

CHAPTER 9

SYNTHESIS AND CONCLUSION

As also indicated in paragraph 1.5, each one of chapters 2-8 is concluded with a comprehensive résumé regarding the discussions pertaining to the particular chapter; all relevant material is summarised therein. Therefore I deem it superfluous to include an extensive résumé in this final chapter. For an overview of this dissertation I recommend in paragraph 1.5 that the reader should consult the different résumés at the end of each applicable chapter. The specific purpose of this thesis is set out in paragraph 1.4, and the aim with this research is elucidated in my hypothesis: *that the Israelite God Yahweh was originally a Midianite/Kenite deity and that marginal groups related to the Kenites, such as the Rechabites, played a significant and dominant role in the preserving of a pre-exilic Yahweh-alone movement, as well as in the establishment of a post-exilic Yahweh monotheism* – see paragraph 1.3.

I was motivated to do this research when I realised how many debates amongst biblical scholars evolve around the question of the origin of *Yahweh* and the development of Yahwism. I have since discovered that there is barely any field of research in biblical scholarship that has not been extensively investigated. Notwithstanding, despite all the discourses in this field of study, as well as in the other relevant disciplines, hardly any of the many questions addressed to the Hebrew Bible have been answered. When I started this research several matters intrigued me, particularly the origin of *Yahweh* and the development of Yahwism; to what extent Yahwism was actually practised by the Israelites; what the *Yahweh*-alone movement entailed; how it happened that a nation who obviously practised syncretism for centuries, were converted to a strict *Yahweh*-alone monotheism within a relatively short period of time – as far as I could ascertain, this question has not yet been answered. Furthermore, no clear-cut decision has been reached by scholars regarding the origin of *Yahweh*, or to the rise of Yahwism culminating in post-exilic monotheism. It therefore motivated me to analyse the work done by scholars in this field and submit – if possible – plausible suggestions relating to these questions. Relevant proposals are incorporated in this chapter.

I soon realised that many problems confront scholars in this field of research. Numerous debates the past decades accentuate the complexity of the origin of Israel as a nation, as well as that of their Yahwistic religion. Some scholars link the origin of *Yahweh* to the Kenites/Midianites, while other scholars propose that *Yahweh* evolved from an *El*-figure. No

two scholars are in complete agreement with each other concerning their distinctive area of research. There are even a number of leading biblical scholars and archaeologists who negate the events as described in the Hebrew Bible. It is clear that the religions and deities of the Ancient Near Eastern peoples played a significant role in the religion of Israel, particularly influencing the crystallisation of the *Yahweh* image and attributes ascribed to *Yahweh*. The pre-exilic Israelites practised a syncretistic-type religion obviously brought about by their interaction with surrounding nations. It is, however, not so easy to detect in the Hebrew Bible to what extent the Israelite religion was influenced by other cults, or precisely how they practised their own religion. These and other problems are addressed in the relevant chapters. The Hebrew Bible is not an historical book, and has, therefore, specific limitations to provide so-called "historical" information; it has, for instance, no intention to relate how Israel originated, but rather why it originated.

The purpose of this research was not to merely repeat that which scholars have debated for many decades, but to approach the problem of Israelite Yahwism with a different premise in mind – as defined in my hypothesis – and endeavour thereby to contribute to biblical research. My intention was to analyse relevant research material – particularly regarding biblical historiography, the development of Israel's religion, and archaeology – and draw conclusions concerning previous and current scholarly conceptions. To attain this aim I researched contributions from a wide range of scholars. This investigation, once more, indicates scholars' disparate views, and also how particular data are often interpreted at variance with the conclusions of another analyst. Numerous publications have shed the light on more or less every facet of the different disciplines related to biblical studies. Although scholars normally concentrate on their specific field of research, it was my purpose to review data pertaining to various disciplines relevant to the Hebrew Bible, and thereby ascertain their mutual dependence – or not. I wish to quote Dever¹ who criticises biblical scholars for neglecting to make use of archaeological data as a powerful tool to illuminate the Israelite cult. Instead of linking the two relevant disciplines, scholars either analyse biblical texts, or research archaeological information. In my investigation I applied archaeological results – and information on finds – as support for any theoretical conclusions; it is clear that biblical and related studies cannot be researched in isolation. In this regard Boshoff² mentions that scholars suggest a variety of approaches to the religio-historical problems in the Hebrew Bible, all of which are 'to a great extent dependent upon the results of other disciplines'.

¹ Dever 2005:74.

² Boshoff 1994:129.

Bearing in mind the extent of literature – and thus also data – available in both archaeological and biblical studies, there is no possibility to consult all relative material, or to become acquainted with the theories of all relevant scholars. I have endeavoured to take cognisance of the views of many scholars who are specialists in particular facets of biblical historical and religious studies, or in archaeology. I have come to the conclusion that early scholars – specifically those of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – played an important role in the initial stages of biblical scholarship; some of their views are still regarded as valid and of significance. As it was thus my purpose, with this research, to consult and analyse supportive material regarding various disciplines – particularly those of historical and religious biblical studies, as well as archaeological aspects – the extent of material deliberated resulted therein that the volume of this thesis exceeds the normal length of doctoral dissertations.

In relation to biblical studies, the Masoretic Text remains the prime source for biblical research. This thesis is, however, not a literary-critical analysis or text analysis; therefore, references to biblical texts are only for the elucidation, or confirmation of specific arguments, and not for analysing the particular text itself. Words or phrases are indicated in Hebrew where applicable to illustrate an argument, or merely for informative purposes.

My approach to the various subjects in each chapter was with the premise that the Yahwist tradition originated in the South, whence it spread to Judah and the North. Marginal southern tribes – particularly the Kenites, and other smiths, such as the Rechabites – probably venerated *Yahweh*, and were thus instrumental in the transmission of Yahwism; their particular trade, which involved long-distance travel, facilitated the spreading of their beliefs. Although the majority of the later Israelites practised syncretism, these marginal groups sustained their Yahwistic faith throughout the Monarchical Period, actively involved in a *Yahweh*-alone movement. As the deportees to Babylon included smiths, the Rechabites were probably amongst them; various references to the Rechabites in rabbinic – and later Christian – literature acknowledge the group's importance in post-exilic times. It is therefore reasonable to assume that their strict Yahwistic monotheism would have played a significant role during the Exile – and thereafter – when Judahites had to reflect on the reasons for their catastrophe. The Rechabites are, furthermore, named as scribes, and could thus also have assisted in the compilation of the Masoretic Text.

I hereafter briefly motivate the inclusion of the different chapters and discussions, which thereby corroborates my hypothesis and substantiates the purpose of this research.

As mentioned previously in this chapter, archaeological data are regarded as of paramount importance to research the various disciplines addressed in this thesis. Striking analogies between archaeological finds and folklore in biblical texts indicate that the actual remains of early Israel that have been revealed, disclose a picture completely different from that which is generally accepted regarding the origins and early development of the Israelite nation. The Hebrew Bible, as literary source, is inconsistent and biased regarding the history and religion of the Israelite people. Archaeology establishes the possibility for new images and a new concept of history; it is in essence the support for any theoretical biblical research, and artefacts or ancient written sources may be identified with data in the Hebrew Bible, and thereby enhance our understanding of the ancient religion. Unfortunately, of the enormous volume of archaeological data that have been collected, it encompasses but only a small fraction of the total evidence at a specific site. Furthermore, a considerable amount of assembled archaeological material is still unpublished.

Considering my argument and hypothesis that at least the mother goddess – and more specifically the Canaanite deity *Asherah/Athirat* – was a goddess familiar and accepted in the whole of the Ancient Near East, it seems that, similarly, the god *Yahweh* might have been venerated as *Ya*, *Yaw*, or *Yah*, over a widespread area of the Ancient Near East. In Chapter 2 excavations at the sites of Ebla, Mari and Ugarit are discussed, where archives have been uncovered that yielded thousands of tablets with texts – some dating as early as the third millennium BC, and up to the fifteenth to twelfth centuries BC. These documents are particularly significant therein that at both Ebla and Ugarit there might be references to a deity with a *Ya*, or a *Yaw* name. The site at Ugarit, furthermore, yielded tablets revealing an alphabetical script close to biblical Hebrew. These Ugaritic texts also evince certain cultural similarities with early Israelite material and provide some background regarding the development of the Israelite religion. Substantial segments of legendary narratives, as well as mythological and ritual texts provide information concerning, inter alia, the storm god *Ba'al* and the head of the Canaanite pantheon, *El*, as well as the deity *Asherah/Athirat*; the names of *Ba'al* and *Asherah* appear sporadically in the Hebrew Bible. Prior to the discovery of the Ugaritic texts, the Hebrew Bible was considered the leading authority on the Canaanite religion. Concerning information supplied by the Mari documents – apart from prophetic texts significant for its relation to biblical prophecy – a tribe that possibly could be linked to the Israelite tribe of Benjamin, as well as numerous references to the *ḥabiru*, has been identified in these texts; some scholars connect the *ḥabiru* with the early Hebrews. Movements of nomadic peoples are described in the

Mari texts and are important for the understanding of the Patriarchal Period; names corresponding to those in Genesis have also been recognised in these texts.

More information on the *ḥabiru* is provided by the fourteenth century BC Amarna Letters – Egyptian correspondence with Palestinian vassals, as well as with Babylonian and Assyrian rulers. The name *ḥabiru* features prominently in these letters. Kings of city-states accused each other of commissioning the *ḥabiru* as mercenaries, thereby rebelling against the pharaoh; the *ḥabiru* were, seemingly, unruly, disruptive elements destabilising the social order. Likewise, a significant Egyptian inscription was discovered on the Victory Stele of pharaoh Merneptah – dated ca 1207 BC – which is the oldest known reference to Israel. This inscription – formulated as a poem – mentions Canaanite cities, as well as "Israel". Since the nation Israel was eventually composed of several groups it is not possible to know to which one of these groups the inscription refers, but it implies that ca 1207 BC there was a group – or a people – called Israel in Canaan; Dever³ indicates that the word "Israel" is preceded by the Egyptian determinative sign for "people", and not for "nation" or "state". Scholars have also identified certain figures – depicted in reliefs on a temple wall at Karnak in Egypt – as Israelites. These figures are connected with the pastoral *Shasu* in other wall-reliefs; some scholars identify the *Shasu* with the early Israelites. Certain Egyptian documents refer to the *Shasu* as tribes of Edom, and also connect them with Mount Seir and the land of Seir. According to these documents, it is thus apparent that both Edom and the land of Seir were peopled by *Shasu*; the Hebrew Bible frequently links these two regions. Scholars suggest that the Proto-Israelites may have been part of groups of *Shasu* and *ḥabiru*.

Sensational discoveries on two pithoi at Kuntillet 'Ajrud, dated ca 800 BC, as well as an inscription on a pillar of a burial cave close to Khirbet 'el-Qom – dated ca 725 BC – mention "Yahweh and his Asherah". These inscriptions brought to the fore the significance of a consort for deities in the Ancient Near East – and in particular for *Yahweh*. The engravings, as well as miscellaneous drawings on the pithoi and pillar, have since their discovery generated numerous debates and scholarly interest – particularly the implications of a Yahwistic polytheism. The phrase raises the question whether the Israelite God, *Yahweh*, had a consort, and seems 'to suggest quite explicitly that Yahweh did have a consort'.⁴ Many scholars agree that these epigraphic finds, as well as supporting evidence – such as the Taanach cult stands – endorse the view 'that the goddess Asherah was worshipped as the consort of Yahweh in both

³ Dever 1997a:43.

⁴ Taylor 1994:53.

Israel and Judah during the period of the Israelite monarchy'.⁵ The popularity of syncretistic Yahwism during the eighth century BC possibly influenced the prophet Hosea to appropriate the idea and imagery implied by "*Yahweh* and his *Asherah*" and implement it in his theology wherein *Yahweh* has a "wife", named Israel. Two cult stands excavated at Taanach – an Iron I site – are lavishly decorated with figures. A nude female form is likely a portrayal of *Asherah*, depicted with two lions and the sacred tree. An open space on one of the registers of the one stand is flanked by two sphinxes. If the stands could be linked to the Israelites, as has been suggested, the question arises whether this vacant space represents *Yahweh*, the "invisible" Deity, posed between two cherubim – thereby linking *Yahweh* and *Asherah* in a cultic representation.

Scholars acknowledge that from the ninth century BC the Israelites venerated at least one – and more likely a few – goddesses. These were personified by an array of figurines, by both the southern and northern Israelites. Nude female figurines – popularly known as *Astartes* – have been found at many Ancient Near Eastern sites. Available evidence indicates that pillar figurines were part of the household cult and favoured especially by the Judeans. These figurines are, therefore, one of the most significant sources for research on the Israelite religion. The dominant female pillar figurine images could be linked to fertility.

Inscriptions in the ancient Hebrew script – dated approximately the sixth century BC – have been discovered in a burial cave at Khirbet Beit Lei. Scholars have proposed that these inscriptions be read as veneration to *Yahweh*, who dwells in Zion. Two silver plaques recovered at Ketef Hinnom, are two of the 'most important archaeological finds ... shedding light on the Bible'.⁶ These plaques contain an alternate version of the well-known Priestly Benediction of Numbers 6:24-26. Barkay and others⁷ date the inscriptions to the seventh century BC, while other readings by scholars date them to the sixth century BC. As both amulets contain the same text, it is a sure intimation that this text must have been meaningful and standardised at the period of inscription. These plaques thus preserve the earliest known citations of biblical texts. The tendency among scholars to date pentateuchal texts to the exilic or post-exilic times might be challenged by these two amulets; it seems evident that a continuous written tradition existed prior to these inscriptions.

⁵ Hadley 1997:169.

⁶ Barkay et al 2004:41.

⁷ Barkay et al 2004:41-42.

Significant cult sites have been uncovered during excavations. Apart from distinct features at cult sites, standing stones have been surveyed and recorded at numerous places. Although no biblical text explicitly describes the cultic role of these stones, texts do report on standing stones at a few sites. At Tel Arad – an important city on the border of Judah in the eastern Negeb – excavations revealed an Iron Age Israelite temple. Its Yahwistic character is confirmed by regular Yahwistic theophoric names on ostraca, especially by those of Judean priestly families. There is a striking similarity between the Arad temple and the Tabernacle in respect of their proportions, which are identical, and although no agreement has been reached amongst scholars regarding the reconstruction of the plan of the Solomonic Temple, the description of the Tabernacle links the Arad sanctuary and the Solomonic Temple. There is, in addition, a distinct uniformity between the cultic accoutrements at the Jerusalem and Arad temples. A large and unique series of inscriptions on ostraca have also been found in the different strata at Tel Arad; these ostraca 'comprise the richest and most varied collection of Hebrew inscriptions from the biblical period found up till now in one place'.⁸

During the course of excavations at Tel Beer-sheba fragments of a large ashlar-built horned altar were found. Aharoni, involved with excavations on the site at the time, assumed that the altar was an indication of a sanctuary or a temple, as mentioned in the Hebrew Bible. The horned altar possibly could have been dismantled and the sanctuary razed to the ground during Hezekiah's cult reform. The discovery of this altar is by far the most acclaimed archaeological find from this site.

Excavations at Tel Dan uncovered an altar, as well as various objects related to the cult. Since the finding of an old Aramaic inscription – from the mid-ninth century BC – at this site, debates have been ongoing regarding a phrase in this inscription. This phrase – on one of the fragments found in the remains of an eastern wall – translated, reads "the House of David". This expression caused a stir amongst biblical scholars. By the ninth century BC Judah's dynastic name was "the House of David" – as now attested by this inscription; the figure of David was thus firmly established at that time. While some scholars consider this phrase as a 'powerful witness for the existence of a David',⁹ other scholars totally reject such a claim.

The excavated material mentioned briefly in the previous paragraphs of this chapter, is but an example of what has been found. This should, however, be a clear indication of the

⁸ Aharoni 1981:141.

⁹ Ehrlich 2001:61.

invaluable information gained from archaeology that could be applied in biblical scholarship – therefore substantiating the claim that biblical research and archaeology are mutually dependent. The particular archaeological finds discussed in this thesis are relevant to support my hypothesis, as well as to supply information applicable to this research.

As indicated in paragraph 1.5, since the discovery of innumerable extra-biblical texts, consensus has been reached amongst biblical scholars that the mythologies and legends of the different Ancient Near Eastern peoples had a great influence on the mythologies and legends as recorded in the Hebrew Bible. It is, moreover, acknowledged that the pre-exilic Israelite nation practised a syncretistic-type religion involving, *inter alia*, particularly some Canaanite gods and rituals. Deities of neighbours were thus recognised and venerated. Attributes of these deities had a notable influence on the specific image of *Yahweh* as perceived by the Israelites.

I, furthermore, mention in my hypothesis – paragraph 1.3 – that I take cognisance of the supposition that the peoples of the various nations of the Ancient Near East continuously and extensively migrated from one place to another, thus spreading religious and other beliefs, influencing one another. To establish this influence I deemed it necessary to be familiar with the occurrence of a deity, or deities, with analogous names worshipped in different regions, thereby establishing whether this tendency was a regular phenomenon and, thus, substantiate my theory that a Yahwistic-related religion could have been practised elsewhere than only in Israel.

In Chapter 3, I discuss the goddess *Asherah* – known as Canaanite *Athirat* – as well as synonymous female deities; *Asherah* was evidently originally a West Semitic deity, who was, at some or other time, admitted to the Mesopotamian pantheon. These deliberations pointed out the different appearances of *Asherah/Athirat* at various pantheons, and with cognate names. Consequently, I draw the conclusion that these multifarious appearances of one deity corroborate my theory that, similarly, the veneration of a *Ya*-deity – or deities with analogous names – over a vast area of the Ancient Near East, is conceivable.

Scholars recognise the *Asherah* mentioned in the Hebrew Bible and the Ugaritic *Athirat* – or *Asherah* – as being identical. She was familiar in ancient Israel as her name was linked to *El* – also acknowledged as an Israelite God, *El* or *Elohim*. She was probably acceptable to many Israelites as a goddess next to *Yahweh-El*. Since the discovery of the inscriptions – "*Yahweh*

and his *Asherah*" – the possibility of a female consort for *Yahweh* has been debated extensively. Scholars have reached a reasonable agreement accepting that *Asherah* in the Masoretic Text refers to both an independent goddess and her wooden cult symbol. It has become clear that the ancient Israelite cult made far more allowances in religious beliefs and practices than admitted by the exilic and post-exilic editors of the Masoretic Text. Some scholars propose that the queen mother – although she held no official office within the Judean and Israelite monarchies – had the official responsibility to dedicate herself to the cult of *Asherah*, the mother goddess.

Some mythical elements linked to the figure of Eve, led various scholars to conclude that a goddess lies behind Eve. The mythical *Lilith* – with only one reference to the name in the Hebrew Bible – has been associated with Eve; rabbinic legends refer to her as being the alleged first wife of Adam. The prophet Jeremiah attributes the catastrophe of the Exile to the veneration of a goddess called the *Queen of Heaven*, who briefly appears in two passages in Jeremiah. Currently, most scholars identify this deity with Canaanite *Astarte*. Judeans were reluctant to abandon her – probably due to her fertility feature.

The major Ancient Near Eastern deities – particularly the storm, warrior and solar gods – share common characteristics. The storm deity has a distinctive iconography. *Ba'al*, the Canaanite storm god, is depicted with a thunderbolt, and a spear touching the ground with streaks of lightning at its other end. Lightning functioned as a weapon of *Yahweh* in his portrayal as Storm God or Warrior God. Although *Yahweh* acted predominantly as national God of the Israelites, *Ba'al* held a unique position among the inhabitants of Palestine – and thus also among the Israelites. Attributes ascribed to *Yahweh* are similar to those of *Ba'al*. Despite the absorption of *Ba'al* traits by *Yahweh*, all indications are that the Judeans carried on with syncretistic religious practices. As divine warrior, *Yahweh* is characterised with his heavenly chariotry and entourage. Battles between Ancient Near Eastern nations were comprehended as battles between patron gods, leading to the ideology of a "holy war". The concept "host of the heaven" originated from the metaphor of *Yahweh* as warrior. Astral deities were not an unfamiliar phenomenon for the ancient Israelites. In the Hebrew Bible *Yahweh* is indicated as Lord of the sun, moon and stars. The sun's chariot was his vehicle; the ancient idea of a chariot of the sun was born from the perception that the sun is a wheel turning through the heavens. Astral cults are prohibited in the Hebrew Bible; astral bodies were apparently venerated during the reign of the Judean kings Manasseh and Amon. The Israelites seemingly considered the sun as an icon or symbol of *Yahweh*.

Contact between the Israelite nation and the other Ancient Near Eastern peoples resulted therein that all the features of the various deities were later conferred upon the Hebrew God. The relationship between the God of Israel – *Elohim* – and the Canaanite god *El*, is to a great extent centred upon the religion of the Patriarchs. The Hebrew Bible occasionally applies a female metaphor to describe *Yahweh* or his actions; attributing female roles and metaphors to "male" deities was not an unknown concept in the Ancient Near East. As indicated earlier, legendary and mythical matter forms an integral part of the Hebrew Bible, and was thus also a fundamental component of the Yahwistic religion of the Israelites; it is therefore evident that the Israelites – be it in their veneration of *Yahweh* or of other deities – were basically influenced by surrounding cultures and religions, and more specifically from the religious culture of Canaan.

The outcome of deliberations in Chapter 3 substantiates my theory that a semblance of *Ya*-veneration in various areas of the Ancient Near East was possible – and maybe even probable. Knowledge of the Israelites' conception of *Yahweh*, and their particular syncretistic religious affinities, contributed to my better perception of the development of Yahwism.

The main focus of this thesis is the rise of Yahwism, which subsequently culminated in post-exilic monotheism. In the following chapter – Chapter 4 – various hypotheses of scholars are deliberated regarding the origin of the name YHWH, as well as a possible interpretation of this Name.

According to Exodus 3:13-14, Moses was the first "Israelite" to be confronted by *Yahweh*, and was told by this god – who came from a territory that did not form part of the later Israelite region – that his name was אֱהִיָּה אֲשֶׁר אֱהִיָּה, 'I AM WHO I AM'. God, furthermore, declared that he was 'The LORD [*Yahweh*], the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'.¹⁰ He later indicated to Moses that, although he appeared to the Patriarchs as "God Almighty", 'by my name the LORD [*Yahweh*] I did not make myself known to them'.¹¹ Janzen¹² is of the opinion that 'the biblical narrative taken as a whole could be read as an explication of what is in the name *Yahweh*'. The Name, as revealed to Moses, mostly appears in the Hebrew Bible in the form of the Tetragrammaton, יְהוָה. The Hebrew Bible refers to the Israelite God by a number of names, titles and epithets.

¹⁰ Exodus 3:15.

¹¹ Exodus 6:3.

¹² Janzen 1979:227.

From antiquity, until a number of years ago, the name of God was analysed mainly with the purpose to determine the subjective perception thereof. Modern scholars approach the problem from a philological perspective – thus analysing written records with the aim to establish the best reading of a text. The enigma of the phrase **אֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר אֱלֹהִים**, has intrigued scholars for many decades. At the same time they endeavour to analyse the Tetragrammaton – **יהוה** – and submit a plausible explanation for the word. One of the main concerns seems to be the paradox of the word **יהוה** being an imperfect finite verb – probably from the causative stem, *hif'il* – and therefore, of necessity, an imperfectum of the third person, while the formula **אֲנִי יְהוָה** – which appears frequently in the Masoretic Text – thus embodies a third person imperfectum (**יהוה**) with a first person pronoun (**אני**) as subject – an unattainable construction. No consensus has been reached by scholars regarding the analysis of the word **יהוה**. In accordance with Maimonides' reasoning, the true reality of God's existence cannot be grasped; the Tetragrammaton therefore implies that God's existence is identical with his essence, which is based on the concept of the absolute oneness of God.

Scholars disagree whether the original form of the name **יהוה** is an abbreviation of a longer construct, or whether it is the extension of shorter forms. Various proposals have been advanced by scholars regarding the origin of the Name. In concurrence with my hypothesis that *Yahweh* was venerated by southern tribes – particularly the Kenites and Midianites – some scholars theorise that the Name originated in the South. Mowinckel,¹³ for instance, suggests that the original meaning of the name *Yahu* – as an explanation of the name *Ya-huwa* – should be explored. *Ya* was a well-known Arabic interjection, and *huwa* the third person masculine personal pronoun "he". Ancient North Sinaitic tribes could have worshipped their god with the cultic exclamation *yá-huwa* – Oh, He. The abbreviated *yahwa* could thus be explained from the accentuation of *yáhuwa*. According to an established custom in Egypt, the epithet "One" – Egyptian "W" – was bestowed upon a supreme deity. Contact existed between the Egyptian and Sinaitic tribes, such as the Kenites. The Egyptian "I am" – vocalised as "Yawey" – possibly influenced the Kenite god *Yāh* to become *Yah-weh*, "Yah-One", with monotheistic implications.

In view of my hypothesis, I therefore endorse particular scholars' proposal that the name *Yahweh* originated in the South. According to the Kenite hypothesis, southern tribes

¹³ Mowinckel 1961:129-132.

venerated *Yahweh* before the Israelites did. A strong point of this classic hypothesis is the recurring tradition in the Masoretic Text of *Yahweh*'s geographical link with the South.¹⁴ In agreement with discussions in paragraphs 2.6 and 4.3.4, pertaining to certain Egyptian documents that refer to "*Yhw* [*Yahu*] in the land of the *Shasu*", my theory is furthermore substantiated. As indicated earlier in this chapter, Egyptian records link the *Shasu* tribes with the southern regions of Edom and Seir; thus, *Yahu* was apparently associated with those territories where the Kenites and related marginal groups roamed – the *Shasu* might have been composed of groups such as the Kenites and related tribes. In Chapter 4, I also discuss epigraphic finds – particularly pertaining to *Ya*-related names – that have been recovered over a large area of the Ancient Near East. These finds, therefore, corroborate my theory that deities with *Ya*-related names were venerated over a wide region of the Ancient Near East. The probability that *Yahweh* was worshipped by southern tribes – particularly such as the Kenites – before the Israelites became acquainted with him, contributes to the possibility that these gods with *Ya*-related names – or even a deity *Yahweh* – were also venerated elsewhere.

Arising from arguments in the previous chapters, the origin of the Kenites, and the Kenite hypothesis, is discussed and evaluated in Chapter 5. The Kenites were a nomadic or semi-nomadic tribe of coppersmiths dwelling primarily in the South, the region – according to biblical references – from where *Yahweh* emanated. Scholars have identified the Cain narrative of Genesis 4 as the aetiological legend of the Kenites, and Cain thus as the eponymous ancestor of the Kenites. The name Cain – קַיִן – is a derivation from the word "gotten" or acquired – קָנִיתִי, *qānītī*. In a text in Numbers¹⁵ Cain is associated with the Kenites – קִינִי. The genealogy of Cain links the lifestyle of the Kenites to three of Cain's descendants, namely being tent dwellers with livestock, musicians and metal craftsmen. Due to the particular nomadic lifestyle and craft of the Kenites, they roamed over a large area and thus had the opportunity to spread the cult of Yahwism. The Kenites' presence in the southern regions is confirmed by the discovery of a Hebrew ostraca at Arad wherein the place name Kinah is mentioned. Kinah, which was situated not far from Arad, may be linked to colonisation by Kenites of the eastern part of the Beer-sheba Valley. The Kenites, who might have been a clan of the Midianites, wandered in the Sinai, Midian, Edom, Amalek, northern Palestine, and the Negeb; a region in the Negeb was named after them. A raised platform, probably an altar, uncovered in the centre of an excavated village at Arad – identified as a Kenite establishment – might have been a twelfth century BC Kenite shrine.

¹⁴ Deuteronomy 33:2; Judges 5:4; Psalm 68:8; Habakkuk 3:3.

¹⁵ Numbers 24:21-22.

Scholars have two major theories regarding the origin of Yahwism, namely the Kenite hypothesis and the adoption of the *El*-figure by *Yahweh*. I postulate – in concurrence with my hypothesis – that *Yahweh* was known and revered by the Midianites and Kenites from a very early period. During the late seventeenth century the Dutch historian of religion, Cornelis P Tiele, advanced the idea of the Kenite hypothesis. He identified *Yahweh* as the god of the desert, whom the Kenites and related groups venerated before the Israelites did. According to Karl Budde – who developed this classic formulation – a Moses-type figure gained knowledge about *Yahweh* through his Kenite father-in-law, Jethro, a Midianite priest, who – consistent with a tradition in Exodus – worshipped *Yahweh*. The Kenite hypothesis is supported by Egyptian records, as well as references in the Hebrew Bible that *Yahweh* emanated from the South.

Scholars have disparate views regarding the Kenite hypothesis. In accordance with my hypothesis, as well as with theories proposed by Budde and other scholars – taking particular discrepancies and shortcomings into account – I evaluate the Kenite hypothesis, in general, positively and I support this particular theory regarding the origin of Yahwism.

Some scholars argue that, despite many attributes of *Yahweh*, which are normally ascribed to *Ba'al*, *Yahweh* was originally more like *El* than like *Ba'al*. *El*-names in the patriarchal narratives are frequently used as epithets of *Yahweh*. Scholars therefore surmise that *Yahweh* and *El* were associated at an early stage, and explain this connection by assuming that *Yahweh* was originally an *El*-figure. Scholars also deduce that *Yahweh* was initially a cultic name of *El*, and that *Yahweh*, therefore, could have been an epithet of *El* as patron deity of the Midianites and Kenites. Although certain aspects of this theory – initiated by Albrecht Alt, and developed by Frank Moore Cross – have merits for the reconstruction of the origin of Yahwism, I cannot completely agree with these scholars' proposals. This hypothesis, furthermore, does not give an indication where *Yahweh* came from. I find it, however, inconceivable that *Yahweh* would have originated from *El*, who was in reality a Canaanite deity. The patriarchs, probably, knew *Yahweh* mainly by his *El*-epithets. I, therefore, propose that *El* was a cultic name or an epithet of *Yahweh* – not the other way around. I, thus, reiterate – in agreement with my hypothesis – that Yahwism originated in the South, and that *Yahweh* was venerated by the Midianites and Kenites, as well as other marginal southern tribes.

In addition to my support of the Kenite hypothesis, I advance – in agreement with my proposed hypothesis – that marginal groups, who were apparently related, played a significant

role in the preserving of the pre-exilic Yahwistic religion. These groups probably included the Rechabites, Calebites, Kenizzites and Jerahmeelites. The Rechabites, who lived in a kind of symbiosis with the Judeans, eventually merged with the tribe.

In Chapter 6 these marginal tribes and clans are discussed. 'The social organization of West Semitic tribal groups was grounded in kinship.'¹⁶ Non-Israelite relationships are conspicuous in the Chronicler's genealogy of the tribe of Judah. The Chronicler appropriated descent to demonstrate the legitimacy of an individual, indicating his connections to a worthy family. According to a proposed diagram – at the end of Chapter 6 – of possible genealogical links among marginal groups, it seems that the Chronicler connected different tribes to the family of Judah – either by creating a positive lineage for them, or by their virtual assimilation into this tribe. This genealogical depiction substantiates my theory that marginal groups were, by reason of their interrelationships – specifically with the Kenites – involved in maintaining a Yahwistic cult. Based on a genealogical link between the Kenites and the Rechabites, scholars postulate that the Rechabites shared the Kenites' trade as metalworkers. Smiths and artisans were – seemingly – highly regarded in the sixth century BC, and were also carried off into captivity by the Babylonians.

According to 1 Chronicles 2:55, the House of Rechab was linked to the Kenites, who also led a nomadic life in the South. Nomadic descendants of the Kenites, the Rechabites, and related tribes and clans, regarded themselves as guardians of the pure *Yahweh* worship – *Yahweh* was the god of the steppe and of the nomads. The Rechabites, who abstained from drinking wine and lived in tents, represented the nomadic ideal. The origins of the Rechabites are obscure. The Hebrew Bible refers to "Jehonadab, the son of Rechab", and "Jonadab the son of Rechab, our father", indicating that Rechab might have been the founder of this group. The noun formed on the root *n-d-b* denotes a member of the urban nobility. They followed a puritanical lifestyle, and "obeyed the voice of their father"; Jeremiah set them as an example for the Judeans and inhabitants of Jerusalem. Jeremiah 35 is the main source of information concerning this group.

The Rechabites, Kenites and Calebites are all connected with the area on the border of Judah and Edom – south-east of Palestine; this leads to the theory that non-Israelite groups were instrumental in introducing the cult of *Yahweh* into Judah and Israel. The Calebites were

¹⁶ Cross 1998:3.

related to the Kenizzites and Jerahmeelites – both who probably lived on the fringe of Judah and are likewise associated with the Negeb and Arad. These peripheral groups, together with some Levites – who were also marginalised – were involved in a *Yahweh*-alone movement that originated during the Monarchical Period. This movement, which propagated exclusive worship to *Yahweh* in resistance to polytheism, probably started during the ninth century BC. The dominant religion of the Israelite Monarchy was polytheistic, and did not differ from that of its neighbours. Although the leaders of the *Yahweh*-alone movement remain anonymous, they might be called the founders of Jewish monotheism. By the eighth century BC monotheism was presented as the only accepted ideal. However, the message of this minority group was too extreme and in direct opposition to the traditional religious beliefs and practices. The prophets were undoubtedly also advocates of the *Yahweh*-alone movement. The Rechabites, whose lifestyle was a message of protest and resistance, were presented by Jeremiah as a symbol of the preservation of their ancestral traditions. They 'were among the oldest strains in the Israelite population to have worshipped *Yahweh*'.¹⁷ The ideology of the *Yahweh*-alone movement can also be detected in Jeremiah's assessment of Israel's religion.

Although references in the Hebrew Bible concerning the Rechabites and other marginal groups are quite limited, I advance – in the light of available information – that these conservatives influenced minority communities into monotheistic *Yahweh* worship, and eventually became the driving force in the strict implementation of the Law during the Exile, and thereafter. Their sober conservatism played a decisive role in the dramatic turnabout of a mainly syncretistic Israelite cult to a monotheistic law-abiding religion.

Consensus has not been reached by scholars concerning the origin and establishment of the Israelite nation. Various hypotheses prevail – particularly regarding their settlement in the "land of Canaan". Traditions relating to the Israelites predominantly refer to *Yahweh*'s involvement with this nation, implying a monotheistic belief in and veneration of *Yahweh* from the beginning of their history. Information in the Hebrew Bible – particularly relating to Israel's history and religion – is, however, biased and unreliable. These matters are briefly addressed in Chapter 7.

Revisionist scholars argue that biblical Israel not necessarily had an historical existence; they question the origin of the biblical literature that produced the history of such an Israel. Other

¹⁷ Van der Toorn 1995:248.

scholars, however, indicate that certain datable Iron Age archaeological witnesses converge with literary references in the Masoretic Text. It is thus unlikely that a post-exilic editor could have invented such narrative passages in the Hebrew text.

It seems that "pure" cultures never existed in the Ancient Near East, but that hybrid cultures were the norm. The Israelites probably lived in a kind of symbiosis with the Sea Peoples and Canaanites. Internal migrations among the so-called Israelite tribes did apparently happen. According to genealogical lists, clans moved from one place to another and in this process realigned with different tribes. It appears, furthermore, that the Israelites did not necessarily have their own differentiated identity, but that it was moulded by a dynamic historical process. The question of the origin of the Israelite nation, the historicity – or not – of the exodus, and the manner of settlement of the Israelite tribes in Palestine, has been debated by scholars for decades. Several hypotheses – particularly on the emergence and settlement of the Israelites – have been advanced. No consensus has yet been reached. Biblical narratives, and their credibility – specifically in the light of conflicting archaeological data – indicate the complexity of the historical value of the Hebrew Bible. The Monarchical Period probably preserved narratives about Israel's identity rather than to conserve a great deal of its history.

Considering the deliberations in Chapter 7, it is hardly possible to ascertain to what extent and at which stage, southern marginal groups – such as Kenites, Jerahmeelites, and others – had contact with, and merged with tribes that later comprised the Israelite nation. A number of these peripheral tribes – including the Rechabites – were metallurgists, and therefore had the opportunity to travel from the South to the North. Some of these tribes were probably linked to the *Shasu*, who were associated with the southern regions, and migrated into the land of Canaan, eventually merging with the "Israelite" tribes; other clans and tribes were – according to the Chronicler's genealogical lists – assimilated into the tribe of Judah.

A long oral tradition precedes the later written and edited Hebrew Bible, which was compiled within the framework of the background and preconceived ideas of the authors and redactors, and is therefore not historically dependable. However, supplementary to archaeological finds, the Masoretic Text could be regarded as the only other source of information on the history and religion of the Israelites. As indicated in Chapter 8, scholars generally agree that the main corpus of the Masoretic Text was finalised – or either compiled and finalised – during the exilic and post-exilic periods. Biblical narrators wrote from a specific theological viewpoint; historical memory adjusts reality to serve the present. The purpose of biblical

narratives was, furthermore – in all likelihood – to answer questions about the relationship of people to the land where they lived, to the ethnic group with which they identified, and to the religious myths and rituals that were fundamental to their sense of identity – and not to "present facts".

Scholars generally accept that the deuteronomists were the developers of the Deuteronomistic History. If a deuteronomistic movement did really exist, the question is to what extent and in what form. Documents, such as the "Book of Law", do not justify speaking of a movement. However, a Deuteronomistic School presumably existed, denoting a scribal guild, active during the Exile and the Persian Period. Editors probably maintained the original text to which they were bound, but felt free to interpret and change it. The earliest traditions were reinterpreted in accordance with the perception of later generations. There was also a tendency to weaken mythical elements in the inherited tradition. The essential part of the Hebrew Bible was probably created in Babylon during the Persian Period. Although the theology of the Hebrew Bible seemingly presents the religious belief of the early Israelite/Jewish people, the final collection and compilation of the canon actually reflects the theology from the sixth or fifth century BC.

Internal diversification in Judaism found expression in the formation of sects, which started between the fourth and second centuries BC. Conservative Jewish communities in Judah clung to their established value systems, while in the Babylonian community 'a particular understanding of biblical monotheism was cultivated'.¹⁸ During the crisis of the Exile the small, but growing group of the *Yahweh*-alone movement demanded exclusive worship of *Yahweh*; monotheism was the solution to the political crisis. Reference to the Rechabites in rabbinic literature is an indication that they continued to exist in the Second Temple Period.

In conclusion, I wish to encapsulate what I aimed to achieve, and that which I have accomplished. During my research, I once more became aware of the complexity of the origin of Israel as a nation, as well as that of their Yahwistic religion. It was, inter alia, my purpose to ascertain the influence of the religions and deities of the Ancient Near Eastern peoples on the religion of the Israelites. In the investigation it became clear that the mythologies and legends of neighbouring nations played a significant role in the Israelite religion, particularly influencing the crystallisation of the *Yahweh* image and attributes ascribed to *Yahweh*. It is, however,

¹⁸ Talmon 1987:595.

not so easy to detect in the Hebrew Bible what the extent of this influence was. Israelites venerated gods other than *Yahweh* in their practise of syncretism. I, furthermore, established that deities with different, but cognate names – as typically in the case of the Canaanite goddess *Athirat/Asherah* – appeared over a vast area of the Ancient Near East. This substantiates my theory that some form of Yahwism originated – or was inherited from migrating groups – at various localities of the Ancient Near East. Several epigraphic finds contain *Ya*-related names. It is therefore evident that increased knowledge about Ancient Near Eastern religions contributes to a better perception of the religion of the early Israelites. Sperling,¹⁹ however, argues that extra-biblical allusions to a god analogous to *Yahweh*, do not resolve the question of the origin of *Yahweh*-worship.

It was also my purpose to determine the interdependence – or not – of different disciplines relevant to the Hebrew Bible. In my research for this thesis it became clear that archaeology and biblical scholarship – particularly historiography – cannot operate effectively without the acceptance of their mutual dependence. I therefore emphasise the necessity to apply archaeological results as support for any theoretical conclusions; biblical and related studies cannot be researched in isolation.

Although it is hardly possible to ascertain the origin of the Kenites, I nevertheless and in concurrence with my theory, support the Kenite hypothesis. In my assessment of the possible influence marginal groups had on the religion of the later Israelite nation, I draw the conclusion that these groups emanated mainly from the southern regions of Palestine. These tribes all seem to have been genealogically linked, albeit – in some instances – artificially by the Chronicler; they were also gradually incorporated into the tribe of Judah.

As my hypothesis for this research is *that the Israelite God Yahweh was originally a Midianite/Kenite deity and that marginal groups related to the Kenites, such as the Rechabites, played a significant and dominant role in the preserving of a pre-exilic Yahweh-alone movement, as well as in the establishment of a post-exilic Yahweh monotheism*, I wish to reiterate conclusive remarks in paragraphs 8.8.2 and 8.10. Although it is hardly possible to ascertain exactly how, and by which group or groups, a strict *Yahweh*-alone monotheism was instituted during the Exile, and thereafter maintained during the Second Temple Period, I propose that the Rechabites were at least one of the major groups that were instrumental in this reversal of

¹⁹ Sperling 1987:2-3.

the Judahites' cultic affinities, I furthermore advance that, unless revolutionary informative material becomes available, it is, more or less, impossible to establish exactly what the course of Israel's religious history was. Therefore, my hypothesis as a possible scenario could be regarded as valid as any other suggestion.

Despite the extent of research material in this thesis, I realise that a particular shortcoming concerns the number of different subjects addressed, with the result that not all themes were discussed and evaluated in depth. At the same time, it was my purpose to indicate the mutual dependence of the different disciplines related to biblical studies – this, I estimate, was achieved.

For future research I would suggest that scholars explore all possible epigraphic and other finds that might give an indication to a form of *Yahweh*-veneration elsewhere than in Israel. Similarly, the influence of *Asherah* could be assessed – including her as proposed consort of *Yahweh* – on the religious life of the Israelites. I would also recommend an in-depth analysis of the religion practised by the Israelite women. Exegetical studies could be considered regarding aspects embodied in my hypothesis, such as the role of the Levites as marginalised group. A further topic could be to analyse, if possible, the exact extent of syncretism among the Israelites, and finally, to endeavour to unravel the mysteries of the Chronicler's genealogical lists.