahweh,' and that is either a true statement or it is not" (my own words). Yet, given such a stringent understanding of what is entailed in the doctrine of inerrancy, it seems to follow that even slight changes in the wording or grammar of the characters' dialogue are departures from what would actually have been said, and would therefore be problematic for the doctrine. Second, the same point might be used against Ross' own position, with respect to Exod 6:3. If this latter verse indicates that the patriarchs did not know the name of Yahweh—and I believe that it does—then a solution such as the one advocated in this study is more respectful of the biblical testimony than Ross', which would imply a flat out contradiction (the source-critical solution does no better on this issue). Of course, he is among those who attempt to establish that Exod 6:3 does not actually say this,³⁴ and so it would be unfair to accuse him of such an inconsistency. But if my exegesis of Exod 6:3 is compelling, then some suitable answer must be given as to why we find the name Yahweh in Genesis. We are then left with the option of, as Ross puts it, having "to harmonize that kind of editing with our theological understanding of narrative reports in the text."

³⁴Ross, 336–38.

Why then do we find the divine name in the mouth of Abraham in Gen 22:14?

Perhaps it has something to do with the etiological nature of the proverbial statement, which explains the meaning of an adage in use at the time the verse was written in terms of something that Abraham said many centuries earlier. It is possible that Abraham's words have been brought into conformity with this latter expression. This is a crucial difference between this verse and the other El compounds in Genesis, none of which are explained explicitly in light of later sayings.

Conclusions on the Name Yahweh in Genesis

In this chapter, I have sought to explain why, in light of the teaching of Exod 6:3, that the patriarchs did not have knowledge of the name Yahweh, we find the name Yahweh used frequently in not only the narrated discourse of Genesis, but in the very speech of the characters themselves. Source critical answers to this problem are ruled out on the grounds that they simply cast the responsibility for the discrepancy into the lap of a later redactor, without explaining why standards of consistency should be applied differently to the sources than they are to the editor. It seems that an explanation is required that can account for how those responsible for the composition of the text of Genesis could also maintain what is said in Exodus 3 and 6 regarding the revelation of the divine name in the generation of Moses. The best solution to this problem is therefore to maintain that the presence of the name Yahweh in the speech of the characters of Genesis is due to a desire to make explicit the fact that the pre-Mosaic Israelites worshipped the same God who revealed himself to Moses. In this way, it is clear that the God who will fulfill the promises to the patriarchs is the same God who made them.

But what is “clear” to the one who reads the text through the eyes of faith is not always clear to the historian. As we learned earlier, many scholars have maintained that

Yahweh, the deity who functioned as the national God of Israel under the monarchy, was not the same as the one who is reflected in the onomasticon and El compounds of Genesis. It is claimed that the identification made by the biblical text between the God of the patriarchs and Yahweh is one that cannot stand up to critical scrutiny, and it is to this criticism that we shall now turn.

CHAPTER 6

EL IN GENESIS

In the previous chapters, I concluded that, according to the testimony of Exodus chapter 6, the divine name Yahweh was not revealed to the Israelite people until the time of Moses, and that there is no clear evidence that it was known prior to its use among the Israelites. In light of these two facts, the presence of the divine name in the dialogue of Genesis is best explained as a theological retrojection of a later Yahwistic author. It is likely that the pre-Mosaic Israelites did not use the name Yahweh to refer to their God.

The Hebrew Bible attests to many designations which the Israelites used for Yahweh. One such designation is **לֶאָן**, which is particularly prominent throughout Genesis, both in terms of its use in personal names, and in the various El compounds used by several of the characters of Genesis. However, the reason for this term's prominence is not entirely clear. On the one hand, if the pre-Mosaic Hebrews did indeed worship a deity whose personal name was unknown or ambiguous, it would be expected that they, speaking a Semitic language, would refer to him as **לֶאָן**.¹ On the other hand, this term can also be a proper name, referring to a deity that was, for some time, head of the Canaanite pantheon. Thus, the frequent occurrence of this term to refer to God in Genesis can be accounted for either by the lack of knowledge of a proper name for their God, or by a quite different

¹Naturally, this noun alone would be insufficient to distinguish the Israelite God from other gods. It probably would have been the case that an El compound, such as El Shadday, would have been used for this, in instances in which **לֶאָן** alone would not suffice (see Exod 6:3).

scenario, in which the early Israelites actually worshipped El. The purpose of this chapter will be to determine whether the data found in Genesis can be used to support the latter.

Evidence from Personal Names

Among those who study ancient Near Eastern religious history, personal names are widely regarded as a reliable source of information regarding religious affiliation. This is because many ancient civilizations—especially those in the ancient Near East, practiced theophony—the embedding of theophoric elements (i.e., forms of the names of deities) in their personal names. Examination of the names that are attested in a specific region at a particular time tends, therefore, to shed light on which deities were revered among the particular people groups in question.² Naturally, some caution is in order in such studies, because a myopic focus on personal names can also be misleading. Several scholars have noted that personal names often do not bear witness to all deities worshipped in a particular culture. At Ugarit, for example, *aqrt* is rarely attested as a theophoric element in personal names, even though Asherah was regarded there as a very prominent deity, being the mother of seventy minor gods (*šb ‘m bn aqrt*),³ as well as (apparently) the consort of El himself. A similar observation can also be made concerning the goddess Tannit in Punic names.⁴ Another problem with this type of research is that it is not always clear whether certain

²Jeffrey H. Tigay, *You Shall Have No Other Gods: Israelite Religion in the Light of Hebrew Inscriptions* (HSS 31; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), 5.

³KTU 1.4.vi:46.

⁴Tigay, 6–7; Mark S. Smith, *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 5; Dennis Pardee, “An Evaluation of the Proper Names from Ebla from a West Semitic Perspective: Pantheon Distribution According to Genre,” in *Eblaite Personal Names and Semitic Name-Giving* (ed. Alfonso Archi; Rome: Missione Archeologica Italiana in Siria, 1988), 119–51.

elements are to be understood as epithets or as proper names of deities. This is perhaps most acute in Israel in names with בָּעֵל and אֱלֹהִים, in which the theophoric element may either be a proper name or a common noun.⁵ Here, names of the latter type will be classified as “Elohistic,” and those of the former will be grouped among “pagan” names.⁶

In his survey of Israelite epigraphic personal names from the time of the monarchy, Tigay concludes that Yahwism must have been Israel’s official religion as early as the ninth century B.C.E., since eighty-three percent of these names are Yahwistic (557 names),⁷ in contrast to twelve percent Elohistic (seventy-seven names) and five percent pagan (thirty-five names).⁸ Also helpful is the study of Fowler, whose count of Israelite personal names in the Hebrew Bible is 639 Yahwistic (sixty-four percent), 318 Elohistic (thirty-two percent) and thirty-seven pagan (four percent).⁹ There is an even greater difference if the evidence from Chronicles is excluded: 371 Yahwistic (sixty-six percent), 163 Elohistic (twenty-nine percent), and twenty-nine pagan (five percent).¹⁰ De Moor,

⁵Note, for example, that both David and Saul had sons whose names are compounded with בָּעֵל. See also Hos 2:18.

⁶“Pagan” shall refer to names that clearly incorporate deities other than *yhwh* and *'l*.

⁷In Hebrew, the Yahwistic theophoric element can occur at the beginning of names as *yô-* or *y'ehô-*, or as *-yâ*, *-yâhû*, or *-yaw* at the end.

⁸Tigay, 47–63, 65–73, 83–85. Obviously, more data has come to light since the publication of Tigay’s work in 1986. The percentage breakdown, both here and with Fowler, is that of Johannes C. de Moor in *The Rise of Yahwism: The Roots of Israelite Monotheism* (rev. and enl. ed.; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1997), 10–40. Some names contain a combination of two of these elements. For example *yô'el*, includes both the Yahwistic and the Elohistic theophorics. These are counted in both totals.

⁹Jeaneane D. Fowler, *Theophoric Personal Names in Ancient Hebrew: A Comparative Study* (JSOTSup 49; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1988), 366–67. Several names included by Fowler have been excluded here, including those with the elements *'b*, *'h*, *'m*, *'dn*, *mlk*, and *swr*, which she considers to be possibly divine elements. While this is certainly true of some names, with others it is either not, or they are ambiguous.

¹⁰De Moor (31–2) notes that the Chronicler alters twenty percent of non-Yahwistic theophoric names (eleven percent Elohistic and nine percent pagan), so that Yahwistic names occur more frequently in his

building upon the works of Tigay and Fowler, surveys Israelite personal names before the time of David, and finds 188 Elohistic names and 163 Yahwistic names—forty-seven and forty-one percent of all theophoric names during that period respectively.¹¹

Neither time nor space allow a detailed investigation into the many debatable personal names that fall within these categories. Nevertheless, there is a clear preference for Yahwistic names throughout most of Israel's history, and this stands in stark contrast to the complete absence of Yahwistic theophoric elements in *all* proper names—geographic and personal—until the time of the exodus. Spanning Genesis through Numbers 26 (the census of the new generation), the Bible records forty-seven Elohistic personal names.¹² Of these, three are either children of Abraham's house (**אֵלִיָּעָזֶר**, Gen 15:2) or his offspring through wives other than Sarah (**יִשְׁמָעָאֵל**, 16:11, etc.; **אַלְדָּעָה**, 25:4), two are Abraham's kin (**קְמוֹאֵל**, 22:21; **בְּתוּאֵל**, 22:22, etc.), one is a son of Ishmael (**אַדְבָּאֵל**, 25:13), and two are sons of Esau

work. While this change may simply reflect onomastics from the time of the Chronicler (de Moor references Joseph Naveh, "Miscellanea Onomastica Hebraica," *Sem* 39 [1990]: 59–62), it is enough to compel us to conclude that including onomastic data from Chronicles may skew the results. Of course, the presence in Chronicles of pagan names argues against any kind of systematic revision (e.g., **עֹזֶב/עִיבֶּל** [1 Chr 1:22; cf. Gen 10:28], **אֲחִישָׁר** [1 Chr 1:49–50], **בֵּית רָפָא** [4:12], **אֲחִימֹוֹת** [6:10], **מָלוֹךְ** [? 6:29], **בָּעֵל חָנָן** [7:10], **הַמְלָכָת**, **עֲזָמָנוֹת** [8:33], **מָרִיב בָּעֵל** [8:34], **עֲזָמָנוֹת** [12:3], **בָּעֵל דָּעַ** [14:7], **בָּעֵל חָנָן** [27:25], **בָּעֵל דָּרָם** [27:28], and **הַדָּרָם** [2 Chr 10:18]). A related phenomenon in Chronicles that is also interesting is the occasional transformation in the LXX of Chronicles of non-pagan forms to pagan forms (e.g., **יִשְׁבָּעָם** > **Ιεσεβααλ** [1 Chr 11:11]; **יִשְׁבָּאָב** > **Ισβααλ** [24:13]).

¹¹ De Moor, 31. In his opinion, "The number of Yahwistic personal names is too high to be dismissed," and "these names testify that Yahwism must have started as a popular religion long before David. Even two centuries would be a relatively short period to account for the rise of Yahwism to the status of a national religion under David" (33).

¹² This count excludes names which, to varying degrees of probability, have an omitted Elohistic element, such as Jacob, which appears as *ia-ah-qu-ub-el* at Ašnakkum, *ia-ah-qu-ub-el* and *ia-qu-ub-el* at Kish, *ia-qu-ub-el* at Tell Harmal, *ia-qu-ub-el* and the hypocoristic *ia-qu-bi* at Babylon, and in Egyptian as the personal names *ia'qob-'r* and *ia'qob-hr*, as well as the toponym, *ia'qob-el* (see Hans-Jürgen Zobel, "יַעֲקֹב/יַעֲקֹב" *ya'* *qōb/ya'* *qōb*," *TDOT* 6:189).

(**מַתּוֹשָׁאֵל** 4:18, etc.) and **מַחְיִיאֵל** 36:10, etc.). Two are in the line of Cain (**רְעוֹאֵל** 5:12–16) and one is in the line of Seth (**מַהְלָלָאֵל** 36:39). One is the wife of a king of Edom (**מַהְיטָבָאֵל** 10:26; **אֶבְיוֹמָדָךְ**, 10:28) and one is a chief of Edom (**מַגְדִּיאֵל** 36:43). Finally, **רְעוֹאֵל** is the name of Moses' father-in-law (Exod 2:18). This leaves thirty-one Israelite personal names that can be positively identified as Elohistic.¹⁴

The basic fact with which any study of early Israelite religion must therefore reckon is that, by far, the most common theophoric element during this early period is **אל**, and that the Yahwistic element is lacking entirely.¹⁵ De Moor believes this absence is “the result of editorial activity based on Exod 6:3”¹⁶—a flippant dismissal of this evidence, which is entirely untenable, since the same editors were apparently quite comfortable using the divine name 145 times prior to Exod 6:3.¹⁷ On the basis of the onomastic evidence, it

¹³The MT points this name to read “the friend” (*al + modad*; Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50* [WBC 2; Waco: Word, 1994], 231), whereas the LXX has Ελμωδαδ (“El/God is friend”).

¹⁴**אֶרְאֵל** (Gen 32:29, etc.); **יִשְׂרָאֵל** (46:10, Exod 6:15); **יְשָׁרָאֵל** (46:14); **יְחִילָאֵל** (46:17); **יְחִזָּקָאֵל** (46:24); **עֲזִיאֵל** (Exod 6:18; Lev 10:4; Num 3:19, 30); **מַלְכִיאֵל** (6:22, Lev 10:4); **פָוִתִיאֵל** (Exod 6:23); **אֶלְקָנָה** (Exod 6:23, 25; Lev 10:12, 16; Num 3:2, 4); **אֶלְעָזָר** (6:24); **אֶלְיָשָׁבָע** (6:25); **בָצָלָאֵל** (31:2; 36:1, 2; 37:1; 38:22); **מִישָׁאֵל** (Lev 10:4; Num 3:30); **אֶלְיָזָר** (Num 1:5; 2:10; 7:30, 35; 10:18); **אֶלְיָשָׁמָע** (1:6); **נְתָנָאֵל** (1:8; 2:5; 7:18, 23; 10:15); **אֶלְעָבָב** (1:9; 2:7; 7:24, 29; 10:16; 16:1, 12); **שְׁלָמִיאֵל** (1:10; 2:18; 7:48, 53; 10:22); **פָנוּעִיאֵל** (1:10; 2:20; 7:54, 59; 10:23); **דְּעוֹאֵל** (1:13; 2:27; 7:72, 77; 10:26); **לְאֵל** (1:14; 2:14 [7:42, 47]); **רְעוֹאֵל** (2:12; 7:36, 41:10:19); **אֶלְיָסָף** (2:14; 3:24; 7:42, 17; 10:20); **צְוֹרִיאֵל** (3:24); **אֶלְדָּךְ** (3:35); **עַמְּנִיאֵל** (11:26–27); **גָּדִיאֵל** (13:12); **גָּנוֹיָאֵל** (13:13); **גָּנוֹגָאֵל** (13:15).

¹⁵The possible exception of *Yokebed* will be discussed below. A lack of the Yahwistic element is also a feature of Israelite toponyms, although these include names of a variety of deities, the most common being El and Baal. For a list of all possible theophoric names, both personal and topographic, until the time of David, see De Moor, 14–38.

¹⁶De Moor, 32.

¹⁷Wenham (xxxii–ii) is also critical of this move. This is not to deny that such “onomastic editing” can and did take place, as it did, for example, in the Egyptian so-called Amarna revolution (see J. A. Wilson, *The Culture of Ancient Egypt* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959], 221), and in the Bible

appears that, among the Israelites who lived before the time of Moses, the most venerated deity was one known by the designation **לָאֵל**.¹⁸

This is perhaps the strongest piece of supporting evidence in favor, not only of the interpretation of Exod 6:3 for which I have argued in this study, but also of the general truthfulness of the verse itself. We therefore find ourselves in the midst of the issue that is at the very center of this study: when we encounter the designation **לָאֵל** in Genesis, is it a common noun referring simply to “God,” or is it a proper name referring to the head of the Canaanite pantheon? Throughout most of the Hebrew Bible, the word is (to use Freedman’s terminology) a “surrogate” of Yahweh, much like the longer designation, **אֱלֹהִים**. This is probably how later Israelites, reflecting on the traditions recorded in Genesis, would have understood it. But the contention of many scholars is that its presence in Genesis, both in the onomasticon and in the El compounds, reflects a stage in Israelite history when this was not the case. During this hypothetical stage in the development of Israelite religion, Yahweh was either nonexistent in the collective consciousness of the early Israelites, a subordinate deity in El’s pantheon, a deity only worshipped by a minority of proto-Israelites, or was present

itself, particularly in the exchange of **בָּעֵל** in certain names with **בָּשְׁתָּה**, and, in one instance, **לָאֵל** (see G. B. Gray, *Studies in Hebrew Proper Names* [London: Adam & Charles Black, 1896], 121–22; on the objection of Matatiahu Tsevat in “Ishboseth and Congeners,” *HUCA* 46 [1975]: 71–87, see Jeffrey H. Tigay, “Israelite Religion: The Onomastic and Epigraphic Evidence,” in *Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross* [ed. Patrick D. Miller, Paul D. Hanson, and S. Dean McBride; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1987], 181 n. 9).

¹⁸This data may also raise the issue of the implications of Elohistic names during the monarchy. Freedman, on this very issue, notes, “It may be that in the later period all the El names in Israel were simply surrogates for Yahweh. Once Yahweh was established as the national god, it was understood or accepted that El was simply a surrogate for Yhwh, without recognition that originally they were separate or that El was a god in his own right” (David Noel Freedman, review of Johannes C. de Moor, *The Rise of Yahwism: The Roots of Israelite Monotheism* and Mark S. Smith, *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel*, *JBL* 110 [1991]: 694).

simply as a cultic name for El. But can such conclusions be inferred from the evidence of Genesis? Unfortunately, the onomastic data cannot be used in assessing this question, since it is impossible to ascertain whether the Elohistic element in these personal names is to be understood as a proper name or as a common noun.¹⁹ To answer this question, we must turn to the El compounds, seeking to determine how this term was used in Israel's patriarchal traditions.

The El Names of God in Genesis

All of the so-called literary sources of Genesis contain El compound names, although P only has El Shadday. Moreover, Genesis contains an unusually high number of such compounds. Most of these occur only once, giving only slight clues as to their meanings and the reasons for their inclusion in the narrative. It is often observed that, with the exception of El Shadday (אֵל שָׁדָי), they all seem to be connected to different locations: El Elyon (אֵל עֶלְיוֹן) appears to be associated with Salem/Jerusalem, El Roi (רָאֵי אֵל) with the Beer-lahai-roi, El Olam (אֵל עוֹלָם) with Beersheba, El Bethel (אֵל בֵּית־אֵל) with Bethel, and El Elohe Israel (אֵל אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל) with Shechem.²⁰ This led Alt to conceive of them as

¹⁹ Pace Smith, who argues that the Elohistic theophoric in יְשָׁרָאֵל supports the notion that El was worshipped among the early Israelites (32). See also Rainer Albertz, *From the Beginnings to the End of the Monarchy* (vol. 1 *A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period*; trans. John Bowden; OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 76. Ziony Zevit, in his treatment of Israelite personal names, omits Elohistic names because “they appear to be generic ‘god’ names. They cannot be assigned to either the Yahwistic or to the non-Yahwistic category on any objective grounds” (*The Religions of Ancient Israel: A Synthesis of Parallactic Approaches* [New York: Continuum, 2001], 587).

²⁰ In Gen 35:11 and 48:3, El Shadday is connected with Bethel.

“local numina,”²¹ and more recent scholars have been convinced that these bear witness to various cults dedicated to the worship of these respective deities at the cities in whose vicinity their names are invoked.²² On the other hand, El Elyon, El Roi, and El Olam all occur only once (El Elyon is mentioned twice in the same episode), and this should prevent us from confidently asserting that these names are exclusively associated with their respective locations.²³ Even the God הָאֵל בִּית־אֵל promises to be with Jacob wherever he goes (Gen 28:15; 35:3) and appears to him in Haran (31:13). In addition, as Wenham notes, “The impression is conveyed that the patriarchs offered sacrifice outside the towns, presumably without the aid of the local priesthood.”²⁴

It is very clear that the word ‘*l*, or *ilum*, is a common noun in all Semitic languages, with the exception of Ethiopic, used to refer generally to “god.” It is also clear that this word was used as a proper noun to refer specifically to the deity El. Which one do we encounter in the patriarchal narratives? Is the frequency of this name for God due to an early identification of the God of the patriarchs with the head of the Canaanite pantheon, or is it simply what we would expect Semites to call a deity who had not yet revealed his name?

²¹ Albrecht Alt, “The God of the Fathers,” in *Essays on Old Testament History and Religion* (trans. R. A. Wilson; Garden City: Doubleday, 1968), 3–86; trans. of *Der Gott der Väter* (BWAT 3.12; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1929).

²² Frank Moore Cross, “**אֵל**, ‘el,” TDOT 1:255; Roland de Vaux, *The Early History of Israel* (trans. David Smith; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978), 280.

²³ Menahem Haran (“The Religion of the Patriarchs: An Attempt at a Synthesis,” ASTI 4 [1965]: 33) sees this as evidence for a Canaanite origin for El-based religion in early Israel, which, he opines, would have been odd for the “semi-nomadic Hebrew tribes.”

²⁴ Gordon J. Wenham, “The Religion of the Patriarchs” in *Essays on the Patriarchal Narratives* (ed.; A. R. Millard and D. J. Wiseman; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1980), 160. See also Haran, 30–34. The Melchizedek episode in Gen 14 does not explicitly involve sacrifice.

Many scholars assume the former, even though the latter is also obviously true.

McComiskey notes:

Since El was a dominant deity in the patriarchal period, it is quite probable that shrines for the worship of El would have been common in Southern Palestine at that time. The epithet *'el* in the names of these sanctuaries would, of course, refer to the god El and would not have an appellative function.²⁵

Of these El names, he opines, “It would not be unusual for the Hebrews to adopt that appellation as the name for their God.”²⁶ With this much, I agree. The issue at hand, however, is not whether or not it would be “unusual” for the Israelites to have assigned these Canaanite El titles to their God, but rather whether there is any compelling evidence that this is what did, in fact, take place with respect to the El titles mentioned in Genesis.

As will be seen in the following discussion, all of these El compounds in Genesis have been taken as manifestations of the Canaanite El. On the other hand, there are also scholars who are prepared to take all of them as appellatives.²⁷ It is only by studying each one in its biblical and broader ancient Near Eastern context that this question can be answered.

²⁵ Thomas Edward McComiskey, “The Religion of the Patriarchs: An Analysis of the God of the Fathers by Albrecht Alt,” in *The Law and the Prophets: Old Testament Studies Prepared in Honor of O. T. Allis* (ed. John H. Skilton; Nutley, N. J.: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1974), 199.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ John Van Seters, “The Religion of the Patriarchs in Genesis,” *Bib* 61 (1980): 220–30; Terrance R. Wardlaw, *Conceptualizing Words for “God” within the Pentateuch: A Cognitive-Semantic Investigation in Literary Context* (LHBOTS 495; New York: T. & T. Clark, 2008), 134.

El Elyon

Genesis 14 recounts the story of an ongoing conflict between various oppressive eastern kings and some of the Palestinian city states who rebelled against them. Eventually, Abraham²⁸ is forced to take up arms and is able to successfully repel the eastern coalition. In the wake of victory, he encounters Melchizedek, who is identified as the king of “Salem” (i.e., Jerusalem, Ps 76:2; also Gen 14:17 and 2 Sam 18:18)²⁹ and priest of El Elyon (אֵל עֶלְיוֹן). Abraham is blessed by Melchizedek in the name of “El Elyon, creator of heaven and earth” (Gen 14:19–20).³⁰ Then, after being approached in a quite different manner by the king of Sodom, Abraham makes the statement, “I have lifted my hand to Yahweh, El Elyon, creator of heaven and earth” (14:22).

This chapter has generated much discussion with respect to its date and the composition of its sources, none of which are usually identified with J, E, D, or P.³¹ My

²⁸ For the sake of convenience, I use the names “Abraham” and “Sarah,” which they are granted in Genesis 17, throughout this chapter, even when describing their words and actions prior to this name change.

²⁹ Tg. *Onq.* has “Jerusalem” at Gen 14:18 (also Josephus, *Ant.* 1:180), and 1QapGen adds “that is, Jerusalem” to a mention of Salem at 22:13.

³⁰ The participle, קָנָה, may also mean “possessor.” G. Levi Della Vida suggests “lord,” which is another gloss of the latter meaning (“Elyon in Genesis 14:18–20,” *JBL* 63 [1944]: 1). For קָנָה meaning “to create,” see Gen 4:1; Exod 15:16; Deut 32:6; Pss 78:54; 139:13; Prov 8:22 (*pace* Bruce Vawter, “Prov. 8:22: Wisdom and Creation,” *JBL* 97 [1980]: 205–16). The lexeme, *qny*, means “to create” in various extra-biblical examples, such as *KTU* 1.10:III:5–6, where it is parallel to *kn* (cf. Deut 32:6), and in the shorter Kulamuwa inscription (*KAI* 25:1–2). Also note the use of ‘*l qn’ rs* in the Phoenician Azatiwada inscription (*KAI* 26.III:18) and in a second century C.E. Neo-Punic inscription (*KAI* 129:1).

³¹ Gordon J. Wenham sees it as quite possible that the chapter belongs to the J tradition, and lists several others who concur (*Genesis 16–50* [WBC 1; Waco: Word, 1987], 306). Yehuda T. Radday and Haim Shore, basing their results on statistical data, conclude, “It is, if we rely on statistical linguistics and neglect all other considerations, neither an archaic relic nor a late postscript, but part and parcel of Genesis” (*Genesis: An Authorship Study in Computer-Assisted Statistical Linguistics* [AnBib 103; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1985], 188).

concern is not with the entire chapter, but rather with verses 18–22. Many scholars regard Abraham’s conversation with Melchizedek as an intrusion into the narrative flow, and thus as an addition to the text.³² To be sure, it is possible to treat verses 18–20 as an intrusion that interrupts the continuity between verses 17 to 21. There is also supposedly a contradiction between Abraham’s willingness to tithe “a tenth of all” (*מעשר מפל*) in verse 20, and his unwillingness to take anything from the king of Sodom in verse 23.³³ But this contradiction is overblown, since Abraham, as a military victor and deliverer, would probably have had the right to retain the plunder³⁴—a reality which may even be reflected, begrudgingly, in the king of Sodom’s words in verse 21. Further, taking verses 18–20 as secondary on account of their “clumsiness” is a judgment that may just as well reflect the *etic* perspective of the scholar, as opposed to the actual literary history of the text. Indeed, several elements of the conversation between Abraham and the king of Sodom—not least of all the reference to El Elyon—make the most sense in light of what is said in verses 18–20.³⁵

El Elyon, as Melchizedek conceived him, is not identified as Yahweh. This is clear from the fact that the text only equates Yahweh and El Elyon in Abraham’s speech, not

³² John A. Emerton, “The Riddle of Genesis 14,” *VT* 21 (1971): 408–409; Bruce Vawter, *On Genesis: A New Reading* (New York: Doubleday, 1977), 197; Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12–36* (trans. John J. Scullion; CC; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 203. Others have argued that 18–20 is original, and that 17 and 21–24 are secondary (E. Sellin, “Melchisedek,” *NKZ* 16 [1905]: 939–40; Michael C. Astour, “Political and Cosmic Symbolism in Gen. 14 and in its Babylonian Sources,” in *Biblical Motifs: Origins and Transformations* [ed. A. Altmann; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1966], 67–68).

³³ Emerton, 408.

³⁴ Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 315–16.

³⁵ Ibid., 304–307.

in Melchizedek's.³⁶ As the text stands, Abraham appears to be taking the name of Melchizedek's god, in whose name נָא can plausibly be understood either as a proper name or as a common noun, and turning it into an epithet of Yahweh.³⁷ McConville writes, “The dialogue plays an important part in the patriarchal narratives’ articulation of what it means to worship Yahweh in the midst of peoples who do not.”³⁸ Various actions and characteristics which foreign worshippers mistakenly attribute to their own gods actually belong to Yahweh. This is clearly the case in later Israelite religious expression,³⁹ and is likely true of this

³⁶ Allen P. Ross, “Did the Patriarchs Know the Name of the Lord?” in *Giving the Sense: Understanding and Using Old Testament Historical Texts* (ed. David M. Howard, Jr. and Michael A. Grisanti; Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2003), 332. In my opinion, it is not possible to know for certain, from the text of Genesis alone, whether Melchizedek is being portrayed as a “righteous gentile” who, like Abraham, simply did not know of the name Yahweh, or if he should be understood as a pagan priest of an otherwise obscure Canaanite deity. The fact that he receives “a tenth of all” from Abraham is not decisive (as if Abraham were acknowledging the legitimacy of the cult over which Melchizedek presided as priest), since the significance of this gift is ambiguous, and can be explained either as religiously or politically motivated, or some combination of each.

³⁷ Commentators are quick to point out that יְהוָה in verse 22 is conspicuously missing from the LXX, the Syriac, and 1QapGen (the SP simply has ‘l h lhy), which has led some to conclude that it is a later gloss (Cross, *TDOT* 1:255; Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 318; Otto Eissfeldt, “El and Yahweh,” *JSS* 1 [1956]: 29 n. 1). Westermann (202) argues the exact opposite—that יְהוָה is original, and that אל עַלְיוֹן קָנֵה שְׁמִים is an addition. But neither position is convincing, since, as Gerhard von Rad points out, the omission may be due to a desire to avoid an offensive connection between Yahweh a Canaanite cult (*Genesis* [trans. J. H. Marks and J. Bowden; London: SCM Press, 1972], 175).

³⁸ Gordon J. McConville, “Abraham and Melchizedek: Horizons in Gen 14,” in *He Swore and Oath: Biblical Themes from Genesis 12–50* (2d. ed.; ed. Richard S. Hess, Gordon J. Wenham, and Philip E. Satterthwaite; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 113.

³⁹ One thinks, for example, of the verbal similarity between Isa 27:1 and *KTU* 1.5:I:1–3. See Richard E. Averbeck, “Ancient Near Eastern Mythography as It Relates to Historiography in the Hebrew Bible: Genesis 3 and the Cosmic Battle,” in *The Future of Biblical Archaeology: Reassessing Methodologies and Assumptions* (ed. James K. Hoffmeier and Alan Millard; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 337–40, as well as the other examples cited there.

passage as well. Thus, עֶלְיוֹן, as it appears in Abraham's statement, should be understood as an adjective derived from the root עָלָה, meaning something like "most high."⁴⁰

Since this interpretation requires that עֶלְיוֹן be understood as an adjective, at least in Abraham's speech, if not Melchizedek's as well, it is worth considering for a moment its occasional occurrence as a proper name. The closest parallel of this sort is the treaty between Bar-Ga'yah, king of *ktk*, and Mati'el, king of Arpad, an Aramaic inscription found at Sefire which is dated to the eighth century B.C.E. On this stela, we find '*l w lyn* listed among various other deities, many of whom are grouped into pairs, and all of whom are invoked as witnesses to the treaty.⁴¹ The conjunction appears to indicate that here El and Elyon are regarded as two distinct deities, indicating that both are to be read as proper names.⁴² This has been challenged unconvincingly by Cross, who suggests that this may be a

⁴⁰Eissfeldt, 28 n. 1; Haran, 49–50 n. 24; Wardlaw, 135. The superlative of this adjective can be seen in passages such as Gen 40:17 ("the uppermost basket") and Deut 26:19; 28:1 ("highest over all the nations").

⁴¹KAI 222.A:11.

⁴²"The Inscriptions of Bar-Ga'yah and Mati'el from Sefire," translated by Joseph A. Fitzmyer (*COS* 2.82 n. 10). The majority of the pairs among which '*l w lyn* are listed are male deities and their consorts (Aššur and Mulles [= Mullissu; Ninlil], Marduk and Zarpanit, Nabu and Tašmet, Nergal and Laš, Sin and Nikkal [for the spelling *nkl* for Ningal's name, see KAI 225:9 and 226:9]; Nikkar and Kad'iah cannot be confidently identified at present, as is pointed out by Michael L. Barré, *The God-List in the Treaty between Hannibal and Philip V of Macedonia: A Study in Light of the Ancient Near Eastern Treaty Tradition* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983]: 24, and Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Aramaic Inscriptions of Sefire* [rev. ed.; BibOr 19a; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1995], 72). But this does not appear to be the case for all of them, most notably Ir and Nusk. The pair of Šamaš and Nur is also doubtful, as the consort of Šamaš is normally Aya (see *ibid.*, 72). '*l w lyn* are clearly set apart from the groups of other deity/consort pairs (E. E. Elnes and P. D. Miller, "Elyon," *DDD*, 294). The intervening text reads, *wqdm kl 'lhy r̥hbh w'dm[h wqdm hdd z' h]lb wqdm sbt wqdm 'l w lyn* ("in the presence of all the Gods of Rahbah and Adam, [in the presence of Hadad of A]leppo, in the presence of Sibitti, in the presence of El and Elyan"). This has led some to even posit that El and Elyon may belong, not to Bar-Ga'yah's pantheon, but to that of Mati'el, which seems a bit speculative (see Rémi Lack "Les origines de Elyon, le Très-Haut, dans la tradition culturelle d'Israël," *CBQ* 24 [1962]: 57 and C. L. Seow, *Myth, Drama, and the Politics of David's Dance* [HSM 46; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989], 52 n. 146). At any rate, the distance between '*l w lyn* and the consort pairs, as well as the fact that not all

“double name of a single god,” as is attested, for example, in the designation *Kôtaru-wa-Hasîsu* (*ktr w hss*) at Ugarit.⁴³ Either way, Elyon does appear to be a proper name in this inscription.⁴⁴ Elyon also appears as a personal name in Eusebius’ *Praeparatio Evangelica*. In this text, dated to the early fourth century C.E.,⁴⁵ we find Ἐλιοῦν καλούμενος “Ὕψιστος described as the father of Heaven (Αὐτόχθων = Οὐρανός) and Earth (Γῆ), who in turn begot, among others, Ἐλυς (El), later called Κρόνος.⁴⁶ Although both of these examples are helpful, neither can be used to force a proper name reading of Elyon in Gen 14. With regard to the former, Elnes and Miller write, “Whatever the case may be, it must be admitted that the treaty gives us no conclusive evidence for or against the existence of ‘Elyôn as an independent deity.’”⁴⁷ Further, Eusebius’ divine genealogy is not supported by other ancient Near Eastern sources.⁴⁸

of the deities listed therein can be identified as such, fully justifies the conclusion that El and Elyon are to be considered male deities which are simply listed side by side, although they seem to be closely related.

⁴³ Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973), 51; McComiskey, 201–202. The relevant text is *KTU* 1.2:IV:7. Consider also *mt w šr* (*KTU* 2.23:8) and *qdš w amrr* (*KTU* 1.123:26; 1.4:IV:13).

⁴⁴ Marvin H. Pope, *El in the Ugaritic Texts* (VTSup 2; Leiden: Brill, 1955), 55.

⁴⁵ See my brief description of this text in chapter 4, n. 84.

⁴⁶ *Praep. ev.* 1.10.15. The Hurro-Hittite “Song of Kumarbi” has an identical ordering (Pope, 56), but Alalu, who corresponds to Sanchuniathon’s Elyon, displays quite different character traits (Elnes and Miller, *DDD*, 294).

⁴⁷ Elnes and Miller, 295.

⁴⁸ For a fuller discussion, see *ibid.* The title ὑψίστος, which is used by the LXX to represent אֱלֹהִים, is present in Greek Mythology in the name Ζεὺς ὑψίστος (or Θεὸς ὑψίστος). See A. B. Cook, *Appendices and Index of Zeus: The God of the Dark Sky (Thunder and Lightning)* (vol. 1 part 2 of *Zeus: A Study in Ancient Religion*; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1925), 876–90; G. H. R. Horsley, *A Review of the Greek Inscriptions and Papyri Published in 1976* (vol. 1 of *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity*; North Ryde, Aus.: Macquarie University Press, 1981), 2–29. For other deities also bearing this title, see Paul Trebilco, “Paul and Silas: ‘Servants of the Most High God’ (Acts 16:16–18),” *JSNT* 36 (1989): 66 n. 15 and the references given there.

The biblical evidence is much more relevant to Genesis 14 than these two examples. Outside of this passage, El Elyon occurs in the Hebrew Bible only in Ps 78:35, where it is clearly used as an epithet of Yahweh. Elyon appears frequently on its own (Num 24:16; Isa 14:14; Lam 3:35, 38; Dan 7:18, 22, 25 [x 2], 27), especially in the Psalms (27 times), and in none of these does it appear to be a proper name. It also occurs alongside explicit references to Yahweh (2 Sam 22:14; Pss 7:18; 57:3; 78:56), Elohim (Pss 46:5; 50:14; 57:3; 78:56), and Shadday (Ps 91:1).⁴⁹ Sarna comments, “These phenomena lead to the conclusion that ‘el ‘elyon is of great antiquity since Hebrew poetry, and especially liturgical poetry, is highly conservative and preserves archaic words, phrases, and forms.”⁵⁰ At Ugarit, it appears as an epithet for El, but never as a proper name.⁵¹ Baal is sometimes even given this title in Ugaritic literature, and also possibly in the Hebrew Bible as well.⁵² Thus, it is much more likely that Elyon in Gen 14 conforms to its ordinary usage and should be translated either “God most high” or “El most high.”⁵³

It is surprising, then, that several scholars have adamantly concluded that Elyon must be regarded as a proper name in Genesis 14. Compelled solely by the Sefire treaty and Eusebius, Della Vida holds that El and Elyon “are not to be considered, as they

⁴⁹ It is unclear whether Elyon in Deut 32:8 is to be equated with Yahweh in the following verse. The close relation between קָלְקָל and נָחַל suggest that the two should be considered as belonging to a parallel word pair.

⁵⁰ Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis* (JPSTC; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 381.

⁵¹ Ibid.; Pope, 55. Elnes and Miller (295) note that the shortened form ‘ly is sometimes applied to El in South Semitic inscriptions. See Gonzague Ryckmans, *Répertoire analytique* (vol. 1 of *Les noms propres sud-sémitiques*; Louvain: Bibliothèque du Muséon, 1934, 243).

⁵² For example, KTU 1.16:III:5–8; Isa 14:13–14; Hos 11:7.

⁵³ Sarna, 110.

used to be, as synonyms of Yahweh, but rather as two different, although related divine beings.”⁵⁴ He regards El as the god of earth, and Elyon the god of heaven, and argues that Genesis contains a conflation of the two deities: “El the Lord of Earth” and “Elyon the Lord of Heaven.”⁵⁵ As the discussion above shows, this can be substantiated only by an appeal to late and isolated evidence. None of the early attestations of the term employ it as a proper name, and both Hebrew and Ugaritic evidence is likewise uniform in using the term either as an adjective or as a divine epithet.

Another element of the divine title used in Genesis 14 that has drawn attention due to extra-biblical parallels is the participial phrase קָנֵה שְׁמִים וְאַרְצָן. Both the Phoenician inscription of Azatiwada found at Karatepe (eighth century B.C.E.) and a neo-Punic inscription found at Leptis Magna in Libya (second century C.E.) refer to *'l qn 'rṣ*.⁵⁶ In terms of chronological and cultural propinquity, clearly the first is more relevant than the second. Similarly, we find reference to a deity named Elkunirša (^d*El-ku-ni-ir-ša*) in the Late Bronze Age Hittite myth, “Elkunirša and Ašertu.” This name is derived from *'l qn 'rṣ*, as is especially clear in light of the high probability that the myth was actually translated from a “Canaanite” original.⁵⁷ Beckman represents the common contention that “the Hittite

⁵⁴ Della Vida, 3.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 9; Lack, 44–64; Westermann, 204; Rolf Rendtorff, “El, Ba‘al und Jahweh,” *ZAW* 78 (1966): 277–92; John Van Seters, *Abraham in History and Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), 307. See also de Vaux, 275; Vawter, *On Genesis*, 200; McComiskey, 199–201.

⁵⁶ This lies behind the Hebrew personal name אֶלְקָנָה (Exod 6:24; 1 Sam 1:1).

⁵⁷ *KAI* 26.III:18 and 129:1.

⁵⁸ Harry A. Hoffner, Jr. *Hittite Myths* (2d. ed.; SBLWAW 2; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), 90–91. Hoffner argues, for example, that the odd term *hapupi*, meaning “owl,” in 2 A.ii where “cup” is expected, is probably due to the Hittite scribe’s misunderstanding of *kōs*, which can mean either “cup” or “owl.”

translator has misunderstood the Canaanite phrase ‘El, Creator of Earth’ as a simple divine name.”⁵⁹ It is also possible that this phrase is attested to in a seventh-century Hebrew inscription which Avigad restores to read [’I] qn ’rs,⁶⁰ but Day notes that “there is no certainty that this reconstruction is correct.”⁶¹ There is also a first century C.E. Aramaic inscription from Palmyra, which identifies a deity named ’lqwnr‘ with Poseidon,⁶² and four small tesserae from the same location with the name spelled ’lqnr‘.⁶³ Finally, it may be recalled that in the passage discussed above by Sanchuniathon, Ἐλιοῦν is the father of Οὐρανός and Γῆ, which, Day opines, “strongly supports the idea that the reference to El-Elyon as ‘Creator of heaven and earth’ in Gen 14.19. 22 is an authentic reminiscence of the Canaanite deity, and not simply invention.”⁶⁴ However, the differences should not be overlooked: In both Genesis and the Azatiwada inscription, El is “creator,” not “father.” Also, in contrast to both Sanchuniathan and Azatiwada, Genesis 14 names him as creator of both heaven *and* earth.⁶⁵

⁵⁹“Elkunirša and Ašertu,” translated by Gary Beckman (*COS* 1.55:149); John Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan* (JSOTSup 265; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 20.

⁶⁰Nahman Avigad, “Excavations in the Jewish Quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem, 1971 (Third Preliminary Report),” *IEJ* 32 (1972): 193–200.

⁶¹Day, 20 n. 23.

⁶²Ibid.; Della Vida, 7.

⁶³Harald Ingholt, Henri Seyrig, and Jean Starcky, *Recueil des tessères de Palmyre: Suivi de remarques linguistiques par André Caquot* (BAH 58; Paris: Imprimerie nationale et Librairie orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1955), nos. 220–23.

⁶⁴Day, 21.

⁶⁵This was pointed out to me by K. Lawson Younger, Jr. in a personal correspondence.

Now we are in the position to tie some of these threads together. Melchizedek identifies and blesses Abraham by his god, El Elyon, creator of heaven and earth, who can either be regarded as a local manifestation of El, or an ambiguous “most high god.” Several extra-biblical parallels do indicate that *qn’rs* was indeed used as an epithet for El, which suggests that Melchizedek’s god is most probably the Canaanite deity El. Yet the fuller title, El Elyon, should not be taken as a conflation of two different deities, since the vast majority of the data indicates that Elyon was, for the most part, used as a divine epithet and not as a distinct deity. Abraham accepts Melchizedek’s gesture, and the narrator clarifies that it is Yahweh who is “God most high, creator of heaven and earth,” and is the one who has given him success. He does this by crafting Abraham’s words according to his post-Mosaic Yahwistic theology. There is no reason to assume that Abraham joined Melchizedek in worship of the latter’s local deity, and the only way to make the text say this is to appeal to a textual variant that is probably itself secondary. Of course, given my line of argumentation, one might object that Abraham’s actual words would simply have been, “El most high, maker of heaven and earth,” since he did not know the name Yahweh, and that they therefore were indistinguishable from Melchizedek’s words. Yet because of the flexibility of the Semitic term *l*, we are prohibited from making a judgment as to whether Abraham was referring to El of the Canaanite pantheon or to his own personal God, who is distinct from El, and is later identified as Yahweh. At this point, our conclusion rests on whether we are willing to trust the theological interpretation of the biblical narrator, whose position on the matter can be refuted, on neither historical nor linguistic grounds.

El Roi

The next El name that is encountered in Genesis is coined by Hagar, Sarah’s maidservant who is pregnant with Abraham’s child, and yet is forced to flee from Abraham’s

household because of a dispute which has been exacerbated by Sarah's jealousy. In the midst of her wandering on the way to Shur she is confronted by the angel of Yahweh, who instructs her to return and submit to her mistress, and, with words that very much echo God's blessing elsewhere in Genesis, promises to multiply her offspring. The divine messenger then explains that the name of her son is to be Ishmael (**יִשְׁמַעְאֵל**), "because Yahweh has heard [her] affliction" (Gen 16:7–12). Then, we have her response: "And she called the name of Yahweh who had spoken to her, 'You are El Roi' (**אֵל רָאֵי**), for she said, 'Surely here have I seen the one who sees me' (**הִגֵּם תָּלַם רָאֵיתִי אֶחָרִי רָאֵי**)?" Lastly, we read, "Therefore, the well was called **בַּאֲרָה לְחֵי רָאֵי**" (16:13–14).⁶⁶

"Seeing" (**רָאָה**) is used as a key word that ties the Hagar episodes together; she is the subject of the verb five times (Gen 16:4, 5, 13; 21:16, 19).⁶⁷ The significance of this *Leitwort* is confirmed here, as it is used by Hagar to define her relationship to God. In Scripture, when God "sees," it is often an indication of his knowledge of his people's plight and his concern about it (e.g., Exod 3:7; 2 Sam 16:12).⁶⁸ Interestingly, this is the only place in the entire Hebrew Bible where a human being is said to have given God a name.⁶⁹

⁶⁶The well (i.e., the "spring") appears in verse 7. Both Albert de Pury ("El-Roi," *DDD*, 291) and John Van Seters (*Abraham*, 193) believe that verses 13–14 are to be viewed as a later insertion, intended, as de Pury puts it, to "ensure that the non-Israelite Ishmaelites have no part in the worship of Yahweh." This is questionable at best, for the ability of scholars to envision a historical scenario that can explain a text's inclusion in Genesis (or anywhere else in the Hebrew Bible, for that matter), does not itself count as evidence for a text's being secondary.

⁶⁷See Paul Edward Hughes, "Seeing Hagar Seeing God: *Leitwort* and Petite Narrative in Genesis 16:1–16," *Did* 8 (1997): 43–59. Note also Gen 21:9, where we are told that Sarah "saw" Ishmael "laughing" (**מִצְחָק**). Here, in an interesting twist, we have two parties at enmity with one another (i.e., Sarah and Isaac versus Hagar and Ishmael), each functioning as the subject of a verb that is characteristic of the other.

⁶⁸Sarna, 121; Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 11.

⁶⁹Hughes, 53; Phyllis Trible, "The Other Woman: A Literary and Theological Study of the Hagar Narratives," in *Understanding the Word: Essays in Honor of Bernhard W. Anderson* (ed. James T.

The MT appears to point the divine designation in verse 13 (**אֵל רָאִי**) as two nouns in construct relationship (“El/God of seeing”), the second being either an objective or a subjective genitive.⁷⁰ The LXX interprets **רָאִי** as a participle (οἶδας με), which is followed by the Vulgate (*tu dues qui vidisti me*) and probably the Samaritan Pentateuch (*r’h*) as well. There is no clear resolution to this issue, and translations are understandably divided on it.⁷¹ In my opinion, the MT is the *lectio difficilior*, and the LXX may be a harmonization with the participial form which occurs at the end of the verse (**רָאִיתִי אֶחָדִי רָאִי**) and in verse 14 (**בְּאַרְתִּי לְחִי רָאִי**).⁷² If the MT is correct, then **אֵל** would be best understood as a common noun, since it would be in construct. Yet while the MT is slightly preferable, it is not certain.

As we saw in chapter 14, the narrator connects the deity who receives a name in this chapter with the God of the exodus, and does this by inserting the name Yahweh itself into the mouth of one of the characters, the angel of Yahweh (Gen 16:11).⁷³ It is therefore interesting that Yahweh is used, neither as an element in Ishmael’s name, nor in Hagar’s

Butler, Edgar W. Conrad, and Ben C. Ollenburger; JSOTSup 37; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985), 229; Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 455; John H. Walton, *Genesis* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 449; Bill T. Arnold, *Genesis* (NCBC; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 165. This is an interesting contrast to the similar formula encountered thus far in Genesis: קָרָא בְשֵׁם יְהוָה (cf. Gen 4:26; 12:8).

⁷⁰For the possible word play on the various subjects of the verb here and in the following verse, see Klaus Koenen, “Wer sieht wen: Zur Textgeschichte von Genesis 16:13,” *VT* 38 (1988): 468–74.

⁷¹For example, whereas the ESV, RSV, and NASB maintain the MT, the NIV and NJPS side with the LXX.

⁷²For a discussion of the options relevant to 13b, see Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 3; Til Boorij, “Hagar’s Words in Genesis XVI 13b,” *VT* 30 (1980): 1–7; Hamilton, 455–57. The extreme skepticism towards the comprehensibility of the text, demonstrated by both Westermann (246–47) and de Vaux (276), is unwarranted.

⁷³Wenham, “Religion,” 181; R. W. L. Moberly, *The Old Testament of the Old Testament: Patriarchal Narratives and Mosaic Yahwism* (OBT; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 72.

designation for God. Both of these points are significant, and are well-accounted for on my account of why Yahweh appears in dialogue in Genesis. It seems reasonable to expect that a Yawhistic name would have been used, both in the case of Ishmael's name, and in Hagar's speech, if Yahweh was the actual name that was spoken to her by the angel (cf. 28:19). Since it is not used, and since we have לְאֵ instead, we are justified seeing in this example an instance where the narrator probably did replace the name לְאֵ with יְהוָה.

A final observation should be made regarding two proposals that have been made for locating extrabiblical parallels to El Roi. Both are mentioned and rejected as being divine names or epithets by de Pury.⁷⁴ The first is in a Babylonian text dating to the Kassite period, in which a prayer to Marduk begins with the following words: “My father, great lord Marduk, the one who sees me, may you speak favorably.”⁷⁵ There is no reason to see this as an actual epithet. The second proposal is a section of the Egyptian Papyrus Anastasi III, a text recording travelers moving across the Egyptian border, which reads, “There went up the servant (or “retainer”) Baal-roy (*r'y*), son of Zippor.”⁷⁶ Yet even if this name is an Egyptian transcription of the Semitic *r'y* root (possibly with a first person pronoun), it is not the epithet

⁷⁴ De Pury, *DDD*, 291–92. De Pury mentions no scholar that actually holds the position he is refuting, nor have I encountered any.

⁷⁵ The text reads, [a]-bi-ma be-lu ra-bu-ú ^dAMAR.UTU a-mi-ri da-mi-iq-ti liq-bi (see Rainer Albertz, *Persönliche Frömmigkeit und offizielle Religion: Religionsinterner Pluralismus in Israel und Babylon* [CTM 9; Stuttgart: Calwer, 1978], 124).

⁷⁶ George Francis Hill, “Some Palestinian Cults in the Graeco-Roman Age,” in *Proceedings of the British Academy* vol. 5 (ed. Henry Frowde; London: Oxford University Press, 1914), 13 n. 2; Richard Caminos, *Late-Egyptian Miscellanies* (BES 1; London: Oxford University Press, 1954), 110; “The Journey of a Frontier Official,” translated by John A. Wilson (*ANET*, 258). Breasted’s original translation was different, regarding *r'y* as being in apposition to “the servant of Baal” (*ARE* III § 630).

of a deity, but a personal name.⁷⁷ It must be concluded that there are currently no convincing ancient Near Eastern parallels to the name El-Roi.

This lack of parallels, along with the textual ambiguity, makes it exceedingly difficult to discern clearly what to make of El-Roi. Although the angel's speech in verse 11 provides interesting corroborative evidence in favor of the theological retrojection theory espoused in the previous chapter of this study, there is not much more to this episode that contributes to our inquiry. If the MT pointing is correct, then the construct relationship favors reading 'לְךָ' as a common noun,⁷⁸ but there are exceptions to this general rule.⁷⁹ This text cannot be taken as definite evidence one way or the other.

El Shadday

Much ink has been spilled on both the meaning of the name El Shadday, as well as the significance of extra-biblical data that sheds light on its biblical usage. The biblical text itself offers no etymology for the name. While this research is both interesting and important, this discussion must be restricted to only that which is relevant to our topic.⁸⁰ Westermann, summarizing the opinion of Koch approvingly, writes, “The etymology, which

⁷⁷The same is true of the personal name, *Aššur-a-ma-ru-um* (*BIN* 4 127:5).

⁷⁸Cross, 49 n. 23.

⁷⁹See the earlier discussion of Cross' view of Exod 3:14.

⁸⁰The standard English rendering, “God Almighty,” follows the LXX’s παντοκράτωρ and the Vulgate’s *omnipotens*. But this is probably due to association with the Hebrew verb תַּבִּל, which means “to destroy,” and is employed as a pun for תַּבִּל in Isa 13:6 and Joel 1:15. A rabbinic interpretation of the name is פֶּל + יְל (“sufficiency, enough;” note Aquila and Symmachus’ ικανός), and may also have had some bearing on these translations. The etymology will be discussed further below.

hitherto has been the center of almost the whole discussion, yields little or nothing for the interpretation of the Shaddai texts.”⁸¹

El Shadday (אֵל שָׁדַי) occurs five times in Genesis (Gen 17:1; 28:3; 35:11; 43:14; 48:3) and שָׁדַי occurs once by itself (49:25).⁸² El Shadday is also the specific name used in Exod 6:3.⁸³ All of these verses are commonly attributed to P, with the exceptions of Gen 43:13, which is taken to be J, and 49:25, which is typically regarded as belonging to a separate source. The compound also occurs in Ezek 10:5. Aside from the compound, we find שָׁדַי standing alone 47 times, 31 of which are in Job,⁸⁴ where we find it parallel to אֵל (Job 8:3, 5; 13:3; 15:25; 22:17; 23:16; 27:2, 11, 13; 33:4; 34:10, 12; 35:13) and אֵלוהֶה (5:17; 6:4; 11:7; 22:26; 27:10; 31:2; 40:2). The remaining eleven times שָׁדַי is found in Job it is by itself. Outside of Job, שָׁדַי is parallel to אֵל (Num 24:4, 16), יְהוָה (Ruth 1:21; Isa 13:6; Joel 1:15), and עֲלִיּוֹן (Ps 91:1), and it is found alone (Ruth 1:20; Ps 68:15; Ezek 1:24). The element שָׁדַי is also present in the Hebrew personal names עַמִּישָׁדִי (Num 1:12; 2:25; 7:66, 71; 10:25) and צָוְרִי-שָׁדִי (Num 2:12; 7:36, 41; 10:19).

⁸¹ Westermann, 258.

⁸² Although the MT of Gen 49:25 verse reads אֱתָה שָׁדַי, the Samaritan Pentateuch, the LXX, and the Syriac suggest וְאֵל שָׁדַי. Despite the fact that שָׁדַי occurs alone no other time in Genesis, the MT should be retained, for וְאֵל appears in the preceding colon, as is common elsewhere, such as in Num 24:4, 16 and in Job 8:3, 5 (Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 486).

⁸³ W. Warning suggests that the references to God as שָׁדַי are purposely ordered so that Exod 6:3 is both the verse that gives a summary of its prior usage, and is itself the seventh occurrence of the name (“Terminological Patterns and the Divine Epithet *Shaddai*,” *TynBul* 51 [2001]: 149–53).

⁸⁴ The K of Job 19:29 reads לְמַעַן תְּדֻועַ שְׁדַיִן. Here, the final word is the relative שַׁ and either the noun שְׁדַיִן or שְׁדַיִן. The Q, שְׁדַיִן, has been called “unintelligible” (David J. A. Clines, *Job 1–20* [WBC 17; Dallas: Word, 1989], 435). Some, however, have suggested that שְׁדַי should be read here (e.g., August Dillmann, *Hiob* [2d ed.; Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1869], 192). This is unlikely, but if correct, would raise the tally to 32 occurrences in Job.

Aside from Beth-El, El Shadday is the only El name in Genesis that is used in more than one passage, and therefore allows us an opportunity to discern its significance. Genesis 17 begins as follows: “When Abraham was ninety-nine years old, Yahweh appeared to Abraham, and he said to him, ‘I am El Shadday, walk before me and be blameless.’” The chapter that ensues is very important in that it contributes several significant themes and concepts to the Abrahamic covenant, including obligatory stipulations such as blamelessness and circumcision (vv. 1–2, 9–14), the idea that Abraham and Sarah will produce “nations,” including a royal line (vv. 5–6, 15–16), the extension of the “everlasting covenant” to Abraham’s offspring (v. 7–8), and the notion that the promise will not be carried through Ishmael, but rather through Abraham’s unborn second son, Isaac (vv. 17–21).

The next time we encounter the name El Shadday is in the words of Isaac in Genesis 28, before he sends Jacob into Haran to protect him from his brother Esau’s wrath, and so that he can acquire a spouse from Abraham’s extended family:

And may El Shadday bless you, and may he make you fruitful and multiply you, that you may become a company of peoples. And may he give the blessing of Abraham to you and to your offspring with you, that you may take possession of the land of your sojourning, which God gave to Abraham (Gen 28:3–4).

Alongside the reoccurrence of El Shadday, there are several connections between what is said here and the wording of chapter 17.⁸⁵ Although not particularly exceptional in Genesis, it is nevertheless significant that Isaac desires for God to make Jacob “fruitful” (*פָרָה*, cf. Gen 17:6) and to “multiply” him (*רְבֹה*; cf. 17:2). Not only is Jacob Abraham’s “offspring” (*זִקְרֹעַ*), but the blessing is directed towards his offspring as well, who are called *עֲמִים* (cf. 17:16).

⁸⁵ Sarna, 196; McKeown, 138. Of course, this language is not exclusive to contexts in which we find El Shadday. My purpose here is to show that there are clear linguistic and thematic links between them.

Jacob's statement later at Bethel, that if God fulfills his promises, "then Yahweh shall be my God," probably reflects 17:7. Finally, note the verbal similarities with Gen 17:8a:

וְנִתְתֵּן לְךָ זֹרֻעַת אֶת אָרֶץ מִגְرַיִם (17:8a)

לְרִשְׁתְּךָ אֶת-אָרֶץ מִגְרַיִךְ אֲשֶׁר-נָתַן אֱלֹהִים לְאַבְרָהָם (28:4)

These words are spoken immediately before Jacob encounters God at Bethel (28:10–22).

The third time God is called El Shadday is when God appears to Jacob during his return to Bethel in Genesis 35, in what Waltke calls the "scene [that] brings the Jacob cycle to its climactic, successful conclusion."⁸⁶ Verses 9–15 have several close affinities with earlier elements of the Jacob cycle, but what is of interest are those pertaining to Isaac's speech in chapter 28. Not only this, but this passage is also connected to chapter 17 in several ways.⁸⁷ These intertextual links serve to show that God is now promising to do for Jacob what Isaac had hoped for. Here and in chapter 17, there is a name change of the patriarchs involved. Also, we have an initial command that includes the familiar terms פֶּרֶה and רֶבֶה (Gen 35:11), which is followed by the same introduction we encountered in Gen 17:1: אֶنֹּני אֵל שָׁדֵי. There is a focus on offspring, with Jacob being told that from him will come a קְהֻלָּת גּוֹיִם, with the first term reminiscent of Gen 35:11, and the second of 17:4, 5, 6, 16, and 20. He is also told that "kings shall come from him" (אֲצַפְּנָה). Finally, there is a promise to give Isaac's offspring the land which he has "given" to Abraham, and now to Isaac as well (cf. Gen 17:8a; 28:4).⁸⁸

⁸⁶Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 469.

⁸⁷Both are noted by Kenneth A. Matthews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26* (NAC 1B; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2005), 622.

⁸⁸Some of these connections are noticed by Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 325.

While none of the other occurrences of Shadday in Genesis are as blatantly placed in the context of a typical Abrahamic blessing formula (with the exception of Gen 48:3–4), it is possible to see undertones of the family blessing in all of them. In Gen 43:14, we find Jacob reluctantly giving permission to Judah to take Benjamin back to Egypt to fulfill the request of Joseph, their otherwise anonymous Egyptian benefactor: “And may יְהֹוָה grant you mercy before the man, that he might send back your other brother and Benjamin.” One aspect of Jacob’s attitude throughout the Joseph cycle is his unwavering favor for the two sons of his beloved wife, Rachel, over against his other sons, for whom he shows little concern. Note, for example, that in the verse just quoted, he refers to Benjamin by name, while Simeon, whom he has allowed to languish in Egypt, is referred to simply as “your other brother.” This theme, present in almost every scene of the narrative, suggests that Jacob assumes that it is through these two youngest sons that the promise of his forefathers will be transmitted, even though God has not revealed this to him (cf. Gen 17:19; 25:23), and even though the impression given throughout the narrative is that all of his sons are now heirs of the promise. It is quite possible, therefore, that this is the reason why he invokes the name of El Shadday, who, he hopes, will prosper the second journey for more food, and ultimately return his son Benjamin to him.⁸⁹ This same logic applies to the next passage in which El Shadday appears, when Jacob blesses Joseph’s sons Ephraim and Manasseh (48:3–4). Here, he specifically references his encounter with El Shadday at Bethel (ch. 35) and reiterates the promise made to him there, along with God’s pledge that he will

⁸⁹ Pace Hamilton, 463. With the exception of 49:25 (see above), 43:14 is the one El Shadday passage in Genesis that source critics are the most reserved about attributing to P (e.g., Claus Westermann, *Genesis* [trans. David E. Green; London: T & T Clark, 1988], 326–27). If our observations on the shared themes are accurate, then it would argue in favor of assigning it to the same source as the others.

make him fruitful, multiply him, make him into a קָרְבָּן עֲמִים (cf. 28:3), and give him the land as an everlasting possession. Finally, Jacob invokes Shadday in his blessing on Joseph in Gen 49:25. All three of these final references in Genesis reflect Jacob's concern for the promise to be transmitted through the sons of Rachel, and are therefore connected to the promises of chapters 17, 28, and 35. This is true, even in light of the fact that the royal element of the promise is transferred to Judah (49:10), the firstborn in line behind his disqualified brothers, Reuben, Simeon, and Levi (34:25–31; 35:22; 49:2–7).

In light of its use in Genesis, it is understandable why El Shadday is found in Exod 6:3, where God tells Moses that this is the name by which he “appeared” to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Note, for instance, the heavy covenantal tone of the ensuing monologue of chapter 6. The significance of all this is that it gives us a very significant clue as to why we find El Shadday so often in the patriarchal narratives, and why it appears again in Exod 6:3: This name seems to be particularly associated with the Abrahamic covenantal promises, especially with respect to the extension of those promises to offspring, and to possession of the land that was “given” to Abraham.⁹⁰ Thus, its roots can be convincingly shown to be at home in Israel’s patriarchal traditions. This is similar to the conclusion of Westermann, who opines, on similar grounds, “It is possible then that the name goes back to the period before Israel was a state and perhaps too shows an affinity to the religion of the patriarchs.”⁹¹ I would go a step further than Westermann and ask why there is any reason to assume that El

⁹⁰ Matthews, 201; Wardlaw, 140. It is difficult to agree with Wenham’s assessment, that, because of the name’s connection with descendants, it “evokes the idea that God is able to make the barren fertile” (*Genesis 16–50*, 20). Nor can I agree with Walton’s distinction between the “Shaddai theophanies” and the “Yahweh theophanies,” whereby the former are concerned with “participation in the covenant” and the latter with the unfulfilled promise of land (460).

⁹¹ Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, 258.

Shadday should not be considered a genuinely patriarchal title for God. Certainly, there is no problem with respect to the antiquity of the name (see below).

This leads us into an inquiry as to whether we are required to see in El Shadday a particular (perhaps familial) manifestation of El of the Canaanite pantheon, or whether לְאֵל in this name can be interpreted as a common noun. Is there anything about שָׁדָּי that suggests that it is appropriate to connect it to a deity other than the one indicated by the biblical storyline? In order to answer this question, we now turn to extrabiblical evidence.

Cross is reluctant to classify El Shadday as an epithet of El, since it is nowhere clearly applied to him, and, in his words, "We are embarrassed with the plentitude of deities associated with mountains in the Canaanite and Amorite pantheons, not to mention the Akkadian Gods called *šadū* [KUR] or *šadū rabiū* [KUR.GAL]."⁹² Nevertheless, he attempts to hypothesize a connection with the Mesopotamian god Amurru, a warlike storm deity who is referred to as *bēl šadē*, and is identified as a clan god (i.e., a "god of the father") in Cappadocian texts.⁹³ This deity's name is written either ^dMAR.TU or AN-AN-MAR-TU. Based on the latter, which Cross normalizes ^dIlu Amurrū, as well as Amurru's "liason" with Ašratu, who is widely assumed to be Il's consort ('Aṣiratu) in the Ugaritic texts,⁹⁴ Cross proposes that a western Amorite El may eventually have been identified with Amurru. He

⁹²Cross, 56–57. Cross cites K. Tallqvist, *Akkadische Götterepitheta* (Helsinki: Societas Orientalis Finnica, 1938), 221, who lists Aššur, Enlil, Adad, and others.

⁹³Cross, 52–60. See also Eric Burrows, "The Meaning of El Šaddaj," *JTS* 41 (1940): 152–61; Lloyd R. Bailey, "Israelite 'Ēl Šadday and Amorite *Bēl Šadē*," *JBL* 87 (1968): 434–438; Jean Ouellette, "Israelite 'Ēl Šadday and Amorite *Bēl Šadē*," *JBL* 87 (1968): 470–471; Tryggve N. D. Mettinger, *In Search of God: The Meaning and Message of the Everlasting Names* (trans. F. H. Cryer; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 71.

⁹⁴See Jacob Klein, "The God Martu in Sumerian Literature," in *Sumerian Gods and Their Representation* (CM 7; ed. I. L. Finkel and Mark J. Geller; Groningen: Styx Publications, 1997), 105.

then reasons that, since Amurru is called *bēl šadē*, *šadday* can reasonably be assumed to have been an epithet of Amorite El.⁹⁵ In fairness, Cross exercises caution and reluctance with this theory, for which lack of any direct evidence makes the proposal seem rather thin. Also, it must be taken into account that Cross' normalization of AN-AN-MAR-TU is by no means the only option.⁹⁶ The only real link with El is via his consort Ašratu, which is not enough to establish a connection. One aspect of Amurru's epithet *bēl šadē* that is helpful, however, is the fact that here the bound noun is not a proper name, which is grammatically expected, and is precisely the kind of appellative that provides the most convincing explanation for El Shadday.

Some parallels have also been proposed in Ugaritic literature. *KTU* 4.183:I:1 and 4.609:53 both reference Baal (Haddu) as *b'l šd*.⁹⁷ We also find reference to *'trrt šd* (“‘Attartu of the steppe”),⁹⁸ as well as *il šd yṣd* (“El/god of the ‘field,’ who hunts”).⁹⁹ It is here that the etymology of **šd** becomes important, for if *šd*, which in Ugaritic can mean both “field” and “mountain,” is related to Hebrew **שָׁדֶן**, then these designations are relevant parallels. That Ugaritic *šd* is related, both to Akkadian *šadūm* and Hebrew **שָׁדֵן** is generally

⁹⁵ Cross, 57–60; Karel van der Toorn, “Amurru,” *DDD*, 34.

⁹⁶ Dietz Otto Edzard (“Martu,” *RLA* 7/5–6:437) vocalizes it as ^dIl-Amurrim (i.e., “god of Amurru”).

⁹⁷ Frauke Gröndahl, *Die Personennamen der Texte aus Ugarit* (StudP 1; Rome: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 1967), 192.

⁹⁸ *KTU* 1.91:10 (*k t'rb . 'trt . šd . bt . mlk [. . .]*) = *KTU* 1.148:18. Also *KTU* 4.182:55, 58 (PRU II 137–41). See Gregorio del Olmo Lete, *Canaanite Religion According the Liturgical Texts of Ugarit* (trans. Wilfred G. E. Watson; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2004), 257.

⁹⁹ *KTU* 1.108:12. Otto Loretz (“Der Kanaanäische Ursprung des Biblischen Gottesnamens El Šaddaj,” *UF* 12 [1980]: 421) translates this, “El des ‘Feldes,’ der jagt.”

agreed upon.¹⁰⁰ In both Phoenician and Punic *šd* means “field,”¹⁰¹ and *šdw* means “mountain” and “cultivated land” in Old South Arabic.¹⁰² In EA 287.56, it is spelled *ša-de-e*.¹⁰³ Propp has shown convincingly that Hebrew **הַשָּׁׁדֶן** can also mean “mountain” or “highland” (Num 23:14; Judg 5:18; 2 Sam 1:21; Jer 13:27; 27:3; 28:14; uncertain, but also possible, are Ps 50:11 and Job 40:20).¹⁰⁴ In Akkadian, *šadūm* often does refer to an “open country” or a “steppeland.”¹⁰⁵ It is probable, therefore, that Hebrew **הַשָּׁׁדֶן**, Ugaritic *šd*, Phoenician and Punic *šd*, Old South Arabic *šdw*, and Akkadian *šadūm* all derive from the same etymon.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁰ *DULAT*, 807.

¹⁰¹ *KAI* 14.19, 43.9, 118.2, 153.4; 287:2a, 4a–b, 6a, 8b. See *DNWSI*, 110 and Charles Krahmalkov, *Phoenician-Punic Dictionary* (OLA 90; Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 456–57.

¹⁰² Joan Copeland Biella, *Dictionary of Old South Arabic: Sabaean Dialect* (HSS 25; Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1982), 511.

¹⁰³ This spelling should not be given too much weight, since, according to Cross (53), the Jerusalem scribe uses *š* for *s*₁ (t) and *s*₂ (s), and *s* for *s*₃ (š).

¹⁰⁴ William H. C. Propp, “On Hebrew *Šāde(h)*, ‘Highland,’ *VT* 37 (1987): 230–36. See also M. Weippert, “Erwägungen zur Etymologie des Gottesnamens ‘El šaddaj,’ *ZDMG* 111 (1961): 42–62; W. Wifall, “El Shaddai or El of the Fields,” *ZAW* 92 (1980): 24–34; Michael A. Grisanti, “**שָׁׁדֶן**/**שָׁׁדֵן**,” *NIDOTTE* 3:1218.

¹⁰⁵ *CAD* 17:58–59; Wilfred G. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1996), 177, 332. Alexander Heidel (“A Special Usage of the Akkadian Term *šadū*,” *JNES* 8 [1949]: 233–35) comments that “*šadū* occasionally . . . corresponds, both etymologically and semantically, to Hebrew *šade*.” Cross (52–54) argues that **שָׁׁדֶן** requires either *s*₁ (t) or *s*₃ (š). Since, he claims, either *s*₁ (t) or *s*₂ (s) stands behind the initial consonant of the Egyptian name, *ša-di-’-m-i* (**šadi-*’*ammî*; cf. Num 1:12; 2:25; 7:66, 71; 10:25), *s*₃ is ruled out, leaving us with *s*₁ (Cross 1973, 53–54; see also Thomas Schneider, *Asiatische Personennamen in ägyptischen Quellen des Neuen Reiches* [OBO 114; Freiburg: Universitätsverlag Freiburg Schweiz, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1992], 195–96). But the evidence for a connection with **שָׁׁדֶן** seems too compelling to be swayed by a single Egyptian transliteration of a Semitic personal name.

¹⁰⁶ According to Ernst A. Knauf (“Shadday,” *DDD*, 750) this would have been *šdy*.

If **šadūm** is related to *šadûm*, which is generally agreed upon,¹⁰⁷ its connection to these terms is a reasonable conclusion, legitimizing the Ugaritic parallels. In considering these Ugaritic occurrences of DN + *šd*, it is evident that *šd* is associated with Baal and Astarte. But in the one text that does refer to *il šd* (*KTU* 1.108:12), it is questionable whether or not *il* is to be understood as a personal name. The fragmentary nature of the tablet makes the context difficult, if not impossible to discern. Further, since the text has no word dividers, different divisions are possible which yield different translations than the one offered by Loretz above. For example, Pardee renders the same line *il šdy šd mlk* (“the god šadayyu, the hunter [of?] milku”).¹⁰⁸ Under this interpretation *šdy* is to be understood as a primitive form of the chthonic deity *šed*.¹⁰⁹ Or, perhaps *šd* is to be taken as an adverbial

¹⁰⁷ Cross, 52–60; Mettinger, 69–72; de Moor, 179; William F. Albright, “The Names Shaddai and Abraham,” *JBL* 54 (1935): 180–87. The doubling of the second radical can be explained as a secondary development on analogy to *qattal/qattāl* third-weak roots (e.g., Akk. *šaddū'a* [“mountain-dweller”]; Cross, 52).

¹⁰⁸ Dennis Pardee, *Les texts paramythologiques de la 24e champagne (1961)* (RSO 4; Paris: Éditions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1988), 81–82. Pardee gives the translation, “le dieu Šadayyu, le chasseur [de?] Milku.”

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 110. This deity is known to have had some prominence during the New Kingdom, particularly during the Amarna period and was later merged with Horus. See H. Brunner, “Sched,” *LÄ* 5:547–49 and George Hart, *The Routledge Dictionary of Egyptian Gods and Goddesses* (2d ed.; New York: Routledge, 2005), 146. Consider also an early sixth-century inscription on a jar fragment from Sarepta, in which we encounter a deity referred to as *šdrp'*, possibly meaning “Šed the healer.” The virtually contemporaneous Amrit stela is also dedicated to the same deity, as is an altar from third century Carthage (*KAI* 77), and four inscriptions from Grotta Regina, Sicily, dating between the fifth and second centuries, as well as inscriptions in Antas, Sanrdinia and Leptis Magna (second–first century B.C.E.). For an extensive discussion of the data and a list of the texts pertaining to this deity, see Edward Lipiński, *Dieux et déesses de l'univers phénicien et punique* (OLA 64; Leuven: Peeters, 1995), 195–99. See also G. Levi Della Vida, “The Phoenician God Satrapes,” *BASOR* 87 (1942): 29–32; Herbert Donner and Wolfgang Röllig, *Kommentar* (vol. 2 of *Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften*; Weisbaden: Harrassowitz, 1973), 95; James B. Pritchard, *Sarepta: A Preliminary Report on the Iron Age* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1975), 102–103 and *Recovering Sarepta, A Phoenician City* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 100–102; Brian Peckham “Phoenicia and the Religion of Israel,” in *Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross* (ed. Patrick D. Miller, Paul D. Hanson, and S. Dean McBride; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1987), 80–81, 91 n. 26.

accusative: “the god travels (through) the countryside.”¹¹⁰ Even if *il šd* is a genitive construction, this would not be determinative, since it may simply mean “god of the field.” The same ambiguity applies to the Thamudic personal name, *ilšdy*, mentioned by Knauf: (ca. 500–300 B.C.E.).¹¹¹ To cite the conclusion of Niehr: “No relationship to the god El . . . is discernible.”¹¹²

Another significant extrabiblical parallel occurs in one of the plaster inscriptions found at Tell Deir ‘Alla, famous for its mention of the seer Balaam, son of Beor (*bl‘m brb ‘r*; cf. Numbers 22–24).¹¹³ These texts date to ca. 800 B.C.E. Although they are of uncertain ethnic origin, their language is a regional dialect with affinities to Aramaic and Canaanite.¹¹⁴ In the relevant text (Combination I), Balaam, the seer, is given a vision by El, the high god, with the help of other gods (*’lhn*), which is understood by Balaam to be one of disaster. These gods are either identified with or composed in part by a group that is called, in lines 5 and 6,¹¹⁵ the *šaddayyīn*” (*šdyn*). It is very possible that these two groups (the *’lhn*

¹¹⁰ André Caquot, Jean-Michel Tarragon, and Jesus-Luis Cunchillos, *Textes religieux, rituels, correspondance* (vol. 2 of *Textes ougaritiques*; LAPO; Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1989), 116–17.

¹¹¹ Knauf, 750. This is also similar to a much earlier personal name, noted by J. J. M. Roberts, *The Earliest Semitic Pantheon: A Study of the Semitic Deities Attested in Mesopotamia before Ur III* [Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972], 125), *Sa-du-DINGIR* (*Šadu-ilum*, “the god is a mountain”). See Ignace J. Gelb, *Sargonic Texts in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford* (MAD 5; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), pl. XV. The tablet upon which this name appears (347b) was discovered at Kish in 1930, and its contents are listed by Gelb as “undefinable” (134).

¹¹² Herbert Niehr, “**šadday**,” *TDOT* 14:421; Bailey, 434–38; E. L. Abel, “The Nature of the Patriarchal God El Shadday,” *Numen* 20 (1973): 49.

¹¹³ See J. Hoftijzer and G. van der Kooij, eds., *The Aramaic Texts from Deir ‘Alla* (DMOA 19; Leiden: Brill, 1976).

¹¹⁴ “The Deir ‘Alla Plaster Inscriptions,” translated by Baruch A. Levine (*COS* 2.27:141).

¹¹⁵ Because of issues pertaining to the assembling of the fragments, particularly here with respect to the first few lines, the lineation differs among scholars. I am using Hackett’s lineation, which differs from the *editio princeps* (Hoftijzer and van der Kooij) by omitting lines 3 and 4, following the analysis offered

and the *šdyn*) are identical, since line 5 equates “what the Šadda[yyīn *have done*]” with “the works of the *'lhn*.¹¹⁶ Hackett uses this text’s portrayal of the divine assembly to illuminate the epithet יְהָנָן in the Hebrew Bible: “If the gods in the council were known at some time and place as *Šaddayyīn*, there is good reason to suspect that *Šadday* is applied as an epithet of El in his position as chief of the council.” She suggests, on analogy with El’s *ilm* in Ugaritic literature (cf. Exod 15:11; Job 41:17; Ps 29:1; 89:7; Dan 11:36), that the *šaddayyīn* may be a group of gods whose name derives from a pluralization of their chief.¹¹⁷ Yet, the analogy seems far-fetched, since it is not required to account for the pluralization of *il*.

One noteworthy link between the *šdyn* of Deir ‘Alla and the Hebrew Bible is that twice in the Balaam oracles of Numbers 24 God is referred to as יְהָנָן. In addition, there are claims that sacrifices were made during the idolatry described in Numbers 25 to שִׁדְים (Deut 32:17), which Ps 106:37 describes as child sacrifice (cf. Ps 106:28–31).¹¹⁸ It is also significant that both the Deir ‘Alla inscriptions, as well as the Balaam oracles of Numbers 22–24, take place in the Transjordan.¹¹⁹ But since the reasons for these similarities are historically ambiguous, it cannot be known exactly what is implied by these connections.

To return to our earlier question, do these parallels require us to connect לְאֵל יְהָנָן to a deity other than the one later identified as Yahweh? First, it should be noted that

by André Caquot and André Lemaire in “Les texts araméens de Deir ‘Alla,” *Syria* 54 (1977): 193. See Jo Ann Hackett, *The Balaam Text from Deir ‘Allā* (HSM 31; Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1984), 7.

¹¹⁶ Hackett, 86. She restores the first phrase as *mh . šd[yn . p 'lw.]* (25).

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 87: “It is reasonable to suggest that *Šadday* was the epithet applied to El as head of the council in the region where the gods in that council were known as *šdyn*.”

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 88–89.

¹¹⁹ Smith, 58.

common use of *šd* to refer to fields or steppes prevents us from understanding אֵל שָׁדֵי as a mountain deity. For this reason, I am skeptical toward attempts to establish a connection with El's mountain assembly, or with the Amorite deity Amurru (*bēl šadē*).¹²⁰ The Ugaritic data, and more so that which comes from Phoenician and Punic, even seems to favor a translation having to do with a plain or a field, which is also allowed by Akkadian *šadūm*. Since there is no evidence to indicate the cultural milieu in which the epithet entered Hebrew usage, it is currently impossible to determine which should be preferred. Although we may not know which, if either, of these options is correct (i.e., “mountain” or “field”), it is likely that אֵל is not a proper name in this title, since it would be in construct, akin to the bound form in *bēl šadē*. The second observation that can be made based on parallel literature is that *šadūm* and its cognate equivalents were applied to a wide range of deities, and in the two places where it occurs in conjunction with ’l there is no reason to assume that the term is referring to a proper name. El's dwelling place is occasionally said to be a mountain, but this connection is not particularly strong, as there are many deities who are much more readily associated with mountains than El. Even if, therefore, it were possible to establish אֵל שָׁדֵי as a god of a mountain, the connection with El would remain undetermined. Cross wisely asserts, “The question may now be asked, is the appellation of ’El Šadday a liturgical epithet of Canaanite ’El who tented on the mount of assembly in the far north? Certainly it would be an appropriate epithet. However, I do not believe that there is sufficient evidence to establish such a thesis.”¹²¹

¹²⁰ Pace Day, 32.

¹²¹ Cross, 56–57.

What then can we say of the name’s inclusion in Genesis? Our earlier discussion focused on the fact that אֵל שָׁקֵן is always used in the patriarchal narratives in conjunction with the transmission of the Abrahamic promise to Abraham’s offspring, and is often—though not always—associated with a promise of land, which was “given” to Abraham. This suggests that it is included in Genesis by virtue of its role in the promise traditions, as opposed to being a vestige of pre-Yahwistic autochthonic Canaanite religion. Its antiquity is suggested by its presence in Gen 49:25¹²² and in the Balaam oracles of Numbers 22–24, where it is parallel to both El (Num 24:4) and Elyon (24:16). Where the name comes from, as well as how and why it came to be adopted by Israel’s patriarchs, is unknown.

El Olam

After a confrontation with Abimelek, king of the “Philistines,” Abraham secures seven young lambs for Abimelek as a witness, attesting to the fact that Abraham himself had dug a certain well, the ownership of which may have been disputed. A treaty is made between the two parties. After Abimelek and his commander depart, Abraham plants a tamarisk tree (לְשָׁקֵן) in Beersheba, and, we read, “There he called upon the name of Yahweh, El Olam (אֵל עֹלָם)” (Gen 21:33).¹²³ Despite the contention of some, there is no good reason to assign verses 33 and 34 to a different source than the preceding narrative.¹²⁴

¹²²De Vaux, 276.

¹²³An intriguing issue that is raised by this verse is that the narrative does not seem to place “El Olam” on the lips of the patriarch. If we are right in denying that “calling on the name of Yahweh” implies an utterance of the actual name Yahweh, why should it be any different for what is said here?

¹²⁴Pace Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, 346–47, who attributes verse 33 to a separate itinerary, on no other grounds but that the clause lacks an expressed subject (350). Other scholars are not so transparent

As was the case with Gen 14:22, 16:13, and 17:1, Yahweh is explicitly identified with this El title. But because of the assumption that the majority of El titles in Genesis more properly belong to Canaanite El, and because of the connection with Beersheba, many scholars have preferred instead to see El Olam as a local manifestation of El worshipped at this locale.¹²⁵ However, this title's place in the narrative may be just as easily explained by its appropriateness in the context of an enduring covenant.¹²⁶

Cross feels that the evidence for understanding Olam as an epithet of El is “overwhelming.”¹²⁷ First among this evidence is “the biblical and Ugaritic epithet *malk 'olām*.” With respect to the biblical evidence, it seems that Cross has in mind Ps 10:16 and Jer 10:10, where Yahweh is called מלך עוזלם, or Ps 29:10, where Yahweh sits enthroned מלך לעוזלם (adverbial accusative, “as king forever”). There are also a few places where Yahweh is said to “reign forever” (מלך לעוזלם, Exod 15:18 [*scriptio plena*]; Ps 146:10). But these texts are speaking of Yahweh, and have no clear connection to El. It is true that *mlk 'lm* does occur in *KTU* 1.108:1, but here it refers to rāpi'ū ([*hl*]n yšt rpu *mlk 'lm* yšt,

as to their reasons. Van Seters gives no reason whatsoever (*Abraham*, 191). George W. Coats simply calls it “an isolated report” (*Genesis with an Introduction to Narrative Literature* [FOTL 1; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983]). Hermann Gunkel does not give his reasons, but merely claims that his J^b is aware of the site’s sacred history (*Genesis* [trans. Mark E. Biddle; Macon: Ga, 1997], 297). Speiser, though not disapprovingly, notes the awkwardness of this position: “One can only guess at the reason why such a brief excerpt from *J* was inserted at this particular point” (158–59).

¹²⁵ Consider, for example, Ernst Jenni’s proposal: “Aus der kurzen Notiz Gen 21, 33 J lässt sich ein von den Israeliten auf Jahwe übertragener vorisraelitischer Kult des ’ēl ‘olām in Beerseba erschließen” (“עלם, ‘olām, Ewigkeit,” *THAT* 2:236). See also Pope, 14; Eissfeldt, 33; Cross, 50; Day, 19. In light of the lack of Bronze Age occupation at Beersheba (Tell es-Saba’), it should be pointed out that none of the references to the site in the patriarchal narratives require us to read the text as implying that the site was significantly populated during their times (see Ze’ev Herzog, “Beersheba,” *OEANE* 1:288).

¹²⁶ McComiskey, 201; Speiser, 159.

¹²⁷ Cross, 50.

“Here, may rāpi’u, king of eternity [or “eternal king”], drink—yes, drink ”).¹²⁸ The same is true of line twenty-one of the same text. While Cross insists that rāpi’u here should be identified with El,¹²⁹ lines two and three call him [*iI*] *ḡtr w yqr il ytb b̄ tt̄rt il tpt̄ bhdr̄y* (“the mighty and noble god, the god who dwells in ‘Aṭtaru, the god who rules in Hadra‘yi”), which strongly indicates that he should instead be identified with Milkū.¹³⁰ In *KTU* 1.2:IV:10, Ba‘lu is encouraged to take his “eternal kingship” (*tqh mlk̄ lmk̄*).¹³¹ Lastly, in *KTU* 2.42:9, we find *nmry mlk̄ lm*, which refers to Nebmare Amenhotep III (cf. *KTU* 2.23:21–24) as the “eternal king.”¹³² Nowhere is *mlk̄ lm* applied to El.

Cross’ second piece of evidence for his contention that Olam is an epithet of El is the fifteenth century B.C.E. inscription found in Serābīt el-Khâdem mine M (no. 358), which Cross vocalizes *’il dū ’olami* (“El, the Ancient One,” or “El, lord of Eternity”), suggesting that it “stands behind the biblical *’Ēl ’Olām*.¹³³ It may be recalled that this was a

¹²⁸The verb, *yšt*, may be indicative, but I take it as jussive. See Pardee, *Les textes*, 80–82.

¹²⁹Cross, 20–23.

¹³⁰Pardee, *Les textes*, 85–86 and *Ritual and Cult at Ugarit* (SBLWAW 2002), 204–205 n. 6 and 7. Del Olmo Lete translates lines two and three, “Yes, *Ilu* has established (him), *Gatru Yaqaru* (the) god who sits in ‘Aṭtaru” (186). Simon B. Parker (“The Feast of Rāpi’u,” *UF* 2 [1970]: 243) agrees that *rāpi’u* is most certainly not Il, but interprets lines 2 and 3 as referring to him. At any rate, *rāpi’u* is not Il in this text. See also B. Margulis, “A Ugaritic Psalm (RŠ 24.252),” *JBL* 89 (1970): 293.

¹³¹See “The Ba‘lu Myth,” translated by Dennis Pardee (*COS* 1.86:248).

¹³²See Alan Cooper, “MLK ‘LM: ‘Eternal King’ or ‘King of Eternity?’” in *Love and Death in the Ancient Near East: Essays in Honor of Marvin H. Pope* (ed. John H. Marks and Robert McClive Good; Guilford, Conn.: Four Quarters, 1987), 3.

¹³³Cross, 19, 49–50; McComiskey, 201; Sarna, 150; Arnold, 199; William F. Albright, *The Proto-Sinaitic Inscriptions and Their Decipherment* [HTS 22; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969, 24; Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18–50* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 94. For other scholars persuaded by this reading, see Meindert Dijkstra, “El ‘Olam in the Sinai?” *ZAW* 99 (1987): 249 n. 3.

key piece of evidence in his theory about the historical development of the divine name Yahweh, partially justifying his shift from *Yahweh* 'ăšer *yahwī* to 'Ēl zū *yahwī*. This reading has been shown to be mistaken by Rainey, who, having examined the text both *in situ* and with the aid of photographs taken by A. Hay, determined that the second character, which Cross read as a *lamed*, was much more convincingly to be read as a *dalet*.¹³⁴ As for the following character, Rainey also claims to have discerned the head of a snake (*naħaš* = *n*), with its body appearing “as a dark shadow in the photograph,” leaving a probable reconstruction as '*d[n] d l̥m*, “lord/father of eternity” or “eternal lord/father.”¹³⁵ Other analyses are possible, but the conclusion of Dijkstra is nevertheless warranted: “Though El certainly was known to the miners of Serabit el-Khadim, he was in all probability not mentioned as El ‘Olam in Sinai 358.”¹³⁶

Finally, Cross mentions the fact that El is often portrayed in the Ugaritic texts as an elderly, ancient god.¹³⁷ As true as this may be, '*l̥m* never occurs in this corpus as an actual epithet of El.¹³⁸ Rather we find reference to the goddess Šapšu as *špš l̥m*,¹³⁹ which is

¹³⁴ Anson F. Rainey, “Notes on Some Proto-Sinaitic Inscriptions,” *IEJ* 25 (1975): 114–16 and “Some Minor Points in two Proto-Sinaitic Inscriptions,” *IEJ* 31 (1981): 92–94. The sign in question is a fish, with the lower and upper fins visible both on top and below. This is in line with Romain F. Butin’s original reading (“The Serabit Expedition of 1930, The Protosinaitic Inscription,” *HTR* 25 [1932]: 184–85), but follows Cowley’s interpretation of the sign as *dalet* (Butin read it as a *samek*; see A. E. Cowley, “The Origin of the Semitic Alphabet,” *JEA* 3 [1916]: 18, 20).

¹³⁵ If the *nun* is doubted, the reading would be '*d d l̥m* ('*ad[d]u dū ālāmi*, “father of eternity” or “eternal father”). This vocalization assumes that the Canaanite shift would not have yet taken place; otherwise, '*l̥m* should be normalized as '*ōlāmi*.

¹³⁶ Dijkstra, 250; Day, 19.

¹³⁷ For example, *KTU* 1.3.V.25; 1.4:V:3; 1.17:VI:28.

¹³⁸ Smith, 36 n. 53.

¹³⁹ *KTU* 2.42:7.

very similar to the eighth century B.C.E. Phoenician Azatiwada inscription, which mentions *šmš ‘lm* immediately after *’l qn ’rṣ* (see above).¹⁴⁰ In EA 155:6, 47, speaking of the king of Egypt, we find *šarru dšamas dāritum* (“the king is the Eternal Sun”).¹⁴¹ Some have even wondered if, on the basis of these references, El Olam should be understood as connoting solar imagery, “the sun being the everlasting god par excellence.”¹⁴² It is also possible to read *’lt ‘lm* in one of the seventh century B.C.E. amulets from Arslan Tash as meaning “the goddess everlasting.”¹⁴³ But it is generally agreed upon that the first word in this construction is to be read, not as “goddess” (*’lh₁*), but as “covenant” (*’lh₂*).¹⁴⁴

To be sure, Cross does not claim that *‘lm* is exclusively applied to El. But our analysis has demonstrated that it cannot be shown anywhere to have been applied to El, and even if this was not the case, the plentitude of other deities and kings of whom it is used would urge extreme caution in any acceptance of Cross’ thesis.¹⁴⁵ As was the case with El

¹⁴⁰ *KAI* 26.III:19. See also IV:2: *šm ’zdwd ykn l’lm km šm šmš wjrḥ* (“may the name of Azatiwada be established forever, like the name of sun and the moon”).

¹⁴¹ The text reads LUGAL ^dUTU *da-ri[-tum]* in line 6, and LUGAL ^dUTU *da-ri-t[u]m* in line 47.

¹⁴² De Pury, “El-Olam,” *DDD*, 290. See also H.-P. Stähle, *Solare Elemente im Jahweglauben des Alten Testaments* (OBO 66; Fribourg: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1985), 27.

¹⁴³ *KAI* 27:9–10. This is the reading of William F. Albright, “An Aramean Magical Text in Hebrew from the Seventh Century B.C.,” *BASOR* 76 (1939): 8; de Vaux, 276.

¹⁴⁴ See *DNWSI* 57–61; “The Amulet from Arslan Tash,” translated by Franz Rosenthal (*ANET* 658); John Day, “Asherah in the Hebrew Bible,” *JBL* 105 (1986): 395; Ziony Zevit, “Phoenician Inscription and Biblical Covenant Theology,” *IEJ* 27 (1977): 116; Theodore J. Lewis, “The Identity and Function of El/Baal Berith,” *JBL* 115 (1996): 409–410; “An Amulet from Arslan Tash,” translated by P. Kyle McCarter (*COS* 2.86:223). The full sentence in which this occurs (lines 8–12) is *krt . ln. ’lt ‘lm ’sr. krt ln . wkl bn ‘lm wrb . dr kl . qdšn* (“Ashur made with us an eternal covenant. He has made [it] with us, along with all the sons of the gods and the leader of the council of holy ones”).

¹⁴⁵ *Pace* Wenham, 94, and Matthews, 65.

Shadday, ‘lm seems to be too general of an epithet to be considered most appropriate for any one deity. So here, Cross’ case for ‘lm as an epithet of El should be regarded as unpersuasive, given his own criteria: “If we are to identify ‘ēl ‘olām with the head of the Canaanite pantheon, ‘Ēl, we must do so on the basis of evidence that ‘olām is a characteristic appellation of ‘Ēl and that ‘olām is not better applied to another deity.”¹⁴⁶

Therefore, when seeking to understand how El Olam should be understood grammatically, it is quite clear that there is no good reason to adopt the option, “El of eternity”— which, as with El Roi and El Shadday, is awkward, though not impossible, due to the proper name standing as the *nomen regens*. Most likely, מָלֵעַ should be construed as an attributive genitive, yielding a likely meaning of “eternal God” or “God of eternity.”¹⁴⁷ But what about regarding Olam as a proper name for a deity (i.e., “the god Olam”), whose existence has been posited by several scholars?¹⁴⁸ De Pury rightly dispenses of this view: “In the pantheons of the ancient Near East . . . ‘olām often appears in conjunction with a divine name: but apparently does not occur as a divine name in itself. It is better, therefore, not to construe Olam as a divine name.”¹⁴⁹

Turning once again to Gen 21:33, we observe that the text clearly identifies El Olam as an epithet of Yahweh, and there is absolutely no warrant for reading this title as

¹⁴⁶Cross, 50.

¹⁴⁷Ibid., 49; Ernst Jenni (“Das Wort ‘olām im Alten Testament,” *ZAW* 65: [1976]: 236) also prefers seeing it as a genitive construction, but is sympathetic to the proper name option.

¹⁴⁸Pope, 14; Cross, 48 n. 18; Albert van den Branden, “Les Dieux des Patriarches,” *BeO* 162 (1990): 36; Mitchel Dahoo, *Psalms I, 1–50* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 1966), xxxvii, 151–53 and *Psalms II, 51–100* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 1968), 16, 191, 215–16, 312; Frank Moore Cross and David Noel Freedman, “The Blessing of Moses,” *JBL* 67 (1948): 209 n. 85.

¹⁴⁹De Pury, *DDD*, 289, with additional criticisms.

having originally belonged to El. As with the other El compounds analyzed so far, a connection cannot be established with the Canaanite deity.

Beth-El

Beth-El is unique among the El compounds in Genesis because it also becomes the second element of another El compound later on (הָאֵל בֵּית־אֵל); Gen 31:13; 35:7), although the two are clearly related. Beth-El is initially mentioned by the narrator twice in the Abraham cycle (12:8 [x 2]; 13:3 [x 2]), and in these passages it is seemingly unexceptional. Later, in chapter 28, Yahweh appears for the first time to Jacob in a dream when he is en route to Haran. After Jacob awakens, he proclaims, “How awesome is this place—this is none other than בֵּית אֱלֹהִים, and this is the gate of heaven” (28:17). After this, he anoints his headrest stone as a מַצְבָּה and calls the name of the place בֵּית־אֵל, which, the narrator remarks, is to be identified with a city originally bearing the name Luz (vv. 18–19; cf. Judg 1:23–24).¹⁵⁰ The scene ends with Jacob vowing that, when God fulfills what he had promised him, the place shall be בֵּית אֱלֹהִים (Gen 28:22).¹⁵¹ Years later, Jacob, speaking to his two wives, claims that God had identified himself in another dream as בָּאֵל בֵּית־אֵל, referring to this earlier episode (31:13). After living near Shechem for some time, God once again appears to Jacob and instructs him, “Build there an altar to the God who appeared to

¹⁵⁰The consistent occupation of Bethel through the Early Bronze Age until the Babylonian invasion in the sixth century confirms the text’s witness to pre-Israelite occupation, but of course does not warrant the conclusion of Westermann, that “the story was already being narrated and handed on long before [the Israelites’] arrival” (*Genesis 12–36*, 453). See William G. Dever, “Bethel,” *OEANE* 1:300–301.

¹⁵¹The text literally says, “This stone, which I have set up as a pillar, shall be בֵּית אֱלֹהִים.” Clearly, the stone itself cannot be a “house” of worship, but merely serves as an earnest for what shall become of the place (Edward R. Dalglish, “Bethel (Deity),” *ABD* 1:709).

you (לֹאָל הַגְּרָאָה אֶלְיךָ) when you were fleeing from the presence of Esau, your brother” (35:1). Jacob announces that he intends to build an altar, “to the God who answers [him] (לֹאָל הַעֲנָה אֶתְךָ) on the day of [his] affliction” (35:3). His family then journeys to Luz, which is, in a manner almost opposite from what was seen in Gen 28:19, identified as Bethel in a parenthetical remark. Jacob proceeds to build the altar and calls the *place* אל בֵּית־אֵל (35:6–7).¹⁵² Also reminiscent of chapter 28, he erects a מִזְבֵּחַ and pours a libation and oil over it. Finally, he once again names the place, calling it בֵּית־אֵל (35:14–15).¹⁵³

This brief survey shows that the place name בֵּית־אֵל is announced by Jacob on two occasions (Gen 28:19; 35:14–15), and this is semantically equivalent to בֵּית אֱלֹהִים (28:17, 22). Since it is common in Semitic languages to use the collocation *byt 'l*, or its equivalents, to refer to a temple, there is no reason to find in these passages evidence of a “house” (i.e., a sanctuary or temple) dedicated explicitly to the Canaanite deity El.¹⁵⁴ The toponym, Beth-El, simply reflects the ordinary usage.

The expression, הַאֵל בֵּית־אֵל occurs in Gen 31:13 (cf. 35:1; 35:2). This is unexpected, since it is unusual in Hebrew for the article to precede the *nomen regens*. The LXX, presumably attempting to deal with this difficulty, reads, ὁ θεὸς ὁ ὄφθείς σοι ἐν τόπῳ θεοῦ—a reading which is also attested to by *Tg. Ps.-J.* Although some scholars adopt this

¹⁵²The LXX and Vulg. both have “Beth-El.”

¹⁵³There are several features of these passages concerning Beth-El that suggest their antiquity. First, in chapter 35 the site is called Luz by the narrator, which an explanatory gloss clarifies as being Bethel (35:6). Second, the key role this site plays in the patriarchal narratives is surprising, given the almost universal derision towards it throughout the Hebrew canon (Arnold, 255 n. 358).

¹⁵⁴For this usage, see HALOT, 124; DNWSI, 159–60; DULAT, 249; CAD 2:286–89; *pace* Cross, 47 n. 14; Day, 37.

rendering,¹⁵⁵ it seems to be an interpretive addition, making explicit what is implied by the MT. It is more satisfactory to retain the MT, viewing the odd grammatical construction as an elision of what is made explicit by the LXX (cf. Gen 35:1; 2 Kgs 23:17). It is also possible to explain this as a simple grammatical oddity which, while unusual, is not entirely unattested.¹⁵⁶ Less difficult (in terms of grammar) is אֵל בֵּית־אֵל (Gen 35:7), which is virtually identical, but lacks the article. What is more puzzling in this verse is why the “place” itself is called “God of Bethel.” Although the omission of אֵל by the LXX, the Syriac, and the Vulgate is attractive, the MT clearly has the *lectio difficilior*, and should therefore be retained. Fortunately, an explanation of why this phrase is applied to a place is not essential for our purposes. In both cases, it is likely that אֵל should be understood as a common noun, since once again, proper names rarely occur in the construct state. Since Beth-El is a toponym, however, this may be permitted, on analogy to *yhw h tmn* and *yhw h šmrn* at Kuntillet ‘Ajrud. Emendations, such as “El is in Bethel,”¹⁵⁷ are not needed, since the phrases are grammatically acceptable as they stand.

¹⁵⁵ Speiser, 241; Vawter, *Genesis*, 333; Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, 492; Arnold, 274 n. 406; Thomas Edward McComiskey, “The Religion of the Patriarchs: An Analysis of *The God of the Fathers* by Albrecht Alt,” in *The Law and the Prophets: Old Testament Studies Prepared in Honor of O. T. Allis* (ed. John H. Skilton; Nutley, N.J.: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1974), 202.

¹⁵⁶ That is, the *nomen regens* can sometimes have the article when the *nomen rectum* is a proper noun (Wardlaw, 143). Examples of this include הָאָרֶץ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל (Num 34:2) (K, 2 Kgs 7:13), הַבּוֹר מִלְבִּיחָהוּ (Isa 37:13), לְעִיר סִפְרָנִים (Isa 36:8, 16), הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲשֹׁור (2 Kgs 23:17), הַמִּזְבֵּחַ בֵּית־אֵל (Jer 38:6), הַבַּת יְרוּשָׁלָם (Lam 2:13), and הַקְּסֵם יְרוּשָׁלָם (Eze 21:27). See GKC § 127.f; Sarna, 214–15; Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 263; Matthews, 514.

¹⁵⁷ Benno Jacob, *Das erste Buch der Tora* (New York: Ktav, 1974), 662.

There is no mention of a deity named Bethel at Ugarit,¹⁵⁸ nor is this found in any inscriptions from Palestine, including seals or impressions.¹⁵⁹ The first mention of a deity named Bethel outside of the Bible is in a treaty imposed on Baal I of Tyre by the Assyrian king Esarhaddon. Among other deities in whose names curses are invoked against Baal I—presumably if he should violate the terms of the treaty—we find the following: “May Bethel and Anath-Bethel [deliver] you into the paws of a man-eating lion.”¹⁶⁰ There is also a Phoenician personal name written É.DINGIR-*a-di-ir*.¹⁶¹ In Esarhaddon’s treaty, the names occur in a list of “gods of Assyria and the gods of Akkad,” which is the only reference from which we may posit a deity by this name in any Mesopotamian pantheon. There is ample attestation to this deity in the Aramean onomastica of the Neo-Babylonian and Achaemenid periods.¹⁶² Other Aramean evidence comes from a letter found at Hermopolis, which speaks of a temple of Bethel at Syene, an Aramean garrison, where the deity was apparently worshipped alongside of the Queen of Heaven.¹⁶³ Papyrus Amherst 63 also preserves the

¹⁵⁸ Pace J. Philip, “The Deity Bethel and the Old Testament,” *JAOS* 59 (1939): 87–88. For a discussion of some of the early, premature attempts to read some of the various occurrences of *bt il* as referring to a deity, see Pope, 59–60.

¹⁵⁹ Bezalel Porten, “The Religion of the Jews of Elephantine in Light of the Hermopolis Papyri,” *JNES* 28 (1969): 119.

¹⁶⁰ SAA 2, 5.iv:6’–7’. The text reads, ^d*ba-a-a-ti-DINGIR.MEŠ* ^d*a-na-ti-ba-a-[a-ti-*DINGI]^R.MEŠ *ina ŠU.2 UR.MAH a-ki-’li* [*lim-nu-u-k]u-nu*. These names both also occur in a much more fragmentary context in Esarhaddon’s succession treaty ([^d*ba-a-a-ti-DINGIR.MEŠ* ^d*a-na-ti-ba-a-a-ti-*DINGIR.[MEŠ], SAA 2, 467). It is not unusual for DINGIR.MEŠ to designate *il/el* (Wolfgang Röllig, “Bethel,” *DDD*, 174). See also Porten, 118, and Rykle Borger, “Anath-Bethel,” *VT* 7 (1957): 102–4.

¹⁶¹ Édouard Dhorme, “Les tablettes babylonniennes de Neirab. *RA* 25 (1928): 62, 75, 79; Ran Zadok, “Phoenicians, Philistines, and Moabites in Mesopotamia,” *BASOR* 230 (1978): 61.

¹⁶²^d É.DINGIR-ZALAG₂ [BE 9, 75:5], É.DINGIR.MEŠ-*da-la-*’ [PBS 2/1 222, 11], *byt’l šny*, *byt’lyd’*, *byt’ldlny* [KAI 227 Vs. 2, 3, Rs. 2, 4]).

¹⁶³ Edda Bresciani and M. Kamil, *Le lettere aramaiche di Hermopoli* (AANL 8.12.5; Rome: Academia Nazionale dei Lincei, 1966): no. 4:1; John C. L. Gibson, *Aramaic Inscriptions Including Inscriptions*

name in Aramaic, although it is written in Demotic script.¹⁶⁴ Among the Jews living in Elephantine, Ešem-Bethel was worshipped alongside of Yahweh.¹⁶⁵ There are also a variety of personal names from Elephantine in which it occurs.¹⁶⁶ Sanchuniathon lists Βαίτυλος as one of the sons of Οὐρανός.¹⁶⁷ Finally, Zeus Betylos appears in a third century dedicatory inscription from Dura Europos,¹⁶⁸ as does the Antiochene ancestral god, Symbetylos, whose name also appears at Kefr Nabu.¹⁶⁹ Porten rightly concludes, “Of theses . . . pieces of evidence, spanning 900 years, there is nothing which clearly connects Bethel with Jewish worship. There is good evidence, however, for connecting Bethel . . . with worship by Arameans.”¹⁷⁰

in the Dialect of Zenjirli (vol. 2 of *Textbook of Syrian Semitic Inscriptions*; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 137. The line reads, šlm byt bt'l wbyt mlkt šmyn 'l 'hty nnyhm (“greetings to the temple of Bethel and the temple of the Queen of heaven. To my sister, NNYHM”). On the unlikely idea that Bethel was merely a surrogate for Yahweh at Elephantine, see Porten, 118.

¹⁶⁴ Raymond A. Bowman, “An Aramaic Religious Text in Demotic Script,” *JNES* 3 (1944): 226. See “The Aramaic Text in Demotic Script,” translated by Richard C. Steiner (*COS* 1.99:313, 14, 15, 16, 18, 20, 21, 22).

¹⁶⁵ Cowley, 22, VII:122–24.

¹⁶⁶ Porten, 118–19.

¹⁶⁷ *Praep. ev.* II.16. Obviously, if Eusebius is correct, it would warrant placement of this deity in a prominent position in the Phoenician pantheon (Dalglish, 706).

¹⁶⁸ Henri Seyrig, “Altar Dedicated to Zeus Betylos,” in *The Excavations at Dura-Europas: Preliminary Report of the Fourth Season of Work, October 1930–March 1931* (ed. Paul Victor Christopher Baur, Michael Ivanovitch Rostovtzeff, and Alfred Raymond Bellinger; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1933), 68–71.

¹⁶⁹ Louis Jalabert and René Mouterde, *Chalcidique et Antiochène* (vol. 2 of *Inscriptions grecques et latines de la Syrie*; Paris: P. Geuthner, 1939), 215–16.

¹⁷⁰ Porten, 119.

All of the evidence for proposed Israelite worship of a deity named Bethel comes from within the Hebrew Bible. Jeremiah 48:13 reads, “And Moab shall be ashamed of Chemosh, as the house of Israel was ashamed of Bethel, their confidence.” The context here seems to support the notion that this deity was worshipped in the northern kingdom, since the comparison is made with Chemosh, which is clearly a divine name.¹⁷¹ Nevertheless, the parallelism may not be the final arbiter, for it is probably better to read Bethel here as a toponym, given the fact that no other clear evidence exists for the worship of a deity named Bethel in pre-exilic Israel.¹⁷² The reference to the “altars” of Bethel in Amos 3:14 is most convincingly a reference to the city, as is its mention in 5:6. The same is true of its two occurrences in Hosea 10:8, 15. Zechariah 7:2 has also been proposed as a possible reference to the deity Bethel, since it may include the personal name בֵּית־אֵל שָׁר־אֹזֶר, functioning as the subject of the verb גִּישַׁלְתָּ. This is possible, especially in view of the exilic context of Zechariah 7, in which similar personal names are attested (see above). But this hardly serves as proof for the worship of the god Bethel in Israel before the exile.

Genesis 31:13 is somewhat awkward, reading, אָנֹכִי הָאֵל בֵּית־אֵל אֲשֶׁר מִשְׁחַת שֵׁם מֵאֱבָה. This is because שׁ seems to suggest that the relative clause should be modifying a toponym, rather than a person. Thus, the LXX has ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ὀφθείς σοι ἐν τόπῳ θεοῦ οὗ ἤλειψάς μοι ἐκεῖ στήλην (“I am the God who appeared to you at the place of

¹⁷¹Day, 37–38, 144.

¹⁷²Dalglish, 710.

¹⁷³De Vauz, 275; Otto Eissfeldt, “Der Gott Bethel,” *ARW* 28 (1930): 1–30; J. Philip Hyatt, “The Deity Bethel and the Old Testament,” *JAOS* 59 (1939): 81–98.

God, where you anointed a pillar to me”),¹⁷⁴ and *Tg. Ps.-J.* has a similar reading. Proposals for emendation are of little help. McComiskey sides with the LXX, rendering it, “The God who appeared to you at Bethel.”¹⁷⁵ But it is very difficult to see how the MT could have come from this.¹⁷⁶ It is easier to explain the LXX’s reading as an attempt to interpret the proto-MT, which may reflect a theological discomfort with the designation “the God of Beth-El” (cf. LXX Gen 14:22).

By itself, Beth-El is unexceptional, as it is the standard designation for a site where worship took place. Although the deity Bethel is attested among the Arameans, there is no reason to assume that the same is true in pre-exilic Israel. In Gen 35:7, we do find אֵל בֵּית־אֵל, in which אֵל, in the construct state, is best understood as a common noun.¹⁷⁷ Like the others, neither Beth-El nor El Beth-El can be taken to be connected with Canaanite El.

El Elohe Israel

Genesis 33 is the chapter that marks the return of Jacob in the land of Canaan. After a surprisingly warm welcome by his brother Esau, Jacob settles his family in the vicinity of Shechem, pitches his tent, and builds an altar, which he names אֵל אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל (Gen 33:20). Of all the El names for God in Genesis, this is the one that most clearly suggests that El is to be understood as a proper name. Most scholars opt for translating this

¹⁷⁴On τόπῳ θεοῦ, note the reading of Gen 28:19: καὶ ἐκάλεσεν Ιακὼβ τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ τόπου ἐκείνου Οἶκος θεοῦ (“and Jacob called the name of that place ‘house of God’”).

¹⁷⁵McComiskey, 202.

¹⁷⁶The Vorlage would have read something like הָאֵל הַנִּרְאָה אֱלֹהֵיךְ בֵּית־אֵל.

¹⁷⁷Cross, 47 n. 14.

as either “El is the God of Israel,” or “El, the God of Israel.”¹⁷⁸ The proper name in this title has even been taken as evidence for the more general hypothesis that El is in fact the deity referred to throughout the patriarchal narratives by similar designations.¹⁷⁹ Herrmann believes that this indicates “that El was worshipped by some of the proto-Israelites.”¹⁸⁰ Pope writes:

To construe ‘ēl as appellative in this expression is a manifest absurdity. We conclude that the name of the god in question was originally El and that the adjunct of the apposition ‘ēlōhē yiśrā’ēl, whether applied early or late, was merely for the purpose of making the identity of YHWH and El explicit.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁸This is a near consensus among English Bible translations. None of the ones consulted (ASV, ESV, JPS, KJV, NAB, NASB, NIV, NJP, NJPS, NKJV, NLT, NRSV, RSV) attempts to translate this phrase; rather, they simply give “El-Elohe-Israel,” or something like it. This is also true of the French *Bible en français courant* and the *Nouvelle édition de Genève*. Several German translations, however, do attempt to translate this phrase with לָאֵל being taken as a common noun. The *Einheitsübersetzung* and the *Revidierte Elberfelder Bibel* both have “Gott, der Gott Israels,” and the *Revidierte Lutherbibel* has “Gott ist der Gott Israels.” Schlatter takes לָאֵל as a noun meaning “strength” in his translation: “Der starke Gott Israels.” The LXX avoids this problem by simply rendering the phrase, καὶ ἐπεκαλέσατο τὸν Θεὸν Ἰσραὴλ. This approach is also taken in Gen 35:7, where the LXX has Βαθηλ for the MT’s אל בְּרִית־אֵל. This aversion suggests that the LXX translators were aware that לָאֵל could be used as a proper divine name to designate a deity other than Yahweh (see John William Wevers, “The Interpretive Character and Significance of the Septuagint Version,” in *From the Beginnings to the Middle Ages (Until 1300)* [vol. 1 of *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation*; ed. Magne Sæbø; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996], 106–107). The fact that this also occurs in Gen 46:3 argues against interpreting the LXX’s ὁ Θεὸς in this latter text as being due to dittography.

¹⁷⁹McComiskey, 198.

¹⁸⁰W. Herrmann, “El,” *DDD*, 277. Smith argues that, since אל בְּרִית is given as the name of a deity worshipped at Shechem in Judg 9:46, what we have in Genesis 33—a scene that occurs in the vicinity of Shechem—is an Israelite identification of the original local El with Yahweh (41–43). See also J. J. M. Roberts, “El,” *IDBSup*, 257.

¹⁸¹Pope, 15.

This view is echoed by a large number of scholars,¹⁸² and implies that Gen 33:20 bears witness to an earlier form of אלהי ישראֵל, יהוה אלהי ישראֵל, which occurs 119 times in the Hebrew Bible.

Others have noted that in other instances in the Hebrew Bible in which an altar is named, the names that are given are verbless clauses; this is the case in Exod 17:15, where the altar is named יהוה נפי¹⁸³ as well as in Judg 6:24, where we have יהוה שלום.¹⁸⁴ On this reading, “El” is a more attractive alternative than “God,” since “God is the God of Israel” is an awkward tautology. Yet in Gen 35:7 the altar is simply called Beth-El. The only other time we encounter the naming of an altar is in Josh 22:34, where the altar appears to be named simply “witness,” although this is based on an emendation accepted by most scholars; the MT simply has וַיָּקֹרְא אֱלֹהִים בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְמִזְבֵּחַ כִּי עַד הוּא, which seems to require the insertion of עד.¹⁸⁵ These parallels, aside from being exceedingly few, do not require a similar translation here.

¹⁸² Speiser, 259; Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 285, 301; Albertz, *Beginnings*, 76; Conrad E. L’Heureux, “Searching for the Origins of God,” in *Traditions in Transformation: Turning Points in Biblical Faith* (ed. Baruch Halpern and Jon D. Levenson; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1981), 39. Translationally, Matthews (576) and Hamilton (350) also concur.

¹⁸³ This was pointed out as early as Rashi (Abraham Maurice Silbermann and Morris Rosenbaum, eds., *Genesis* [vol. 1 of *Pentateuch with Targum Onkelos, Haphtaroth and Rashi’s Commentary*; trans. Abraham Maurice Silbermann and Morris Rosenbaum; Jerusalem: Routledge & Keagan Paul, 1973], 1:164).

¹⁸⁴ Wardlaw, 144–45; Van Seters, “Religion,” 22–23.

¹⁸⁵ See Trent C. Butler, *Joshua* (WBC 7; Waco: Word, 1983), 241; Richard D. Nelson, *Joshua* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 246; David M. Howard, *Joshua* (NAC 5; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1998), 415–16.

In addition to הָאֵל אֱלֹהִי אֲבִיךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל (Gen 46:3), we also find אל אֱלֹהִי.

With the article, it is impossible to construe לְאֵל here as a proper name.¹⁸⁶ However, Cross argues that the article should be omitted in this case, since, according to his understanding of the development of the Hebrew language, the article did not develop until after the loss of inflectional endings in the early Iron Age.¹⁸⁷ Although a lack of data makes it difficult to pinpoint an exact date, it does seem that the definite article should be regarded as a first millennium morphological innovation.¹⁸⁸ If Cross is correct, then one's interpretation of Gen 46:3 should be understood as a virtual semantic equivalent to Gen 33:20. However, his proposal amounts to speculation regarding the prehistory of the text, which may also have differed from the MT in other ways for which we have no extant evidence. In other words, if we are willing to reconstruct the text so that לְאֵל becomes anarthrous, we must also be willing to accept the possibility that there are other ways in which the phrase may have "originally" been different from the MT. At any rate, the article is not crucial for my case, and, if omitted, would cause this verse to fall under the same analysis as Gen 33:20.

¹⁸⁶This is a shared feature of the article in Canaanite, Aramaic, Arabic, and also probably Old South Arabic (see John Huehnergard, "Features of Central Semitic," in *Biblical and Oriental Essays in Memory of William L. Moran* [ed. A. Giusto. Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 2005]: 185).

¹⁸⁷Cross, 46; Wenham, "Religion," 168. Speiser casually omits the article as well (342). Van Seters ("Religion," 224 n. 9) notes the circularity in Cross' argumentation: Cross takes the omission of the article as evidence of the earliness of the text, yet here he emends the article out of the text because he believes it is early. He is adjusting the data to fit his theory, rather than the other way around.

¹⁸⁸Thomas O. Lambdin, "The Junctural Origin of the West Semitic Definite Article," in *Near Eastern Studies in Honor of William Foxwell Albright* (ed. Hans Goedicke; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1971), 315–333; Randall W. Garr, *Dialect Geography of Syria-Palestine: 1000–586 B.C.E.* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2004), 87–89. For a convincing argument regarding the origin of the definite article, see Na'ama Pat-El, "The Development of the Semitic Definite Article: A Syntactic Approach," *JSS* 54 (2009): 19–50.

Despite the strong rhetoric of those who are very convinced that the initial word in this phrase in Gen 33:20 is a proper name, there are a fair number of scholars who disagree. Blum, for example, is happy to translate the phrase, “Gott ist der Gott Israels.”¹⁸⁹ Another option is to translate Gen 33:20 as “mighty is the God of Israel,” which may be a correct rendering of a similar exclamation which occurs both in Josh 22:22 and in Ps 50:1: אֱלֹהִים יְהוָה.¹⁹⁰ Another alternative way to understand Gen 33:20 is proposed by Arnold, who sees the phrase as an “explicative apposition, in which ‘El’ is a general category and ‘God of Israel’ is a particular member of that category.”¹⁹¹ Thus, the phrase would mean something like, “God—namely, the God of Israel.” Arnold’s suggestion becomes even more compelling in light of similar usage of אֱלֹהִים in the Hebrew Bible. In the Psalms, we find אֱלֹהִים אֱלֹהִי יִשְׂרָאֵל (Ps 51:16), אֱלֹהִים אֱלֹהִי תְּשַׁעַטְתִּי (68:9; 72:18; Ezra 6:22), as well as אֱלֹהִים אֱלֹהִי אֶבְוָתֵיכֶם in 2 Chr 34:32. This also provides a convincing explanation for (the MT of) Gen 46:3 (הָאֵל אֱלֹהִי אֶבְיךָ), since in other instances of this type of apposition the first noun often has the article, while it is lacking in the second.¹⁹² Finally, it can be argued

¹⁸⁹ Erhard Blum, *Die Komposition der Vätergeschichte* (WMANT 57; Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1984); so Waltke, 461; Walton, 609.

¹⁹⁰ Howard, 411–12; Peter C. Craigie and Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 1–50* (2d ed.; WBC 19; Dallas: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 362–63. This is the translation adopted by the ASV, ESV, NASB, NIV, and RSV in Jos 22:22, while the NKJV and NRSV have “God of gods.” For Ps 50:1, all of these translations have “mighty.” Has-Joachim Kraus translates Ps 50:1 as “God, God, Yahweh” (*Psalms 1–59*; [trans. Hilton C. Oswald; CC; Minneapolis: Fortress 1993], 486–87). See also Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch* (trans. James Martin; vol. 1 of *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*; Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1951), 311. Smith is confident that אֱלֹהִים in Josh 22:22 is to be understood as a common noun (34).

¹⁹¹ Arnold, 291 n. 472.

¹⁹² For example, (2) הַנּוּר הַגְּבִיא (1 Kgs 2:19); הַמְלָךְ שְׁלֹמֹה (2 Sam 3:31), הַמְלָךְ דָּוִד (1 Kgs 9:4); (Ezra 1:7); הַנּוּר חִזְקִיָּהוּ (1 Chr 5:9); הַנּוּר פָּרָת (Isa 39:3). See IBHS § 12.3e; Paul Joüon, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (trans. and rev. T. Muraoka; 2 vols.; SubBi 14; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1993) § 131; Bill. T. Arnold and John H. Choi, *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 24.

that El Elohe Israel simply contains an abbreviated form of one (or more) of the other El names for God, which themselves seem to function as proper names. In this view, אֱלֹהִים of Gen 33:20 and perhaps 46:3 is a proper name, yet it does not refer to Canaanite El, but rather to the God designated by the other El names.¹⁹³

Our conclusion with respect to Gen 33:20 and 46:3, in light of the available evidence, is that all options should be regarded as possible. The phrase, אֱלֹהִים יְהוָה can be translated either “El is the God of Israel,” “El, the God of Israel,” “Mighty is the God of Israel,” or “God—namely, the God of Israel.” The latter finds support in the parallel constructions cited above. Genesis 46:3 is dependent on whether one wishes to include the article or to dismiss it. With the article, אֱלֹהִים cannot be a proper name, and so must be construed as a common noun in apposition to אֲבִיךָ אֱלֹהִים. Without the article, the options are similar to the ones in Gen 33:20.

El’s Consort in Genesis?

One final text remains that is relevant to our inquiry. Genesis 49 has been widely considered to be among the earliest passages in the Hebrew Bible, dated by many to the period of the judges or the early monarchy.¹⁹⁴ This chapter contains the “Testament of Jacob,” given by the patriarch to his sons. Here, among a cluster of several early

¹⁹³Credit for this final option must be given to Richard E. Averbeck, who convinced me that it was a viable option in a private conversation.

¹⁹⁴David Noel Freedman, “‘Who Is Like Thee Among the Gods?’ The Religion of Early Israel,” in *Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross* (ed. Patrick D. Miller, Paul D. Hanson, and S. Dean McBride; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1987), 319, 321–24. Freedman’s reasons include its “archaic language and style,” the presence of the original twelve-tribal divisions, its description of the tribe of Levi as essentially “secular,” and the lack of any mention of the exodus or Sinai events.

designations for God, all included in Jacob's blessing on his son Joseph (vv. 22–26), we find mention of the “blessings of breasts and womb” (**ברכת שדיים ורחם**), which is one of the five such “blessings” contained in verse 25. Freedman comments, “It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that this is not simply a generic reference to human fertility but rather a designation of the great Mother Goddess, the consort of El who is the archetypal divine father.”¹⁹⁵ If this is true, perhaps we do have some evidence, after all, that El worship lays behind one of the descriptions of God in Israel.

Smith fleshes this idea out a bit more.¹⁹⁶ He points out that *rhm* is sometimes associated with Anat,¹⁹⁷ and that the plural *rhm̄t* is used of the pair of Anat and Asherah.¹⁹⁸ In addition, *KTU* 1.23:23–24 describes the “beautiful gods” (*ilm n 'mm*) as “sucking from the nipples of the breast of 'Atiratu.”¹⁹⁹ Since Anat's cult is unattested in Iron Age Israel and Phoenicia, however, and since Asherah is considered El's consort, the latter proves to be the best candidate for the owner of the epithet **שדיים ורחם** in Gen 49:25.²⁰⁰ This, coupled with the separate invocation of Yahweh in verse 18, leads Smith to conclude, “This chapter might

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 324.

¹⁹⁶ In fairness, it is important to note that, every time Smith mentions this passage, his contention that this may refer to Asherah is made only tentatively. See also Bruce Vawter, “The Canaanite Background of Genesis 49,” *CBQ* 17 (1955): 16–17.

¹⁹⁷ *KTU* 1.6:II:27; 1.15:II:6; 1.23:16.

¹⁹⁸ *KTU* 1.23:13, 28.

¹⁹⁹ The text reads, *ynqm bap zd atrt*.

²⁰⁰ Smith also tries to reconstruct the end of line 24 as reading *atrt*. [*rhmy*] on the basis of *atrt wrhmy* in line 28, but this is not certain.

then represent a tradition or early stage in Israel's religious history in which El and Yahweh were not identified and Asherah stood as an identifiable goddess.”²⁰¹

But there are also contextual considerations that account for the inclusion of שְׁדִים וּרְחָם. The expression bears phonetic similarity to the earlier שְׁעִי וַיְבָרֶךְ, in which there is a repetition of the same consonantal order שׁ, בָּ, וּ, with the following word beginning with רָ, and containing רָ, followed by the similar spirants מָ and כָּ, respectively. Note also the alliteration between שְׁמִים and שְׁדִים. It also seems likely that שְׁדִים וּרְחָם is intentionally set among pairs of opposites: “blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep crouching beneath.” Thus, the mention of “breasts and womb” probably serves to balance the threefold reference to “father” in verses 24–26. Wenham writes, “This deliberate balancing of divine blessing on male and female spheres of interest suggests the completeness of God’s promises to all Joseph’s descendants, both men and women.”²⁰²

Not only this, but Smith’s use of Ugaritic parallels seems rather strained. First, “breasts and womb” do not actually function as “epithets” of either Anat or Asherah, and there is definitely no indication that this is how they are to be taken in Genesis.²⁰³ Second, the combination, “breasts and womb,” is never used either of Anat or Asherah; the elements only appear individually.²⁰⁴ Third, since there is no evidence of a cult of Anat in Israel, as Smith himself acknowledges, all of the parallels with Anat seem rather senseless,

²⁰¹Smith, 50–52.

²⁰²Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 487.

²⁰³Richard S. Hess, *Israelite Religions: An Archaeological and Biblical Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 152.

²⁰⁴Ibid.

leaving the only real connection *KTU* 1.23, and thus implying a connection with Asherah. But the significance of *zd* in this text is much different than in Genesis 49; in “Dawn and Dusk,” as Pardee puts it, “the suckling of an infant by a goddess here indicates divine adoption rather than biological motherhood.”²⁰⁵ The only compelling evidence that we should see Asherah in this expression in Genesis 49 is her status as the consort of El.²⁰⁶ The problem with this, of course, is that El’s presence in Genesis 49 has not been demonstrated persuasively by other means. Finally, we must ask whether a mention of the two most typical female symbols of fertility is specific enough to conclusively draw a connection to a specific goddess, or even if we are required to see a reference to a goddess at all. Hess’ opinion is both sensitive to the Israelite context, and displays a cautious and restrained use the evidence: “In the poems of Genesis 49 it is not surprising that [breasts and womb] are ascribed to the God of Israel, who is understood as Creator and Sustainer of everything.”²⁰⁷

Conclusions Regarding the El Names in Genesis

We are now in the position to summarize the data gleaned from the previous analysis of the El compounds of Genesis. My discussion has focused mainly on whether אֵל, as it is used in these compounds, is a common noun or a proper name, and whether these compounds are used to refer to Canaanite El outside of the Hebrew Bible. With respect to several of these (El Roi, El Shadday, El Olam, El Beth-El), it is unlikely that we have a

²⁰⁵“Dawn and Dusk,” translated by Dennis Pardee (*COS* 1.87:279 n. 36). Pardee also references the same meaning for this imagery with Kirta’s son, Yaṣuba (*KTU* 1.15:26–28).

²⁰⁶Smith, 51. Note that Freedman (324), on the other hand, uses the supposed reference to Asherah as evidence that El lies behind the epithets of this text. Thus, we are stuck in a vicious circle.

²⁰⁷Hess, 152.

personal name, since לְאֵל stands in construct relation to an absolute noun. But it is important to note that this is by no means clear, since the names *ywhh tmn* and *ywhh šmrn*, attested to at Kuntillet ‘Ajrud, provide evidence that divine names may be used in Hebrew as construct nouns, or possibly with an implied אֶלְהָיִם between the two nouns. This would then presumably be used to indicate a particular manifestation of the deity in question. Thus, we cannot object, on strictly syntactical grounds, to the notion that לְאֵל in these compounds may be a proper noun, although the general Semitic avoidance of this kind of nominal overdetermination should warrant much caution, and certainly casts serious doubt on the claim that this noun is to be understood as a personal divine name.

The second significant observation is that these titles are generally unattested as titles of the Canaanite god El. El Roi, El Shadday, and El Olam are nowhere clearly used this way, although similar forms of the latter two occasionally occur as designations of other deities. Elyon is attested as an epithet of El, but it also functions this way with other divine names. Among all the El titles of Genesis, *qn ’rs* is the only one that seems to have been exclusively applied to El, although the evidence is too scant for us to be dogmatic about this. In addition, El Elyon is not a conflation of two distinct deities; scholars who wish to claim this must appeal to late and isolated evidence and ignore more relevant Hebrew and Ugaritic usage. It is therefore probable that Melchizedek’s reference to El Elyon is to a Canaanite deity, but it is equally clear that Abraham’s is not; instead, he appropriates this name as an epithet of his own God, who is distinct from the god of Melchizedek.²⁰⁸ El Beth-El is otherwise unknown, and although Beth-El does seem to have been an independent deity,

²⁰⁸ It is interesting that the only clear reference to the Canaanite deity El in Genesis is found on the lips of a Canaanite priest.

primarily among the Arameans, there is no compelling reason to read it as a proper divine name in Genesis, or as referring to a temple of El, as opposed to simply a sanctuary in general.

Among the El compounds of Genesis, El Elohe Israel is the one that can most convincingly be presented as providing evidence for El worship, but even this is not as clear as many assume. While it is legitimate to translate this as “El is the God of Israel,” this is by no means the only option, since it can also be understood either as appositional (“God—namely the God of Israel”) or with לְאֵל meaning “mighty.” Of these latter two options, the first is more likely, as it is supported by similar expressions occurring elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. Further, even if לְאֵל is to be taken here as a proper name, it is by no means clear that that it is preferable to understand it as referring to Canaanite El, rather than as an abbreviated form of one of the other El compounds of Genesis.

With the exception of the altar, El Elohe Israel, all of these names are explicitly identified by the narrator as Yahweh, sometimes in direct speech (Gen 14:22), and sometimes in narrated discourse (16:3; 17:1; 21:33; 28:16–19). Whatever the origin of these titles, they were eventually accepted as legitimate epithets for Yahweh. This point is uncontroversial among historians of Israelite religion. The matter of dispute is whether they provide evidence for worship of the Canaanite deity El in earlier states of Israelite religion. Based on the analysis offered in this chapter, my conclusion is that they do not. Therefore, if the historian of Israelite religion is compelled to demonstrate the existence of El worship among the Israelites, it must be on grounds other than the evidence provided in Genesis.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

In this study, the biblical account of pre-Mosaic Israelite religion was analyzed in order to determine whether or not it could be used as evidence for the worship of the Canaanite deity El among the early Israelites.

The introduction showed that it is common practice among historians of Israelite religion to regard several aspects of Genesis as bearing witness to a stage in the development of Israelite religion in which El was worshipped as a, if not *the*, major deity in Israel. Scholars differ as to how Yahweh came to take El's place as Israel's chief God. While some regard Yahweh and El as having originally been identical (e.g., Cross, de Moor, Miller), others believe that Yahweh and El were always distinct deities (e.g., Eissfeldt, Smith, Day), typically viewing Yahweh as having been part of El's divine council. Regardless of their position on this matter, however, one thing that such scholars tend to have in common is their contention that the biblical evidence supports the notion that El was worshipped in Israel, and that a significant part of the evidence for this is contained in Genesis, particularly in the various ways in which the term הָאֵל is used.

It was necessary to take several steps before evaluating whether or not the common scholarly interpretation of this evidence is correct. First, it was important to understand whether or not the biblical narrative itself claims that God was known by the name Yahweh before the time of Moses. This is because so much of the conversation is centered around the names that are used throughout Genesis, for both God and humans. Essentially, it was crucial to understand whether or not it was the position of the biblical

authors that the name Yahweh was known and used among the early Israelites alongside the various El names for God. My conclusion after studying the two key texts, Exodus 3 and 6, was that it was the position of those responsible for these two biblical texts that Yahweh was not the name that the Israelites used to refer to God prior to the time of Moses. In addition, there is no compelling evidence that Yahweh was worshipped prior to this. This is confirmed by the biblical onomasticon leading up to the exodus, in which Yahwistic theophoric personal names are lacking entirely (with the possible exception of Jochebed), and Elohistic names dominate instead.

The frequent use of Yahweh in the dialogue of Genesis, however, does not conflict with this, because it can be explained as a purposeful theological retrojection of an author who wrote after Yahweh had become the national deity of Israel. The greatest potential problems for this view arise from the claim that various individuals “called upon the name of Yahweh” and the use of “Yahweh Yir’eh” by Abraham to name the place where his son was spared from being sacrificed. Yet neither of these proved to be strong enough objections to overturn my exegesis of Exod 6:3 and to render the theological retrojection scenario improbable.

Instead, the pre-Mosaic Israelites knew God by various designations that incorporate the term **לְאֵל**. Aside from Melchizedek’s reference to El Elyon, creator of heaven and earth (Gen 14:19) and the name by which Jacob calls his altar at Shechem, El Elohe Israel (33:20), it was found that none of these names can be demonstrated to have originally been applied to Canaanite El. The former is spoken by a Canaanite priest, and adopted by Abraham as an appropriate epithet for his own God, and the latter may be interpreted either as including an abbreviated form of another El compound or as an explicative apposition, which is by no means improbable, given the occasional use of the similar expression, **אֱלֹהִים**.

אֱלֹהִי יִשְׂרָאֵל. Finally, the suggestion that reference to El's consort can be found in Gen 49:25 was found to be groundless.

Thus, a negative answer to my original research question is entirely justified: The biblical account of pre-Mosaic Israelite religion does not provide evidence that Canaanite El was worshipped among the Israelites. This does not mean that there is no evidence whatsoever for the worship of El in Israel. Perhaps analysis of other important texts that have contributed to this discussion can, in fact, support the common scholarly reconstruction of early Israelite religion. But there is no compelling reason to believe this to be the case for Genesis.

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