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YHWH's Divine Agents: The Ark of the Covenant and the *Kābôd*

The discussion up to this point has been laying the groundwork for a more careful interrogation of YHWH's own presencing media in the Hebrew Bible. We have seen that the people of Iron Age Israel and Judah constructed their understandings of the nature and function of deity on the same cognitive foundations—those “fundamentals of ancient thought”—on which the peoples of the surrounding societies constructed their own understandings of the same. YHWH emerges in the earliest literary strata as a prototypical ancient Southwest Asian deity that possessed many of the characteristics and performed many of the functions that have been identified by cognitive scientists as critical to the transmission and perseverance of concepts of socially concerned deities. This includes the manifestation of the deity's presence through material media, which is demonstrated by the cultic media that have been discovered among the material remains of Iron Age Israel and Judah. The Hebrew Bible itself, however, also attests to the centrality of presencing media. Stelai and other media pepper the texts in ways that demonstrate their normativity, but even more centrally, the Hebrew Bible repeatedly and emphatically insists on the temple itself as the principal material medium for facilitating the deity's presence and the principal sign of that presence.

Having said that, beginning in the seventh century BCE and continuing for some time, significant changes were introduced regarding the way that presencing media was understood, particularly by the authors and editors responsible for the D, Dtr, and P literary strata, as well as those responsible for consolidating the various traditions into the corpora that became the Hebrew Bible. There were no doubt different motivations for these changes prior to the destruction of the Jerusalem temple,¹ but following that destruction, those motivations seem to have

¹ For instance, Max Weber (1952) posited the theory later taken up by Baruch Halpern (1991), Joseph Blenkinsopp (1995), and Susan Ackerman (2012) that one of the primary goals of D's earliest campaign of cult centralization was to undermine the power of kin-based communities and their commitment to cultic relationships with deceased kin.