

Ps 115:2–7; cf. Hos 8:4–6).<sup>68</sup> Ultimately, however, the rhetoric is still aimed at social roles and responsibilities, and not at ontology.

The divine messengers of the Hebrew Bible also seem to occupy the periphery of the category (cf. Köckert 2007). While these messengers operate in ways that indicate some kind of divine status, they are not divine patrons over social groups, they do not (yet) appear to deploy their own communicable agency through any material media, and while they are asserted to have access to strategic information, it seems to derive from YHWH. In the Ugaritic literature, divine messengers—referred to as “deities” (*ilm*) in *KTU* 1.3.iii.32 (Handy 1994, 157)—primarily communicated between one deity and another, and they constituted a servile class of deity operating on the lowest tier of the pantheon (Smith 2001, 49–50; Handy 1994, 149–54). But even in the Hebrew Bible they could be referred to as deities, as in the story of the annunciation of Samson’s birth to his parents in Judg 13:21–22: “The messenger of YHWH [*mal’ak YHWH*] did not appear again to Manoah and to his wife. Then Manoah realized that it was the messenger of YHWH. So Manoah said to his wife, ‘We will surely die, since we have seen deity [*’ēlōhīm rā’înū*].’” The received form of the text seems to refer to the messenger as a deity, so for communities in which that text circulated, the messenger would likely have been understood as some manner of deity (although chapter 6 will show that the textual situation is not so cut and dry). This is also indicated by the widespread reinterpretation in the Greco-Roman period of passages that explicitly refer to deities as references to messengers (e.g. 1 Enoch’s reinterpretation of Gen 6).

Finally, we must mention a collection of divine beings whose occupation of the periphery of the conceptual category of deity is largely a result of their distance from population centers, social groups, and human institutions. These were divine agents without patronage, and they included the chaos monsters of the sea, such as *liwyātān*, “Leviathan” (Isa 27:1; Ps 74:14; 104:26; Job 3:8; 40:25), and the ghosts and demons thought to dwell in ruins and in the wilderness, such as the *šyîm*, “desert-demons(?)”, the *’îyîm*, “howlers(?)”, the *šē’îrîm*, “goat-demons,” *lîlî*, “Lilith,” and *’āzā’zēl*, “Azazel.”<sup>69</sup> These entities were not described with any appreciable degree of detail in the texts, which not only contributed to their ambiguity, but to their conceptual elasticity, providing convenient conceptual canvasses for later periods. In the short term, they no doubt served the biblical authors’ structuring of divine power.<sup>70</sup> Perhaps they were understood zoomorphically or as hybrid entities, but the texts just don’t provide

<sup>68</sup> Cf. Dick 1999; Smith 2004b; Levtow 2008, 40–85.

<sup>69</sup> Most of these are mentioned only in Isa 13:21–22; 34:14; Jer 50:39, but for Azazel, see Lev 16:8, 10, 26. See Janowski 1999a, 1999b; Hutter 1999; Frey-Anthes 2008; Blair 2009.

<sup>70</sup> On writing and the postexilic development of angelology and demonology, see Reed 2020.