MONOTHEISM AND ANGELOLOGY IN PERSIAN PERIOD YEHUD

BY

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ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	Anchor Bible Dictionary
ANET	Ancient Near Eastern Texts Related to the Old Testament
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
AuOr	Aula Orientalis
BA	Biblical Archaeologist
BAR	Biblical Archaeology Review
BS	Biblical Seminar
BASOR	Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research
BIB	Biblica
BDB	Brown, Driver, and Briggs
BJS	Brown Judaica Studies
BTB	Biblical Theology Bulletin
BW	The Biblical World
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CBET	Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology
CBQ	Catholic Biblical Quarterly
DDD	Dictionary of Deities and Demons
DSS	Dead Sea Scrolls
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
FTR	Harvard Theological Review
HAR	Hebrew Annual Review
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
HTR	Harvard Theological Review
HUCA	Hebrew Union College Annual
IDB	The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible
JARCE	Journal of the American Research Centre in Egypt
JBL	Journal of Biblical Literature
JNSL	Journal of North West Semiti c Languages
JETS	Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society
JNES	Journal of Near Eastern Studies
JSNT	Journal for the Study of the New Testament
JSOR	Journal of the Society of Oriental Research
JSOT	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
JSS	Journal of Semitic Studies
JTS	Journal of Theological Studies
LXX	Septuagint
MT	Masoretic Text
NEA	Near Eastern Archaeology
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NISBE	New International Standard Bible Encyclopedia
OTE	Old Testament Essays *OTL* Old Testament Library
OTS	Old Testament Studies

RHR	Revue de I'Histoire des Religions
SBLSCS	Society of Biblical Literature Septuagint and Cognate Studies
SCJ	Stone-Campbell Journal
SVTQ	Saint Vladimir's Theological Quarterly
STDJ	Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah
TMSJ	The Master's Seminary Journal
TDOT	Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament
TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries
UBL	Ugaritisch-biblische Literatur
UF	*Ugarit-Forschungen*
VT	Vetus Testamentum
VTSup	Vetus Testamentum Supplements
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
ZAW	Zeitschrift fur die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft

ABSTRACT

Monotheism and its development in Israelite religion is a topic that continues to invite scholarly engagement. Some of the key talking points around it involve whether or not it was developed before or after the exilic period. At the same time, and irrespective of when it was introduced into Israelite religion, the circumstances that facilitated its development have never been acknowledged with unanimity. The purpose of the present study is two-fold: first, it seeks to prove that pre-exilic Israelite religion was as syncretistic as any other ancient Near Eastern tradition, and that exclusive monotheism only became a reality in Persian period Yehud. Secondly, the study is also intended to authenticate the hypothesis that in the wake of the development of monotheism in Yehud, all deities other than Yahweh were demoted to the status of מלאכים, messengers (angels) leaving Yahweh as the only legitimate God.

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Studies about monotheism and its origin in Israelite religion have probably attracted more attention in the scholarship of the Hebrew Bible than any other topic (Halphern 2009:13-56). Scholars have over the past few centuries come up with different theories aimed at explaining the origin of monotheism.[1] There are scholars who argue that monotheism was an early doctrine in Israelite religion. Some of them have often argued that monotheism has been part of Israelite religion almost from the very inception of Israel as a people (Langdon 1931:113-14).[2] Some scholars who include the likes of Albright have argued for a mosaic origin of monotheism (Albright 1957:257-72). Central to the mosaic theory is the notion that the worship of one deity in Israelite religion only became a reality following Moses' encounter with Yahweh on mount Sinai.[3] Kaufmann, for his part and as one of the proponents of an early origin of monotheism, was of the view that Israelite religion was never polytheistic, arguing that the presumed evidences of polytheism were mere practises of magic which probably filtered into Israel from Canaan (Kaufmann 1960: 229-31).

Other than the mosaic origin, another supposed time period within which monotheism is posited

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1   For a comprehensive account of the different views on this subject see Sitali (2014:1-8).
2   Representative of this position is an early writer named Langdon (1931:113-14). While admitting that subsequent Israelite religion was no longer monotheistic but rather syncretistic or polytheistic, Langdon argued that Israelite religion was monotheistic from Israel's earliest history in the ancient Near Eastern world. In his view, Langdon believed that the history of religion was a decline from monotheism to extreme polytheism. He cited the Sumerian religion dating back to 3000 BCE, and argued that the Sumerians back then had a total of 750 gods but that they ended up having about 5000 gods a millennium later. This phenomenon according to him is evidence that Israelite religion has been declining from its early monotheism to polytheism. He further went on to argue, "I may fail to carry conviction in concluding that both in Sumerian and Semitic religions, monotheism preceded polytheism. . . . The evidence and reasons for this conclusion, so contrary to accepted and current views, have been set down with care and with the perception of adverse criticism." Also see Sitali (2014:2-3). The problem with Langdon's observation however, is that instead of Israelite religion (Judeo-Christianity) continuing to decline from exclusive monotheism to extreme polytheism or syncretism, what we find is a rather more refined monotheism.
3   This understanding derives from the fact that the first and second commandments of the law which Moses received from God on mount Sinai (Ex 20:1-4) prohibit the worship of gods other than Yahweh. In the minds of the proponents of mosaic monotheism, the Israelites would therefore have begun the practise of a monotheistic faith as soon as they started observing the ten commands.

to have been born is the monarchical period. The proponents of this view include the following: Smith (1987:23); Lang (1983:13-59); and McCarter (1987:139-43). Some of the activities believed to have facilitated the development of monotheism in the monarchical era include the reforms of kings Hezekiah (715-687 BCE) and Josiah (640-609 BCE) which were aimed at promoting an exclusive worship of Yahweh (see Smith 2004:60-61).[4] However, some scholars have cast a shadow of doubt on these reforms that were aimed at purifying the Israelite religion supposedly en route to an exclusive monotheistic faith. One aspect that has been challenged particularly with regard to the Josianic reforms is their historicity (Pakkala 2010:201-31).[5] The question is whether or not they did in fact take place and could be historically authenticated. Further, even if they did happen, their intended objective on Israelite religion may not have been realized. This is because as this study will reveal, the evidence leads us to conclude that pre-exilic Israelite religion was anything but monotheistic. Other than these reforms, the Yahweh-alone movement, which condemned the use of images in Israelite religion was equally aimed at facilitating the development of monotheism in the monarchical period (Human 1999:498-500). While it may be argued that the reforms of this movement may have facilitated the institution of normative monotheism, yet other scholars see it differently. Such a presentation of Israelite religion as Dever (2003:286) has argued is nothing but a late literary construct which he calls "Book religion."[6] Again, like in the case of the reforms of Hezekiah and Josiah, the accomplishments of the Yahweh-alone movement have probably been overrated beyond reality. This, all the more, poses a challenge to the argument that pre-exilic Israelite religion was ever monotheistic. Such uncertainties have led a group of scholars to contend that pre-exilic Israelite religion was not monotheistic.[7]

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4   The reforms of Hezekiah and Josiah are recorded in 2 Kings 18:4 and 2 Kings 22-23 respectively.
5   This study will evaluate the arguments presented by Juha Pakkala that he perceives as contradicting the historicity of the reforms in question in order to determine the truth.
6   The idea being emphasized by Dever here is that this kind of portrayal of Israelite religion was posited by the editors or composers of the biblical text at a date later than the time within which the events happened. Thus as he calls it, it was a book religion representing that of the editors but different from that which was actually practised in 8-7th BCE Judah.
7   The scholars who subscribe to this position include: Fohrer (1972:172); Smith (1952:147; and 1971:42); Gerstenberger (2002:215-18, 274-5); Dever (2005:294-7).

Further to the foregoing theories, it has also been suggested that monotheism only came to its final triumph during the Persian period (539-333 BCE).[8] The challenge this claim is faced with is the fact that not all the canonical texts of the Persian period deny the existence of gods other than Yahweh. While the book of Chronicles may be a good source of an explicit monotheistic confession in Persian period Yehud, still, it has been observed that the book does not altogether deny the existence of other gods (Lynch 2014:31). The monotheistic claim in 1 Chronicles 17:20 for example, does not deny the existence of other gods but rather stresses the incomparability of Yahweh with other gods. Biblical passages such as 1 Chronicles 17:20 and 1 Chronicles 16:25 which could have clearly evinced a monotheistic faith, and others like them, have therefore been seen as nothing but a preservation of the older formulations which compared Yahweh with the gods of the nations.[9] It is the purpose of this study therefore, to critically review all the monotheistic claims in the canonical books of the Persian period including Chronicles, in order to authenticate the assertion that monotheism only came to its final triumph in the period in question.

Furthermore, while some canonical texts of the Persian period may exhibit religion of a monotheistic character, still, some have wondered whether or not the religion and faith of the authors of the text was essentially the same as that practised by the Yehudite society at large. Put simply, did everyone in Persian Yehud share the monotheistic belief system of the theologians or scribes who composed the final text of the Hebrew Bible? Along with that also comes the question of textual redaction. It has almost unanimously been acknowledged by scholars that the text of the Hebrew Bible in its present state is a product of an extensive redaction. Some scholars have therefore argued that the Persian period canonical texts may have been modified or edited to suit the religion of the redactors which would not necessarily represent that of the entire Jewish community in Yehud. In an elaborate manner, Edelman's comments are representative of such views (Edelman 1995:16, 17):

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8   See Smith (1952:135-47; 1971:15-56). Also, see Smith (2004:119-123).
9   On this see, Lynch (2014:31) and Japhet (1997:44).

It is important to realize that the text of the Hebrew Bible is the product of a long, editorial process. Its final shapers were monotheistic and they wanted the inherited traditions to reflect their own religious beliefs in a single creator deity, Yahweh, who had at his command various lesser divine beings who also populated heaven, the angels. Had they created the texts themselves, they almost certainly would not have included the scattered references to Asherah, Nehushtan, Plague, Pestilence, Death Sun, Moon and other lesser deities, which they have gone out of their way to turn into cultic objects used in the worship of Yahweh or turn into mere abstract qualities. . . . Earlier generations may have had more freedom to edit such texts more extensively and delete direct references to deities other than Yahweh that were not easily understood within an emerging monotheistic framework, before certain texts became "classics.

In light of these observations, I will therefore have to harmonize all the available arguments in order to come up with a comprehensive explanation on the extent to which monotheism became a reality in the Persian period.

By the same token, one explanation that has gained ground among Hebrew Bible scholars is the claim that in order to pave way for monotheism, the gods worshiped along with Yahweh in pre-exilic Israel all came to be identified as angels or messengers in the Persian period (see Smith 2001:47-51; Whybray 1971:82; Grabbe 2000:34-35; Handy 1994:153). The understanding with this claim is that with the other tutelary gods now 'demoted' to the status of angels, Yahweh essentially became the only legitimate God without competitors. Be it as it may, this claim has equally not been without challenge either. For those who have questioned the validity of this claim, Heiser's comments are representative (Heiser 2004:18, 19):

First, if the divine council had ceased to exist in Israelite religion by the end of the exile, how does one account for the roughly 175 references in the Qumran material to multiple אלהים and אלים (בני)? How are explicit references to the "divine council /council of El" (עדת אל) and the "council of the gods" (עדת אלים /אלוהים or סוד אלים) in these same texts to be understood? Why are these exact phrases understood as referring to polytheistic leanings in pre-exilic canonical literature, but redefined after the exile? Moreover, how can the presumed downgrading of the pre-exilic gods of the divine council to servant angels account for a Second Temple heavenly hierarchy that retained the worldview of territorial control by divine beings? . . . A tagged computer search of the Dead Sea Scrolls database reveals there are no lines from any Qumran text where a "deity class" term (בני אלים/אלוהים) for a member of the heavenly host overlaps with the word מלאכים. In fact, there are only eleven instances in the entire Qumran corpus where בני אלים/ אלוהים and מלאכים occur within fifty words of each other.

In view of observations such as these, we are compelled not to take anything at face value. It is in the interest of this study therefore, that we weigh the pros and cons related to the claim that the pre-exilic

gods were 'demoted' to angels after the exile in order to establish the truth. In order to validate the claim that angelology in Yehud did in fact facilitate the development of monotheism, this study will have to evaluate all the references to deities other than Yahweh and how they were conceived of both in pre-exilic Israel and Yehud. By so doing, the idea is to determine what framework of mind, was behind the transformational interpretation of these deities from their divine (godly) status to that of mere messengers and servants in pre-exilic Israel and Yehud respectively.

Furthermore, one of the challenges facing the determination of the actual religion practised in Israel both before and after the exile, is the reliability of the extant sources. For example, some scholars have questioned the reliability of the biblical text as a historical source. Most notable among them is Davies (1992:90-107) who argues that we must distinguish between 'historical Israel' and 'theological Israel.' According to Davies, the biblical source material which forms the basis of theological Israel, is a product of a group of people with a particular faith orientation. That said, it goes without saying therefore, that whatever the final composers of the text recorded in the Persian period was selected more in line with their religious conviction than historical reality. If this characterization of the text is correct, then it all the more cautions us to be more diligent with our conclusions about the true nature of post-exilic Israelite religion—whether monotheistic or syncretistic. Further to Davies' point of view, Sommer (2009:148-49) has equally described Israelite religion as comprising what he refers to as "Israelite religion versus Biblical religion." Like Davies, he attempts to distinguish between the actual religion that was practised by the Israelites and that which was presented by the biblical writers who did so from an adhered theological perspective. In approaching this critical issue, Sommer leads the reader through two rhetorical questions. The first question is, "Were the ancient Israelites monotheistic?" In answering this question, he suggests that we do well to complement the biblical data with the archaeological evidence. This builds on his earlier observation that biblical religion was for the most part a reflection of the faith of the textual editors which must therefore be scrutinized under such

external sources as archaeological finds. The second question is, "Are the documents found in the Hebrew Bible monotheistic?" Again, like the first, this question underscores the fact that the biblical text for the most part prescribes the religious beliefs of the Israelites rather than describing the actual religion they practised. Sommer concludes by urging the reader to critically analyze the sources, biblical or archaeological, in order to arrive at informed conclusions.[10]

In place of the biblical text, whose historicity has been questioned as a reliable source, some have argued that the Ugaritic texts which were discovered around 1929 could be a better source of pre-exilic Israelite religion (see Handy 1994:19-20). The Ugaritic texts have demonstrated that pre-exilic Israelite religion was consistent with other ancient Near Eastern religions in practising syncretism (see Cook 2005:7). However, even as the Ugaritic texts may be considered a more reliable source of pre-exilic Israelite religion, like other ancient cuneiform clay tablets, they equally suffered from the challenge of fragmentation which resulted into the loss of part or whole sections of data. In such cases, Handy (1994:20) observes that the editors of the text would often have to imagine what the missing text could have been and thus integrate it into the existing text. Again, this observation equally cautions us to treat the extant sources of Israelite religion with care. In order to ensure that we treat the subject matter under discussion with fairness, we will have to be careful so that we do not rely on the biblical source in isolation of the other sources such as the Ugaritic voice. Alongside the biblical source material, we will therefore have to draw from other sources including but not limited to: Ugaritic texts, Syro-Palestinian inscriptions, the Dead Sea Scrolls, the historical records of Philo of Byblos, as well as some archaeological Finds. In light of all the observations raised above, this study will first evaluate monotheism and angelology each on its own terms both in pre-exilic and Persian period Yehud. Secondly, it will then seek to determine how angelology might have facilitated the development of monotheism in Yehud over against pre-exilic syncretism or polytheism.

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10   Likewise, Smith (1971:42) also gives further elaboration on the difference between ancient Israelite religion and Biblical religion.

1.2 Research problem

Monotheism, with its varying definitions as we have already observed, has attracted more scholarly discourse in the Hebrew Bible than most other topics. One aspect of monotheism that continues to attract attention is the question of its origin. Hebrew Bible scholars have not been able to agree with unanimity as to when exactly monotheism might have developed in Israelite religion. Among the divergent views regarding the origin of monotheism, the one that seems to be gaining ground is the hypothesis that monotheism—the belief in one god while denying the existence of all others, only came to triumph in Israelite religion during the Persian period at which time the former kingdom of Judah came to be identified as Yehud. However, as the reader may have observed, there is still need for continued research on the subject as there are references to gods other than Yahweh in the Persian period.

Also, there is no question that monotheism and angelology are complementary ideologies in Israelite religion. The two are almost inseparable in any study that seeks to explore the factors that led to the development of monotheism in Israelite religion. For one to talk about the development of monotheism, one will almost always have to talk about angelology and vice versa. While there are some isolated statements about how angelology facilitated the development of monotheism, still, no scholar has done an in-depth and exhaustive study on how angelology facilitated or complemented the development of monotheism. The origin of angels and angelology in Israelite religion for example, has never been determined with unanimity. There are those who hold the view that the belief in angels was possibly adopted from Israel's neighbour in the ancient Near Eastern world (Smith 1972:445-46).[11] Others, however, have argued that angels were born out of Israel's innovation in which the desire to present Yahweh as the only legitimate God had led to the 'demotion' of gods other than Yahweh to the

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11 Central to this theory is the belief that angels existed in form of gods in most ancient Near Eastern cultures including Israel before the development of exclusive monotheism. They were not known as angels back then but rather as gods who carried out errands in the service of the chief deity El.

status of angels (Handy 1994:152-54). It therefore goes without saying, that there still remains a lot to be explored regarding the paradigm shift from mythological gods to angels which ultimately facilitated the development of monotheism.

Furthermore, the controversy between Yahweh's monotheistic status versus his uniqueness and incomparability among the gods of the nations is an ongoing one. Put in other words, the question is whether Yahweh was to be considered as the only God in existence or that he was one special divine being among many? This is yet another question that needs further investigation. Whichever way this question is answered, we would expect follow up questions. For example, if Yahweh has always been the only God in existence, we would have to explain the meaning of the biblical references to gods other than Yahweh in the Hebrew Bible. (see for example: Neut 33:2-3; Tech 14:5; Ps 103:20). Likewise, if Yahweh was believed to be one divine being among many, then one wonders whether or not monotheism would be the right term with which to describe the ontological being of the Israelite God.

Moreover, on the assertion by some scholars that the Hebrew Bible in its present form is a product of an extensive editorial work whose object in part was to purge the biblical text of its polytheistic remnants, the question that is yet to be answered is just why such remnants have never been fully emended from the text of the Hebrew Bible. This observation comes in view of the many somewhat problematic passages in the Hebrew Bible that tend to associate the religion of Israel with that of her polytheistic neighbours in the ancient Near Eastern world. It is probably fair to say that no scholar to date has addressed this question satisfactorily, thus making it a research question.

1.3 Aims and objectives

The aim and objective of this research is to demonstrate that monotheism in Israelite religion was a much later development than some scholars have postulated. As it shall be pointed out, the study will

attempt to prove that pre-exilic Israelite religion was as syncretistic as other traditions in ancient Near East especially Ugarit. The study also seeks to prove that angels (messengers) were acknowledged both in pre-exilic Israel and Ugaritic traditions. It may have been the case that in both traditions, angels were earlier believed to be gods or divine. The prior divine status of angels which essentially made them gods or deities will therefore have to be analyzed. This, by necessity, will seek to discover how they ended up being an important consideration in the conception of the Yehudite deity and the development of monotheism. However, as chapter three will elaborate, the point of departure came as a result of Israel's promulgation of a monotheistic faith which degraded all other beings leaving Yahweh as the only legitimate God.

I will further endeavor to state that not only did exclusive monotheism emerge late in Israel, but that it specifically reached its zenith during the Persian period after the exile. Angelology, which is the study of angels and their origin, is indispensable to the emergence of monotheism in Israel. While studies on monotheism and angelology have previously been conducted, few or no scholars to the best of my knowledge have addressed the role of angels in the overall development of monotheism in detail. So far I have only come across one author who has addressed monotheism and angelology as complementary themes, and that is Segal, in an article entitles, "Monotheism and Angelology in Daniel" (see Segal 2010:405-20). This study will therefore describe how angelology facilitated the development of monotheism; clearly stating how the paradigm shift led to a new conception of the divine in Yehud. Through an analysis of some select canonical texts exclusive to the Persian period, it will be demonstrated how such texts were edited in order to eliminate the remnants of syncretism and thereby promote a monotheistic faith. Under their new status, the angels were not to be seen as Yahweh's competitors which would perpetuate polytheistic tendencies, but rather as subservient beings accountable and obedient to him.

In order to achieve a comprehensive perspective of the actual religion practised in Yehud, it is

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important that we do not confine ourselves to an investigation of the canonical texts alone. Some non-canonical texts including the Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS), the book of Enoch, and the targums shall therefore be critically evaluated in order to discover their testimony to the developing monotheism and angelology in Yehud. Further, the archaeological finds of the period under investigation will also be carefully analyzed for any evidence leading to the birth of monotheism. Moreover, considering that there are points of scholarly disagreement in the present research, I will conclude with a personal response and reflection on some of the most critical issues.

1.4 Methodology

While many methodologies will be at play in this study, I will embark on two major approaches—Historical-Critical and Source Critical methods. Under historical criticism, we shall attempt to understand the provenance of the world that created both the Ugaritic as well as the biblical texts. The idea is to answer such questions as, how were such texts originally understood by the authors and the original recipients? What were the prevailing historical circumstances under which the texts were written? Under source criticism, we wish to establish the reliability of the sources from which the extant data derives. Under source criticism we shall ask questions like, how was a particular source located? How credible were the authors? Did they record the data purely from a historical perspective or from a biased one? First and foremost, the religion of Israel will have to be discussed in light of that of her neighbours in the ancient Near East, especially the Canaanites. In this case, the status of Yahweh in relation to the gods of the nations will provide some helpful clues regarding the similarities and differences that may have existed between them.

This study will evaluate some Hebrew Bible texts evincing some polytheistic tendencies as well as some relevant archaeological finds in order to demonstrate that pre-exilic Israel was as much polytheistic and syncretistic as her neighbours. The archaeological features to be considered will

include but not limited to material culture, inscriptions, texts, incense altars, figurines, and works of art. Also, based on the hypothesis projected by the present study, in which it is believed that Israel started off as a polytheistic religious people who only became monotheistic after the exile, we will seek to discover the factors that led to this paradigm shift. While strong assertions have been made stressing that the beings that came to be identified as angels after the exile were previously gods, this study will seek to substantiate this claim. To achieve that, we will have to evaluate the essence of the angels in light of the pre-exilic gods worshiped in Israel. The idea is to track any possible identifications that might have existed between the two groups of supernatural beings. The study will take the case of the two angels we have come to know as Michael and Gabriel for example, and attempt to characteristically compare them with some of Israel's pre-exilic gods or "sons of gods." By so doing, the idea shall be to establish whether or not there might be any significant similarities between them. Any strong resemblances in this regard, shall argue in favour of the assertion that angels were unequivocally gods prior to becoming angels. The transformation from gods to angels and the motivation behind it shall be analyzed. Any precedence to this transformation both in Israelite religion and Israel's neighbours will help to answer the question of the origin of angelology. Thus, both the Babylonian and the Persian traditions, with whom Israel had some contact, shall be investigated for any possible influence.

The role of textual redaction in the formulation of a monotheistic faith in Persian period Yehud, shall be reviewed. By necessity, the study will seek to unveil the historical background of these redactors, answering questions such as who were they? What was their belief system? How much of the original text did they emend, how and why? Since this study intends to do an investigation of the development of monotheism in relation to angels in Persian Yehud, it will by necessity have to deal with a critical analysis of the literature purported to be exclusive to the period. Among such relevant texts in this regard will be the two books of 1 & 2 Chronicles. While Chronicles may be seen to be a

replica of the Deuteronomistic History, particularly Samuel and Kings, the differences between them evinced by the Chronicler will be critically informative to the understanding of monotheism and angelology not only in Chronicles but in Yehud as a whole.

1.5 Hypothesis

Throughout this study, I am of the hypothesis that pre-exilic Israelite religion was syncretistic or at most polytheistic, and that it only became monotheistic after the exile during Persian dominion. This religious transformation was made possible through the 'demotion' of all the pre-exilic gods to the status of angels or messengers which essentially left Yahweh as the only legitimate God without competitors. While it may be true that not all the Yehudites practised a monotheistic faith, it is equally true that a large portion of the population may have preferred a monotheistic faith instead of a polytheistic one. That the influence of angelology in Yehudite religion may have come from the Babylonians as well as the Persians, has not been determined with certainty. However, to completely deny such a possibility is not doing justice to the study. This is because some elements of Israel's belief in Angels may have been borrowed from each of these nations under whose dominion Israel served.

1.6 Chapter division

Chapter one is basically an introduction and overview of the issues that characterize the study. Central to the chapter is an account of the divergent views regarding the origin of monotheism. Despite the strong assertion that monotheism came to its final triumph in the Persian period, the chapter brings to the attention of the reader some of the contradictory views in which it has been observed that references to gods other than Yahweh do exist both in the canonical and non-canonical texts of the period. The chapter also alerts the reader about some of the contradictory views on such key subjects as the reliability of the sources, the role of textual redaction, and the hypothesis that the gods worshiped in pre-exilic Israelite religion came to be identified as angels in the Persian period. Overall, the chapter

spells out such features as: the research problem that necessitated the undertaking of the research, the aims and objectives, the methodology employed in articulating the issues that characterize the study, the hypothesis, the purpose as well as a summary of the chapter divisions.

Chapter two describes the nature of religion in the ancient Near Eastern traditions, particularly that of Ugarit, clearly stating how the people of Ugarit conceived of their deity. Ugaritic religion is of great significance to the understanding of Israelite religion. First, Ugaritic literature may be a more reliable source of knowledge about pre-exilic Israelite religion than the Hebrew Bible. This is because unlike the Hebrew Bible which is believed to have gone through some extensive textual redaction, the Ugaritic texts tend to be an original record of the religion practised at Ugarit as well as Israel. Secondly, that Ugaritic religion was highly polytheistic in nature, will in turn imply that pre-exilic Israelite religion might have equally been polytheistic based on the ascertained affinities. This chapter will therefore attempt to review the affinities between Ugaritic and Israelite religions in the pre-exilic period. Bearing in mind that the two ancient Near Eastern traditions had a lot in common, there is no doubt that a careful analysis of the actual religious features characteristic to Ugarit, will enlighten our understanding of Israel's conception of their deity before the exile.

To achieve all that, the characteristics of the Ugaritic/Canaanite god El, will be compared and contrasted against those ascribed to the Israelite God in the Hebrew Bible. Some cultic terminologies employed in describing Ugaritic religion shall be investigated in pre-exilic Israel's description of their own. Comparisons of the responsibilities held by the two prominent Ugaritic gods, El and Baal, shall be made against those of the Israelite deity, Yahweh. Once such similarities have clearly been outlined, the result will be of great benefit to subsequent chapters that will address the possible differences between the two traditions leading up to the emergence of monotheism in post-exilic Yehud. Further, the divine council terminology, entailing the structure of the gods worshiped in Ugaritic religion—their titles, their functions, and their relationships with each other will also be discussed.

Chapter three narrows down the discussion from a generalization of Ugaritic religion to an analysis of the place occupied by the messenger deities. The chapter will seek to do an in-depth study of the status of messenger deities in Ugaritic religion and how that might have possibly laid a foundation for their development in Israelite religion. In order to lay a firm grasp on the status of messenger deities in Ugaritic religion, the chapter will analyze such aspects as—the names of the messenger deities, the titles (designations) ascribed to them, and the roles they performed. We will in turn discuss how the messengers (angels) were conceived of in pre-exilic Israelite religion in light of Ugaritic contexts. While this chapter will compare and contrast some characteristics of messenger deities (angels) in both Israelite and Ugaritic religions, the contrasts between them will greatly contribute to our knowledge about the mindset of Israel's theologians who composed the biblical text. The differences between the two religious systems in their conception of messenger deities will lay the foundation for a critical analysis of the factors that might have led to the transformation of Israelite religion from one of syncretism (polytheism?) to one of exclusive monotheism through the development of angelology.

Chapter four tracks the transformation of Israelite religion in the Persian period, from polytheism to exclusive monotheism. It is here that the four structural pantheon that characterized both pre-exilic Israelite and Ugaritic religions shall be discussed; tracking its reduction to two tiers in Persian period Yehud—consisting of Yahweh and the angels (messengers). Some select passages in biblical books exclusive to the Persian period including 1 and 2 Chronicles and Hosea shall be analyzed in order to trace how angelology might have facilitated the monotheistic status of Yahweh. Of particular interest will be the descriptive designations given to the Israelite deity in the Persian period, over against those by which he was known in the pre-exilic period. The truth about the exclusivity and incomparability of Yahweh and the questions surrounding the denial of the existence of any other god beside him shall also be discussed. Thus some of the factors that led to Yahweh's exclusivity shall be

discussed while paying special attention to the role played by the angels. Scholars have long observed that the text of the Hebrew Bible as we presently have it is a product of an extensive redaction. The extent to which textual redaction was conducted in the Persian period, and how it might have contributed to the development of both monotheism and angelology will therefore be discussed in the present chapter.

Chapter five will be dedicated to an investigation of the development of monotheism and angelology in some Canonical sources of the post-exilic period. First of all, the chapter will track the legitimacy of some named deities including Resheph, Deber, Qeteb, and Azazel in some ancient Near Eastern traditions. Once that is established, it will then be investigated as to how the same deities were treated in the text of the Hebrew Bible. Some of the biblical books in which these ANE deities shall be investigated include Leviticus, Deuteronomy, Chronicles, Psalms, Hosea, and Habakkuk. The treatment of these deities in the Hebrew Bible will be of great interest to the overall topic presented in the present study. Bearing in mind that the Israelites are the proponents of a monotheistic faith, their treatment of lesser deities alongside Yahweh the only legitimate God of Israel shall either authenticate or repudiate the view that angels were former gods that were demoted to such a status.

Chapter six will then attempt to track how some of the deities discussed in chapter two were treated in the non-canonical texts of the post-exilic Jewish literature including the Septuagint and the Dead Sea Scrolls. The treatment of these deities in the Jewish literature will greatly contribute to the present study on two counts. First, the fact that this literature was composed after the exile, a period during which monotheism is purported to have been born, makes it worth of an intensive critical analysis on how the composers of the literature dealt with the mythological deities named in the Hebrew Bible. Secondly, because the literature in question is characterized as translations of the canonical text of the Hebrew Bible, it is to be expected that it was translated with a theological bias of sorts. Thus, the translators' handling of mythological deities in the text they translated is very important

to our knowledge about Jewish religion in the post-exilic period. In this undertaking, some designations that referenced divinities both in ancient mythology and pre-exilic Israelite religion shall be critically analyzed in light of post-exilic Jewish religiosity. Thus, such epithets as בני הַשׁמִים and קְדוֹשִׁים which clearly referenced deities would be of great interest on how they are handled in a presumed monotheistic context.

Chapter seven serves as a conclusion and synthesis of the findings of the study. It is here where I will summarize my response to the major issues encountered during the presentation of the study. I will state my position on issues of scholarly disagreement notably among them being: the origin of monotheism, and the assertion that angels were originally gods who were degraded to the status of messengers in the Persian period. It is here where some of the most important findings in the study shall be restated.

1.7 Terminology and orthography

That this study has taken cognizance of extant scholarly contributions on the topic under investigation is without question. One way in which this observation is particularly true is through the recognition of the common terms often employed by scholars in their presentations on the topic. In what follows, we take note of such terms:

- Angelology: Angelology is simply the study (or doctrine) about angels. Angel(s), derived from the Greek αγγελōς, is the equivalent of the Hebrew, מלאָך which means messenger. In the context of the present study, angelology will be discussed in light of its contribution to the development of monotheism in Yehud. As this study shall demonstrate, angels were originally considered to be gods in the ancient Near Eastern religions including that of Israel. However, during the biblical period in Yehud, all divine beings other than Yahweh were degraded to the status of Angels.

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- Monotheism: Monotheism has often been understood simply as the belief in the existence of one God. This term has been used in this study to entail the belief in one God while denying the existence of all others. Considering that pre-exilic Israelite religion was either syncretistic or polytheistic, the presentation of monotheism will have to include the role played by angels—(messengers) who existed to serve Yahweh the only legitimate God of Israel.

- Divine council: refers to the assembly of gods, usually operating under a head deity who presides over the affairs of the council. While the Divine council concept may be associated more with the religions of the ancient Near Eastern traditions such as Ugarit, it is equally evident in the text of the Hebrew Bible. Some of the passages that evince the council motif in the Hebrew Bible include: Psalms 89:5—with such designations as congregation (*q'hal*) and assembly (*sôd*) of the holy ones (*qedoshîm*); Job 1:6—which references the 'Sons of God(s)' (*benei ha'elohîm*); as well as Genesis 2:4, 6—which equally refers to the *benei ha'elohîm.*

- Deuteronomist (D): is seen as one of the major source materials underlying much of the literature of the Hebrew Bible mostly in Deuteronomy. Such material is also found in the books of Joshua, Judges, and Samuel which form the Deuteronomistic History (DtrH); as well as the book of Jeremiah. Although there is a tendency to sometimes use the adjectives deuteronomic and deuteronomistic interchangeably, the two are essentially different as one is exilic and the other post-exilic respectively. Scholars like Albertz (2000:2-4) have considered the Deuteronomistic material to be a product not of a single author but of a school or movement.

- Deuteronomistic History (DtrH): Includes the historical canonical books stretching from Joshua to Kings—Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings. The term is believed to have first been used by Martin Noth, a German scholar who suggested that the material was the work of a single author around the 6[th]C BCE who drew heavily on the book of Deuteronomy (Campbell and O'Brien

2000:11).

- Interpolation: was a practise in which later scribes inserted some words into the text or margins of the text copied from the original manuscripts. For theological reasons, sometimes a word in the text could be replaced by another word especially where the presence of such a word may have caused some theological discomfort.

- Mythology: In the context of the present study, mythology shall be understood as a collection of myths (stories) about god(s).

- Queen of heaven: Was a designation assigned to the goddess Asherah, believed to have been the consort of El, the head god of the pantheon; but was also seen to be the consort of Yahweh the god of Israel.

- Redaction: Was carried out by the final editors of the biblical text to replace some words that were perceived to be theologically incorrect. Often, such words were seen to evince tendencies of the syncretism that characterized the ancient past.

- Syncretism: This is a practise which was prevalent in pre-exilic Israel whereby other tutelary deities were worshiped alongside the principal deity, Yahweh.

- Ugaritic: Ugarit, an ancient city in Northern Syria which is modern-day Ras Shamra, is probably best known for the Ugaritic texts discovered in 1929 with an elaborate description of Canaanite religion. However, most importantly, these same texts have also revealed some affinities with the text of the Hebrew Bible particularly in the areas of Poetry and divine imagery making them an indispensable source in Hebrew Bible studies.

- Yehud/Yehudites: This was an Aramaic designation employed by the Persians in reference to the province of Judah, often referred to as (Yehud Medinata) during the Persian period. The Yehudites were the citizens of Yehud.

- YHWH: It is the transliteration of the Hebrew יהוה representing the national God of Israel, Yahweh. Alternative tetragrammatons include—YHVH, JHVH and JHWH.

- Abbreviations of biblical books used in this dissertation follow the following list:

Gen: Genesis	Ps: Psalms
Exod: Exodus	Prov: Proverbs
Lev: Leviticus	Isa: Isaiah
Num: Numbers	Jer: Jeremiah
Deut: Deuteronomy	Ezek: Ezekiel
Josh: Joshua	Dan: Daniel
Judg: Judges	Hos: Hosea
1-2 Sam: 1-2 Samuel	Joel: Joel
1-2 Kgs: 1-2 Kings	Amos: Amos
1-2 Chr: 1-2 Chronicles	Mic: Micah
Ezra: Ezra	Hab: Habakkuk
Neh: Nehemiah	Zeph: Zephaniah
Job: Job	Zech: Zechariah

CHAPTER 2
DIVINE COUNCIL IN UGARITIC AND PRE-EXILIC ISRAELITE RELIGION

2.1 Introduction

In our quest for answers on how the gods once worshiped in pre-exilic Israel came to be identified as angels in Yehud, the starting point is to establish the reality of the assertion that the early Israelites worshiped other gods alongside Yahweh (see Grabble 2000:34-35; cf. Handy 1994:157).[12] By necessity, such an undertaking will seek to answer questions like: what kind of gods were worshiped in Israel? What were their names and characteristics? What gods were worshiped by Israel's neighbours, particularly the Canaanites whom they found in the land of Canaan? Knowing the religion of Israel's neighbours at that time is of great benefit to our study. This is because as neighbouring religious groups of people, it is to be expected that they consciously or unconsciously mirrored each others' religious views. Moreover, establishing the presence of a divine council in Israelite religion will also enable us mark the point at which the Israelite religion was transformed from polytheism to monotheism. In the course of all that, it is hoped that the circumstances under which the gods formerly worshiped in Israel came to be identified as angels in Yehud shall be unearthed.

Right from the outset we shall proceed by evaluating the extant sources of our knowledge about Ugaritic and Israelite religions. The idea is to establish the authenticity of these sources in order to validate the data they present about the Syro-Palestinian deities. The individual deities that comprised the Ugaritic and Israelite councils shall be discussed, carefully noting their individual characteristics within the framework of their respective pantheons. It will be of particular interest to our study, that we discuss the status of Yahweh, the chief god of Israel in light of El, his Ugaritic counterpart. The

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12   In these references, both authors observe that the beings who came to be identified as angels in the Hebrew Bible may have been gods that were worshiped in Israel's early history. Following the development of monotheism in which Yahweh came to be identified as the only legitimate God, these gods were 'demoted' to the status of messengers (angels). This assertion shall be referenced from time to time as it forms the basis upon which the hypothesis of the present study is founded.

comparisons and contrasts between them will either speak to Yahweh's syncretistic or monotheistic cultic status. In the course of evaluating the two religio-traditions, we shall attempt to define the essence of the בְּנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים (sons of the god(s) particularly in the Hebrew Bible. In Ugaritic mythology, the בְּנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים are themselves gods in the full sense of the word. We shall therefore attempt to discover how they were conceived of in Israelite religion without having to compromise their monotheistic faith.[13]

Moreover, since this study is based on the hypothesis that Israelite religion before the exile was either syncretistic or polytheistic, the Josianic reforms of the monarchic period will be of particular interest to our discussion. The Josianic reforms present the view that sometime during the 7th century BCE, king Josiah had instituted some measures that purified Israelite religion of its Canaanite heritage which would have made it a monotheistic religion. If these reforms did take place in the manner the author of 2 Kings 22-23 describes them, that would imply that Israelite religion became henotheistic during the monarchic period.[14] Such a view would therefore not be contradictory of the thesis of the present study which contends that Israelite religion only became monotheistic during the Persian period.[15] We will however seek to establish the historicity of these reforms in light of other relevant biblical books in order to determine whether or not such reforms did happen. We will also track the religious practises of some Jewish people who may have emigrated from monarchic Judah after the reforms were purported to have been instituted in order to verify if the mission of the reforms was being implemented. On this, we will evaluate the religion of the Jewish people who lived in Elephantine, Egypt after they fled the Babylonian invasion of Judah.

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13 On this point Rollston's (2003:103) comments in which he sees pre-exilic religion to have been consistent with that of Ugarit will be of great benefit to our study.

14 On this point, more and more increasingly, Hebrew Bible scholars seem to be agreeable that pre-exilic Israelite religion was likely henotheistic and not monotheistic, in this case henotheism bearing the definition in which one deity, Yahweh was worshiped without a denial of the existence of other deities (see Gnuse 1997:112).

15 While the exact point in time at which Israelite religion was transformed from a polytheistic to a monotheistic one may continue to be debated in the scholarship of these topics, this study will build upon the assertion that such a transformation may have only come to fruition in the Persian period see Gerstenberger (2011:384, 387).

2.2 Why study Ugaritic Religion?

The Ugaritic texts have been a subject of much discussion among scholars of ancient Near Eastern religions including that of Israel. Ugarit has also been known as Ras Shamra, meaning "Fennel Mound" and was so named probably because of the flowers that grew there (see Smith 2001:14). The importance of the Ugaritic texts to the study of the Hebrew Bible cannot be overemphasized. Writing in 1994 (Handy 1994:19-20) observes, "Without question the most important sources of information on the gods, cult, culture and religion of Syria-Palestine at the present time are the numerous tablets found at Ras Shamra, the ancient port city of Ugarit in northern Syria." Handy's observation is representative of other scholars. Like Handy, Smith (2002:2) with gratitude notes, "Thanks to the Ugaritic texts, scholars finally have a native Canaanite source to help reconstruct the relationship between Canaanite and Israelite religion." In his doctoral dissertation, Heiser (2004:1) for his part, observes that the Ugaritic discovery "marked a watershed in the study of the religious worldview of the Hebrew Bible." An analysis of these comments regarding the value of the Ugaritic texts shows that they highlighted and amplified our knowledge about the message of the Hebrew Bible and by necessity the religion of Israel. By the end of this chapter therefore, it is hoped that the ways in which the Ugaritic texts help us understand especially pre-exilic Israelite religion will be discovered.

It may also be argued that the Ugaritic texts were probably written within the historical time period of the authors thus making them a more reliable source of religious information than the Hebrew Bible. To elaborate on this point, it has become an acceptable observation among Hebrew Bible scholars that the authors of the Hebrew Bible came to write the stories long after they happened (cf. Davies 1992:90-107; 108-117). The authors were long separated from the culture, religion and even belief systems of the people about whom they wrote. They wrote about a people whose culture and life's experiences were not their own. If this observation be correct in every sense, it may be argued therefore, that the biblical authors wrote about events for which they did not have first hand

information. Putting all these observations into consideration, there is no doubt that the Ugaritic texts provide a more comprehensive source of early Israelite religion than the Hebrew Bible. A representative explanation on the differences between Ugaritic literature and the text of the Hebrew Bible is the one given by Goldenberg (2007:5, 8-9):

> From the historian's point of view, the Bible presents a very difficult problem. . . The Bible's religious message is loud and clear, but we cannot always know how the described events would have appeared without the religious purpose that now shapes the narrative, or indeed how the authors of the Bible learned about those events in the first place.

Continuing with the perceived limitedness of the Hebrew Bible as a historical resource on Syro-Palestinian religions, it has also been observed that for the most part, the Bible is rather more polemical than descriptive of Canaanite religion. In place of rendering a detailed presentation of Canaanite religion for example, Ringgren (1973:125) argues that the biblical record often makes rather isolated statements in passing. With such observations, scholars including the likes of Cooper (1987:35) have rendered the Hebrew Bible as an unreliable source of Canaanite religion.

Another important aspect of our study on Ugaritic religion versus Israelite religion that begs clarification is the relationship between the Ugaritic and Canaanite people groups. The question is whether or not the two were essentially one and the same ethno-religio people group. The usage of the two designations has become so fused in biblical scholarship that the distinguishing line between them has grown from being faint to being non-existent. It is not uncommon to associate a reference meant for one of the two with the other. Enlightening on this subject matter is Williams' observation that the two had a common religious culture into which the Israelites were subsequently absorbed (see Williams 1935: 233). Furthermore, Williams (1935:233) writes, "When it is remembered that the Canaanites and Phoenicians had a common religious culture and that into this culture the Hebrews came and were absorbed, then it becomes apparent that a better understanding of the Canaanite and Phoenician religious customs would shed much light upon Old Testament utterances couched consciously or

unconsciously in terms of them." Following this observation, it is no wonder that the two designations "Ugaritic" and "Canaanite" have often been used interchangeably in biblical scholarship thereby making the myths and legends characteristic of Ugarit to be Canaanite and sometimes Israelite as well.[16]

Furthermore, going by the observation that the immigrant Israelites were absorbed into the 'melting pot' culture of Ugarit and Canaan, that means we have three major cultures fused into a multi-ethnic and probably multi-religious union. The three cultures seem to have been so closely identified with each other in some ways in fact that there is a tendency in biblical scholarship to address them by a common designation—'Syria-Palestine' or 'Syro-Palestine' (Handy 1994:3). As Handy (1994:3) elaborates, "*Syria-Palestine* refers to an area encompassing the city-states located at the eastern state of the Mediterranean Sea, including the 'Phoenician' coastal cities, the western Syrian states, and the hill country often designated in terms of the minor nations of Israel, Judah, Moab, and others . . ." Going by this designation and definition, it seems that the bond that united the three nations was stronger than that which divided them. On that basis, it is to be expected that several religio-cultural practises that were characteristic of any one of them were most likely applicable to the others as well. It is therefore worth noting at this point that the syncretism or polytheism that characterized the religions of Ugarit and Canaan was probably prevalent in early Israelite religion as well. However, while the three ancient Near Eastern cultures had fused to the point of forming one entity, still, they were essentially not one and the same. On this point, Craigie's (1983:45) analysis is informative:

> (i) Ugarit refers to both a city and a kingdom; it designates a small nation state, located on the northeastern coast of the Mediterranean, that came to an end early in the 12th century B.C. (ii) Canaan, on the other hand, does not refer to a single unitary state; it refers rather to a geographical area occupied over time by a variety of different states, located on the southeastern coast of the Mediterranean. Chronologically, the term Canaan continues in use after the demise of Ugarit. (iii) Israel designates a nation state, and before that, a people. Geographically, it is located in Canaan; chronologically, it comes into existence, as a state after the demise of Ugarit.

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16   For more on this and some of the challenges encountered in making such comparisons however, see Craigie (1983: 67-68, 74-76).

2.3 Reliability of the sources
2.3.1 About the sources

All the mythological stories about ancient Near Eastern religions have to be substantiated by credible

sources if they are to be considered reliable and trustworthy. In this section, we will analyze the extant

sources from which the myths were derived and then we shall as much as possible assess their

reliability. By necessity, such an undertaking will seek to explore questions including but not limited

to: Who were the authors of the myths? What was their background? Who comprised their audience?

What is the relevance of their writings to those of us who live in the 21st century?[17] Obviously the

challenge faced by the 21st century reader of these myths is that we are so far removed from the time

and tradition within which they were written that at best our interpretation of them is theoretical and

hypothetical. Handy's (1994:3) elaboration on this dilemma could not be truer:

> Without "insider" aid in the interpretation of the sources, either by commentaries or, preferably, by
> members of the tradition itself, any description of another's religious convictions remains at best
> theoretical. Even with adequate primary sources and legitimate commentators it is impossible to
> gauge the variety within a given religious tradition without being able to examine thoroughly all
> believers adhering to the faith.

As Handy has rightly observed, the first challenge we have is that we will never have the privilege of

meeting the authors of the extant sources who lived and compiled their records thousands of years ago.

As a result of that, anything that is not crystal clear from such sources in their present state leads us to

speculate or reconstruct the sources to our own interpretation which may or may not represent the

original intended meaning. The other fact that arises from his observation is what I would call

'representativeness' of the sources. By that I mean to say, we shall never know how much of the data

recorded in these sources represent the communities within which they were written. Put simply, it is

not clear whether the sources represent the belief systems of the entire communities within which they

were written or they were just views of a few adherents or probably just for the authors themselves.

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17   It must be noted that not all of these questions will find answers from the sources concerned. At best some of them
      may simply be a matter of wishful thinking but which could also provide a ground for further research.

As it may be expected, the authors of these myths, or shall we say the scribes, recorded the stories within the context of the prevailing culture of their time. The system of government they were familiar with, the world view of the scribal schools they attended, and many other relevant experiential factors, must have all exerted an impact on the texts they produced (cf. Michalowski 1987:62-64; Sweet 1990:101-7; Handy 1994:4-5)). In other words, they did not write in a vacuum. Further, another aspect that cannot be overlooked is the fact that in their description of the pantheons and the operational dynamics of the deities, the authors could not avoid the use of human attributes (cf. MacDonald 1979:525). This all plays within the framework of what scholars have come to designate as anthropomorphism—the attribution of human tendencies to a deity. Some scholars have challenged the possibility that anthropomorphism may have influenced the authors of the extant sources, arguing that such an assertion cannot be substantiated (cf. Oden 1979:43-63). However, whether or not we are able to prove the role of anthropomorphism in the compilation of the myths, it probably remains true that it is difficult to imagine any author of religion who would describe God whom we have never seen without the use of human imageries and ideologies.

Another challenge that scholars of Syro-Palestinian religions are often faced with is the scarcity of the source materials. Often, even where these materials do exist, they are incomplete portions of the narratives, in which case the interpreters have ended up filling in the gaps through speculation (Handy 1994:19). That said, it goes without saying therefore that any attempt to understand Syro-Palestinian religion demands that we undertake a comprehensive and comparative assessment of all the extant sources with open minds. Relying on any single source in isolation of the rest will no doubt lead us to making incomplete conclusions. In this brief evaluation of the sources, we shall identify and present the contributions of each one of them. The purpose of evaluating these sources shall not be exhaustive. Rather, by so doing, it is hoped that not only the reliability of the sources but the overall credibility of Syro-Palestinian religions including that of Israel shall be brought into perspective.

2.3.2 Ugaritic Texts

The first of the sources we shall evaluate are the Ugaritic texts. These texts have long been a subject of much discussion among scholars of ancient Near Eastern religions including the Hebrew Bible. Regarding the discovery of these texts, Craigie (1983:7) whose historical account we shall reference here is probably the most elaborate.[18] Ugarit has also been known as Ras Shamra, meaning "Fennel Mound," so named probably because of the flowers that grew there (see Smith 2001:14). It has been argued that there is probably no better source of information on the gods, cult, culture and religion of Syria-Palestine than the tablets found at Ras Shamra (Handy 1994:19-20).

While the Ugaritic texts are an unequivocal vital source of information for our knowledge about Syro-Palestinian religion, it has been observed that not only is the source material scarce, but that in fact "only a small fraction of it consists of intelligible mythological narrative" (Handy 1994:19). Even more serious regarding the problem of scarcity of sources is the fact that much of the available data was derived from isolated portions whose complete stories were missing. In this case, the authors of the myths often had to reconstruct the stories to the best of their ability in order to make them mythologically relevant. Handy (1994:20) has offered an elaborate account of the real problem brought about by the lack of material coherence in these texts:

> It is the tendency of these tablets to break in such a manner that whole sections of stories are lost, even when the narrative has been found preserved on more than one tablet. Random scratches or cracks on the writing surface of the tablet create no end of headaches for those who have to determine whether the marks were part of the script or merely flaws in the clay.

In view of observations such as these, the question that the student of ancient Near Eastern religion is faced with is whether to reject the evidence arising out of such fragmentary source materials altogether

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18 In the spring of 1928, a farmer was ploughing some land on the Mediterranean coast of Syria. His name was Mahmoud Mella az-Zir, and he lived close to a bay called Mine el-Beida. The tip of his plough ran into stone just beneath the surface of the soil. When he examined the obstruction, he found a large man-made flagstone. He cleared away the earth, raised the stone, and beneath it he saw a subterranean passageway leading into an ancient tomb. Entering the tomb, he discovered a number of objects of potential value, which he sold to a dealer in antiquities. Though he could not have known it at the time, the agricultural worker had opened up more than a tomb on that spring day. He had opened a door, which was to lead to extra-ordinary discoveries concerning ancient history and civilization, and even to a new appraisal of the Old Testament.

or to accept it with caution. Rejecting such evidence obviously would be crossing the line, rather, we do well to work with what we have and use it as some kind of template upon which to build a framework for further research. One way by which the Ugaritic texts even in their fragmentary state may nevertheless still be considered a reliable source is by comparing the data they contain with other sources.

Among the textual sources at Ugaritic were two groups of tablets that may be described simply as "Narrative Texts" and "Ritual texts" (see Handy 1994:20-28). On the whole, these texts equally suffer from the same fragmentary problem that we have already presented. While the narrative texts for example, have been considered helpful in providing a detailed elaboration on the mythological and legendary nature of the deities at Ugarit, still, a question of their actual origin has been raised. The question is whether these texts originated from within Ugarit or they might have been imported from outside (cf. Oden 1979:51-55). On this question, there are those who have argued for example in favour of an imported Baal cult into Syria-Palestine thereby replacing the cult of El (see Kapelrud 1952:92-93); while others have contested that the Baal cult was as ancient in Syria-Palestine as that of El (see Fleming (1993:93, 97-98). It would seem that as helpful as these narrative textual sources might have been, they have never been able to solve a problem as simple as how many gods were actually worshiped in Syria-Palestine. The ritual texts on the other hand have been credited for detailing that it was a common practise in the Ugaritic myths for donations (sacrifices) to be offered to some deities (cf. Morenz 1973:89). However, while this may affirm the existence of the deities who were the recipients of such donations, the sources have been criticized for not providing details on which gods were actually involved in the rituals (Handy 1994:26). Again, helpful as any of our sources of investigation might be, the golden rule is to evaluate them in light of other sources.

2.3.3 Inscriptions in Syria-Palestine

Though not many, still, a few inscriptions that make reference to deities in Syria-Palestine have been unearthed.[19] For the most part, these inscriptions are believed to have presented information on the names of some deities in the myths. The inscriptions describe the relationship that existed between the human rulers and the deities. Of interest is the observation that the gods ensured that the remains of the rulers after death were well protected by their particular deity (cf. *KAI* 14.20-22). It s not clear whether or not this privilege was at one time extended to ordinary citizens of the city-states who believed in such gods. This god-ruler relationship is of interest in view of the Christian faith in which some denominations believe that when a believer dies, such a person's soul or remains are watched over by God who alone would eschatologically raise it from the dead. Whether or not what we see here is a case of borrowing by the Christian theologians from ancient mythology we do not know. Like any one of the sources we have reviewed thus far, these inscriptions have also evinced some deficiencies. For example, first, some of the deities on the inscriptions were altogether unknown; secondly, the names of the deities do not specify which exact deities they refer to; and thirdly, when the deity names are translated into other languages, it has not been clear which god was referenced by the translated names whether El, Baal, or some other deity (See Miller 1973:43-45; cf. Handy 1994:30-31). Another problem that those that critique these inscriptions have pointed out is the fact that their dating has never been verified with certainty. Inability to verify their dating has in turn also made it difficult to authenticate the nature of the gods referenced within them (see Coogan 1987:116-18; and McCarter 1980:49-60).

2.3.4 Text of the Hebrew Bible

It is of interest to note that the Hebrew Bible could be a source of information for Syro-Palestinian

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19   See Handy (1994:28-34) for a detailed presentation of the inscriptions and all the involved dynamics.

religion. Ordinarily, one would expect it to be an exclusive record of Israelite religion. It has been observed that the Old Testament has about 89 references to the Canaanite god Baal, 40 times to other Canaanite gods including the goddess Asherah, and some 10 times to the goddess Ashtoreth (Pfeiffer 1962:12). Overall, some have even gone to the extent of estimating that there could be up to 139 references to Canaanite gods in the Bible (Anderson 1975:6-7). While so many references to Canaanite deities have been attested in the Hebrew Bible, it has long been observed that such references are for the most part to do with the evil nature of Canaanite religion which included unrestricted sex and drinking habits (orgy) and practises of child sacrifice.[20] In this case, the Hebrew Bible as a source of Syro-Palestinian religion may at best be considered a biased record whose objective was not to record the myths as they happened but rather everything about them that was wrong as perceived through the lens of the biblical theologians. Furthermore, the Hebrew Bible has been observed to be highly polemical of Canaanite religion and in particular the worship of the Canaanite god, Baal. Consequently, this polemical nature of the texts makes them to render a one-sided testimony lacking a detailed presentation of all the dynamics that characterized Canaanite religion. This view of the the Hebrew Bible as a source of Syro-Palestinian religion has been elaborated by Ringgren (1973:125) who writes: "For a long time our primary source of Canaanite religion was simply the presentation of it in the Old Testament. This, as is well known, is of a polemical nature, and can therefore not be expected to give an objectively correct picture of the religion." Ringgren's observation about the polemical nature of the biblical texts has found support in other scholars including Cooper (1987:35) who writes, "It is generally agreed that the biblical witness to the Canaanite religion is highly polemical and, therefore, unreliable." The question of reliability or non-reliability is one that may engage us into a conversation of a different level. The question is whether or not we can altogether discredit the biblical text for all

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20   For further study on this point, see the following bibliography: Vriezen (1967:52, 55-56); and Eliade (1978-85), 1:159-60—on the unrestricted sexual and drinking practises; and Heider 1985:1-92,); Stager and Wolff (1984:30-51); cf. Handy (1994:37)—on the practice of child sacrifice.

that it presents about religion in Syria-Palestine just because of its perceived polemical nature. If that be the case, then we might as well discredit every one of the extant sources as each one has its own short falls. As we stated earlier, the Ugaritic texts themselves, about which scholars of ancient Near East are so passionate, are themselves not inerrant. In spite of that, biblical scholarship today is better enlightened about ancient Near Eastern religion than it was the case before the discovery of the texts. It is probably a fair analysis therefore, to argue that while the Ugaritic texts, just like the Hebrew Bible, may not be perfect sources of Syro-Palestinian religions, still, they have provided us with a significant amount of information. That being said, we would probably do well to say that the Hebrew Bible is a reliable source, but not a complete one.

2.3.5 Philo of Byblos' History

The historical records of the Phoenicians by Philo of Byblos have been considered to be a great source of religion in the Syria-Palestine. These historical records, are found in Eusebius of Caesarea's Preparation *Evangelical,* and it is believed that it was based on what a Phoenician priest named Annunciation had told him (cf. Ringgren 1973:126). It is further believed that Annunciation himself also had Hieronymus, a 1200 BCE author as his source (Anderson 1975:22-23). It has been observed that since Ugaritic records tend to be agreeable with those of Philo in their presentation of the myths, Philo's historical records may therefore be considered as reliable sources of Canaanite religion.[21] However, like other sources, Philo's historical records equally had some challenges that have left scholars questioning their authenticity. For example, when Philo narrates the mythological stories, sometimes he interchangeably presents the gods as if the were humans (Handy 1994:46-47). Also, it is believed that Philo seems to have accumulated material from the Phoenician cult of his time, which suggests therefore that most of it was much latter than the actual Ugaritic mythology. This would mean

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21   On this line of reasoning, see Albright (1968:217-18); cf. Pope (1955:4-5); and Dahood (1958:70).

that most of it was reconstructed data which may not have been an accurate representation of Ugaritic religion (Handy 1994:47).

As a summary of our findings from the sources we have evaluated, it is fair to point out first of all that as far as reliability is concerned, each source has some positive and down sides. Each source contains some degree of accuracy as well as inerrancy. That being said, it becomes imperative that no source should be solely dependent upon in isolation of the rest. Rather, it is wise to utilize each source in light of the others, as that would make them complement for each others' deficiencies. It is therefore important for anyone doing research on Ugaritic mythology to use all the extant sources with caution, and an awareness of the limitations that characterize them. Dever's (2001:16-17) observation on our use of ancient texts as sources of religious data, irrespective of the traditions they represent is worth noting:

1. A text is a product of a particular time, place, culture, language, and it must be placed back in that context to be understood at all.

2. An original "meaning" is inherent and is expressed in language that is both deliberate and potentially intelligible.

3. The reader's first task in approaching a text is to place himself and his situation in the background, attempting to be as "objective" as possible so as to be open to the text's original (i.e., "true") meaning in its own terms as far as possible.

4. Methodically, there is no substitute for mastery of the text's original language. Geographical and cultural setting, and the light that other contemporary texts may shed.

5. Since there are, at best, always personal, subjective factors at work in interpreting an ancient text, these must be acknowledged, but they may then be usefully exploited. These factors include intuition; an educated imagination; and, above all, empathy, or "positioning oneself within understanding distance."

6. Above all, the question of the modern appropriation of the perceived meaning of a text must be kept strictly separate during the initial interpretation in fulfillment of the requirement of "disinterestedness." Even thereafter, the applied meaning is tentative and is not possessed of the same "authority" that the text may have had in its original context. In short, theological concerns must be rigidly distinguished from historical exegesis. As Krister Stendahl, distinguished theologian, New Testament scholar, and former dean of Harvard Divinity school, once observed, there are two separate questions to be asked in all historical inquiry, especially in biblical studies: (1) What did the text mean? and (2) What does it mean?

In light of the material we just reviewed on our ancient sources of religious information, it immediately became imperative that we do not only treat each source with care but that none of them is to be relied upon in isolation of the rest. This is because as we discovered, some of these sources, be it the Ugaritic texts or the 'inscriptions in Syria-Palestine,' have suffered from the consequences of wear and tear due to their age; in which case their interpreters would have to supplement for the missing links which may or may not be an accurate representation. Sadly, not even the text of the Hebrew Bible is exempt from such scrutiny as a source of religious information. As elaborated, the Hebrew Bible was composed long after the events it presents. Even more important regarding how we handle its contents is the observation that for the most part, it tends to be polemical of Canaanite religion rather than rendering a balanced historical record. Thus if we are to have a complete information about Syro-Palestinian religion, it is wise that we complement the material in the Hebrew Bible with data from all other sources.

2.4 Divine council in Ugaritic religion
2.4.1 The status of El

Discussions on Ugaritic religion have been dealt with by those who specialize in ancient Near Eastern studies for a long time. That said, we shall not have to repeat everything there is about Ugaritic religion in a limited space such as we have in the present chapter. The purpose of this sub-section therefore is to present in detail the gods who comprised the Ugaritic pantheon while at the same time asking rhetorically how those same gods may have been adapted into pre-exilic Israelite religion and thereby evincing syncretism or polytheism. Foremost, it is necessary to mention that any reference to divinity in Ugaritic religion will have to consider the different beings who bear the divine title. Altogether, these divine beings form what scholars have come to designate as "assembly of the gods," "assembly of the divine sons," "assembly of the council" or simply "divine council" (see Smith 2004:101). Along

with these designations also comes the title "divine family" in which it was believed as we shall discover later that the divinity constituted a family of gods with father, mother and children (Smith 2004:101). Other than just attesting a divine council in Ugaritic religion, L'Heureux is probably one of the earliest scholars to note that there exists a hierarchy among the gods who comprise the council (see L'Heureux 1979:106-7). Other scholars have also followed him in acknowledging the existence of a hierarchy in Ugaritic pantheon including Handy (1994:169-72), and Smith (2004:101-5). While acknowledging a hierarchy in the Ugaritic pantheon, Smith (2004:86-123) has gone on to subdivide it into four levels (tiers) with El on the highest level. In presenting the gods of the Ugaritic pantheon, we shall follow Handy's (1994:170) characterization of the structure, who has categorized the four levels as follows: the Authoritative deities, the active deities, the artisan deities, and the messenger deities. The authoritative deities of the highest level included El and Asherah, whom we shall now present in respective detail in what follows. Scholars have long established that El was the highest authority and power in the Ugaritic pantheon.[22] One way by which we can certainly get to know the true status of El is by evaluating the meanings of his designated epithets. Foremost among such epithets is "bniyu binwti" which literally means "creator of all created things" (Mullen 1980:13-14). From this, it is evident that from a Ugaritic religio-historical perspective, everything that existed in the then known world came into being through the creatorship of El. El was also popularly known by the designation, *Father*. His fatherhood is said to have even been extended to the world of the gods, which gave him the designation, *abu bani ili* which is to say, "father of the gods" (cf. Cross 1997:15). El's fatherhood however, has left scholars wondering about its true import. Like it is the case with the description of all other deities in Syria-Palestine, we find that the authors of the myths used anthropomorphic language in describing the nature of the gods. They described the gods and their activities in human terms and from a human perspective which may or may not have been a true representation of the mythology. For

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22   On this observation, see Handy (1994:70); Albright (1968:119-120); and Cross (1997:13-75).

example, Handy (1994:78) has observed what seems to be El's bearing of the gods through copulation just like humans do:

> In kissing and conception,
> In embracing, pregnancy,
> They crouched and gave birth
> To Shahar and Shalim (*KTU* 1.21.51-52)

However, in a rather paradoxical manner, El could also create divine beings (gods) without sexual procreation (Pope 1955:37). The ensuing dilemma out of all this is for us to be able to determine whether El used one or both methods in his creatorship and fatherhood of the gods. This is where it really gets interesting, and it heightens our curiosity on how this same concept of El's creatorship may have featured with Yahweh in the Hebrew Bible.

Another epithet of El is "Bull," such as we find in the phrase, *Abir Ya'qob,* meaning "the bull of Jacob" (Cross 1997:15). Gray (1965:158) thinks that the term 'Bull' may be in reference to either El's strength or possibly to his procreative vigor. The noun 'El' which generally means "god" is well attested in the Semitic world under different cognate terms including the Arabic "Allah" which means "the god" or simply "God" (Coogan and Smith 2012:6). Amidst conflicting views, it has also been noted that El was sometimes referred to as *'ab 'snm'* which may be interpreted as 'the Father of Years' as one possibility, while others suggest that following the Arabic cognate (*'snm* = 'to be exalted'), the designation could alternatively be translated as 'the exalted one' (Gray 1965:155). Either way, without having to get into the linguistic debate regarding the correct translation of *'snm*, two facts may be noted. First, if El was 'the Father of Years,' it essentially made him the sovereign authority in the pantheon, who may have existed from eternity past and who alone had the power to regulate time—years and seasons. Secondly, if El was considered to be the 'exalted' one, still, it would place him above everyone else in the pantheon, thus making him the head of the pantheon. It would be interesting how this exalted status of El was understood in Israelite religion with reference to Yahweh.

However, while acknowledging that El was once the highest authority in the myths, some scholars were of the view that at some point in time El had been replaced by another deity called Baal[23] The rationale behind this claim was that El had become impotent and was therefore replaced by Baal who was virile. By way of substantiating El's impotence and inability to procreate, two texts (the Elkunirsha fragment and the Ugaritic narrative of the Birth of the Gracious Gods) have been read by some as presenting evidence that El was no longer sexually active (Oldenburg 1969:109-14; cf. Handy 1994:71). However, other scholars have refuted this claim (cf. Cross 1997:22-24). As research on the subject continued, it was discovered that instead of engaging the two deities in conflict with each other, the two became viewed as separate beings representing different aspects of the divine realm (Caquot and Sznycer 1980:12; cf. Handy 1994:71). In spite of all these arguments, scholars were eventually left with two options. On the one hand there are those who claimed that El had altogether ceased to function as the head of the pantheon (Oldenburg 1969:107-208; cf. Handy 1994:71), while others maintained that El continued to be the head of the pantheon.[24]

Scholars are for the most part agreeable about the exalted status of El in Ugaritic religion. However, as is always the case in biblical scholarship, El's actual role in the pantheon continues to be an open question. Another question that begs attention is El's superiority over Baal. In the text that became known as the *Baal cycle,* Baal is quoted to have boastfully claimed, "I alone rule over the gods" (cf. Coogan 2012:6). While a discussion of the status of Baal in the Ugaritic pantheon shall be presented later, the more convincing explanation on the rather conflicting relationship between the two deities is probably the one given by Coogan and Smith (2012:6-7):

> The best explanation of these discrepancies is that Canaanite theology was not static. While El was the head of the pantheon, and actively so in earlier stories such as *Aqhat* and *Kirta,* Baal was becoming the dominant Canaanite deity, and the *Baal cycle* perhaps reflects this process. There seems to be a sort of co-regency between El as the executive power and Baal as the military power in the cosmos.

23   See De Moor (1990:105-7); Loretz (1990:68); Pope (1987:224); Handy (1994:69).
24   See Albright (1968:119-21); Albright (1957:231); Cross (1997:13-75); cf. Handy (1994:71-2).

While we might really not know how this El-Baal relationship played out in Ugaritic religion enough to warrant a substantial comment, Coogan and Smith are right on one thing and that is, on observing that Canaanite theology was not static. Religion is a dynamic ideology if we may call it that way. Israelite religion itself, which is at the core of this study, has gone through different transformational phases before ultimately becoming the Christian faith that we have come to know. The idea of God has never been singular, universal or consistent. The view of god in pre-exilic Israel for example was different from that of the post-exilic period and beyond. Likewise, while El was certainly perceived to be the head of the Canaanite pantheon at some stage, Baal was equally been viewed just as such at some point in time. The idea of Baal possibly having been a co-regency of El is a discussion that has gained ground in New testament studies regarding the relationship between the biblical God and Jesus Christ, which we certainly do not want to delve into at this point. However, the real underlying question in all this is just how El was conceived of in Israelite religion in light of his status in Ugaritic religion.

2.4.2 Asherah in Ugaritic religion

Along with El is a co-embodiment of ultimate divine power goddess named Asherah with whom he shared the designations of King and Queen Mother respectively (see Andreasen 1983:182; cf. Handy 1994:74). Asherah (Ugaritic=Athirat) was the chief goddess of the Ugaritic pantheon, mother of the gods, and El's consort or wife (Hadley 2000:38). Before the discovery of the Ugaritic texts, as has been observed, Asherah was generally considered to be some form of cultic object and not necessarily a true goddess (see Smith 1972:187-88). She has often been marginalized to a non-entity status (see Loretz1990:84; Smith 1984:359; Ackerman 1992:191), different from what we would expect of any deity. However, a close evaluation of this goddess shows that she was significant in the Ugaritic pantheon. One way by which her significance is evinced is when El consults her regarding Baal's possible replacement after he was defeated by Mot (*CTA* 6.i.45-6). Even before we can explore

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whatever there might be about her true character in the pantheon, this consultation with the head god El argues in favour of her esteemed status in the pantheon.

Some of Asherah's epithets include "qnyt 'ilm," with the possible meaning of 'creatress of the gods' (*KTU* 1.4.I.22)*,* and also 'um 'il[m] meaning 'mother of the god(s) (cf. Hadley 2000:39). The obvious question arising out of the epithet 'creatress of the gods' is whether or not she was in fact the creatress of all the gods including the highest ranking god, El (cf. Binger 1997:50-51). Also, Asherah's motherhood of the gods is uncertain and the mystery is heightened by Handy's observation, "There is no extant narrative clearly showing Asherah giving birth to any deity, yet she stood as the legal mother to them all" (Handy 1994:77). It is probably because of questions such as these that some scholars have opted for different translations of these epithets. For example, some have translated 'qnyt 'lim' as 'ruler (queen) of the gods' (Ahlstrom 1963:74-5); while others have preferred 'mistress of the gods' (Vawter 1986:464). Still, other scholars have yet considered the meaning of the root *qny* to be 'acquire' or to 'own' instead of 'create' (see Katz 1954:126-31; Vawter 1986:466-67). All the same, the difference between Asherah as 'creatress' or 'owner' does not seem to do much in defining the actual character and identity of this goddess. What continues to be true is the fact that she occupied an important place in the pantheon. Asherah was also popularly known by the designation 'fertility goddess' probably in line with her ability to procreate.[25] Ancient Near Eastern scholars have come to the conclusion that the true identity of Asherah was probably as problematic in Syria-Palestine as it is in our time.[26] It has been noted that Asherah was also often identified with astral imageries. For example, she was sometimes identified with Venus, the Morning and Evening Star much the same as Ishtar and Aphrodite, her Mesopotamian and Greek counterparts respectively (cf. Ackerman 1992:23; Roberts 1972:101). Although probably not as well attested as the other characteristics, Asherah was also sometimes identified as the goddess of war often depicted with shield and spear (cf. Ackerman 1992:24).

25   Cf. Dever (1984:22); Hackett (1989:71-73); and Wiggens 1991:392).
26   See Patai 1990:12-15; Dever (1984:28-29); Freedman (1987:246).

In all the descriptions of Asherah, one senses that she was closely or intimately associated with El. She is often depicted as the embodiment of El's attributes, for example, a Ugaritic poem depicts her as "the grace of El, the support of El, and the peace of El" (KTU 1.65). Obviously, as we have already observed, this does not mean that Asherah was never characterized on her own terms. The opposite is true, as Asherah was ontologically an independent goddess in her own right, who had the power to make her own decisions most of which El respected. However, Asherah's embodiment of El's attributes may give an urge to those who, especially in Israelite religion, have argued that all the other deities were simply hypostases of the one God El or El-Yahweh.[27] It has also been observed that Asherah had a statute or a 'holy law' associated with her name pretty much like the law of Moses in the Hebrew Bible (Noll 2001:247). Could it be that the Decalogue in the Hebrew Bible (Ex 20:3-17) traditionally believed to have been given to Moses on mount Sinai was probably adapted into Israelite religion from Ugaritic or Canaanite religion? This is just another research question in the ongoing studies that seeks to establish the relationship between Canaanite and Israelite religions.

It is probably true that the challenge we have in dealing with ancient (Ugaritic) terms is not being able to understand their original and contemporary meaning. The question for example is whether or not the meaning of being a creator or creatress in the 21st century would have been the same in the 1st or 2nd millennium BCE. Regarding our treatment of ancient divine epithets for example the one in which Yahweh uses the epithet 'king', Handy (1994:75); cf Handy (1988:57-59) cautions:

> But some caution must be taken when dealing with divine epithets. It clearly meant something different for the Ugaritic tablet authors to call the gods *mlk* (translated 'king') than it meant in western Europe, for example, to call Henry the Eighth by the title "king." There were at least three levels of personnel designated at Ugarit by the title *mlk*: El. Baal, and the human ruler of the city-state. This multiple attestation of a title, which in common English usage is generally restricted to a single individual within one governmental organization, clearly demonstrates that the word *mlk* had its own peculiarities of meaning at Ugarit, not shared by the English word *King*.

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27 Strictly speaking, those who hold this view are advocates of a monotheistic faith both in Syro-Palestinian religion and even more so in Israelite religion whose source material is the text of the Hebrew Bible which is traditionally known as the Old Testament. We shall briefly revisit the concept of hypostasis towards the end of the chapter.

While we might never know the actual meaning of the epithets of Asherah, what remains true is that this goddess occupied a highly esteemed status in the Ugaritic pantheon. In view of all the facts we have reviewed about Asherah, the underlying question is just how she may have been adapted into Israelite religion. It will be of particular interest to know how her relationship with El, would compare or contrast with that of Yahweh.

2.4.3 Second level deities (Baal in Ugaritic religion)

The second level of the pantheon was occupied by several deities among whom Baal was probably the most prominent. As we have already pointed out the true status of Baal is rather confusing. The sources we have already evaluated deny his being one of the 70 sons of El and Asherah, stating that he is rather a son of Dagan (*CTA* 2.i.19; 35; 5.iv.23-4). However, he is equally known to be El's son (*CTA* 3.E.iv.2; v.43; 4.i.14). As an alternative, he has also been seen to be the son of both El and Dagan (Day 1985:175). Baal is sometimes known to have a consort named Anat, who is also considered to be his sister (*CTA* 3.D.iv.83-4; 6.ii.12) and yet she is at times said to be El's daughter (*CTA* 3.E.iv.7; v.18, 35). In the Baal epic, scholars have long observed that Baal was upset because he did not have a house like the seventy sons of Athirat.[28] The fact that Baal does not identify himself as one of the sons of El and Asherah essentially makes him an independent and competitor deity against El and probably Asherah too. Scholars have long observed from the Ugaritic texts that Baal is both a generic term meaning "lord" and also a proper name (Oldenburg 1969:58). One example in which it was used as a proper name was in the case of Hadad (storm god) with whom it became a fixed designation (Albright 1978:124). Each location or community was normally supposed to have their own 'lord' or baal responsible over that particular locality Smith 1972:93-94; cf. Handy 1994: 99-100). Each Baal was responsible for the fertility of his particular locality, and it is said that the *baalim* (plural) were often

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28   For a bibliography, see Hadley (2000:39); Gibson (1978:8-12); and De Moor (1987:45-69).

referred to as fertility gods (Smith 1972:1104-8).

Baal is generally known by several designations or epithets. While El was known to be the father of the gods presumably including Baal himself, yet Baal is known by the Ugaritic designation 'bn dgn' meaning 'son of Dagan' (L'Heureux 1979:12). It would seem that under not very clear circumstances, Baal who was Dagan's son may have at some point in time assimilated into El's pantheon thereby making him El's son as well (cf. Kapelrud 1952:52-53).[29] Baal was also popularly known by the designation, *Aliyn Baal* which carries meanings including "Most mighty Baal" (Oldenburg 1969:58) and "the victor Baal" (Driver 1956:75). Scholars have noted the fact that in the wake of the Ugaritic texts, the two gods Baal and Aliyu were considered to be two separate deities. However, it seems clear now that the two are probably one and the same god, sharing the same attributes, carrying out the same functions, and bearing interchangeable epithets (Kapelrud 1952:47-48). On occasion, Baal could also be referred to as 'Lord or God of mount Saphon,' and it has been suggested by some scholars that a mountain home was befitting for Baal considering that he was a rain god (Kapelrud 1952:57; Smith 1994:122-23). Describing Saphon in detail, Ringgren (1973:133) writes:

> Baal's dwelling place is the mount Saphon, north of Ugarit, the Kasios of the Greeks. This mountain was clearly to the Canaanites what Olympus was to the Greeks; it was not only the dwelling place of Baal but the site of the assembly of the gods...In a recently published text, a description is given of how Baal, who is called Hadad, sit enthroned upon his mountain here called Saphon and the 'the mount of victory.'

Another popular designation by which Baal was known is *Rider of the Clouds,* which is a possible translation of the Ugaritic, *rkb 'rpt.* This designation is rendered with a variety of nuances including 'rider of the clouds,' 'rider on the clouds,' and 'Who mounts the Clouds,' all of which are   frequent epithets in reference to gods in Ugaritic literature (Hermann 1999:704). The idea in this epithet with reference to Baal depicts him as riding upon the clouds just like a driver in a chariot who goes out to

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29   This point could be a good subject of research too large for the limited time and space we have in the present chapter.

distribute rain (cf. Hermann 1999:704). The designation 'Rider of the Clouds' will particularly be of great interest to our study of early Israelite religion where the authors of the Hebrew Bible have equally assigned the same epithet to Yahweh.

Moreover, Baal was often referred to as king (*mlk*) of the earth, which in the minds of many made it appear that he was the head of the pantheon who may have most likely overthrown El, the long time king of the pantheon.[30] Amidst conflicting speculations about the true status of Baal in relation to El, the view that strongly persisted was that El remained the head of the pantheon while Baal in a hierarchical order served in a subordinate role under El (see Driver 1956:21; and L'Heureux 1979:69-79). In light of evolving theological views, it almost always remained that Baal was a storm god who ensured that there was always rain to perpetuate the growth of crops, which essentially made him a fertility god (Gibson 1984:206; cf. Handy 1994:101). The relationship between Baal and El, to say the least, was a very uncertain one. On the one hand, El is decorated as the supreme leader of the pantheon and thus the cosmos, and yet on the other hand Baal bore designations that seemingly made him the head of the pantheon and cosmos. Ultimately, El is believed to have been the sovereign leader of the cosmos while Baal operated under him. Another attempt at describing the Baal-El relationship is the assertion by Coogan & Smith (2012:6-7) who wrote, "There seems to be a sort of co-regency between El as the executive power and Baal as the military power in the cosmos." This view presents El as the superior deity in the pantheon, while Baal might have served in a deputized role.

Of interest is the observation that in Egypt, Baal was used as a title in reference to the native god Seth, and even more intriguing is to learn that the identity of Baal was essentially lost and embodied in the person of Seth (Morenz 1973:238). What this means is that as far as the Egyptians were concerned, they believed that by worshiping the god Seth, they were essentially worshiping a

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30 For the argument that Baal's kingship made him the head of the Syro-Palestinian pantheon, see Albright (1968:125); Cassuto 1971:59; cf. Handy (1994:101). For the idea that Baal may have overthrown El from his position of head of the pantheon, see Kapelrud (1952):133; Eliade (1978-1985), I:151.

Baal-type god albeit under a different name. This is an observation the reader might want to explore in detail especially with reference to the subject of hypostasis which we shall briefly discuss towards the end of the present chapter. The question is whether or not the gods worshiped in different cultures were all aspects of one God despite the different names by which they were known. With the discovery of the Ugaritic texts however, the designation Baal became identified as a name for a particular god who was sometimes known by several names including Baal and Hadad (Handy 1994:100). For some time, the various divine names given to Baal were believed to represent several distinct gods. However, it was later discovered that such names were titles of the same god, Baal (cf. Handy 1994:100). The prominence of Baal in Ugaritic religion was signified by one of the two large temples dedicated to him, and it has also been argued that in the mythology of Ras Shamra "the cult of Baal is more explicitly documented than that of any other deity, . . ."(see Gray 1965:163; and Coogan & Smith 2012:7).

2.4.4 Other second level deities in Ugaritic Pantheon

Other than the god, Baal, there were other deities on the second level of the Ugaritic pantheon, though not as prominent as Baal himself. For the purposes of this study, we shall review only three of them namely, Anat, Mot, and Shemesh or Shapshu (cf. Handy 1994:102-7). Again, let the reader be reminded that we need not repeat what every author has already written about these deities. We will therefore attempt to address only those aspects that have a bearing on Israelite religion. With regard to the goddess Anat, it is generally observed that she was not well attested in Syria-Palestine before the discovery of the Ugaritic texts other than place names that were named after her (see Smith 1972:211; cf. Wood 1916:264). The situation in the Egyptian mythology was an interesting one, for even as Anat was a foreign deity whom they adapted, they craftily merged her with other deities into a single divine being.[31] Of interest also is the fact that among the Israelites who had fled to the ancient city of

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31 On how Anat was incorporated into Egyptian mythology, see Morenz 1973:259; cf. Handy (1994:102). On how Anat was merged with other deities into a single divine being, see Cook 1930:104-5; Morenz (1973:143-241). This process in which the Egyptians merged their deities into a single being will be of interest later as we discuss

Elephantine during the exile, Anat was worshiped under the identity of Anat-YHW (Cook 1930:104-5).

What we find here is what I would call a case of 'identity by association.' By that I mean to say that

according to these Judeans in Elephantine, even if they supposedly worshiped Anat, in their minds they

were worshiping a 'Yahweh-type deity.' Again, what is evident here is probably another case of

hypostasis.

While Asherah was on occasion seen to be Baal's consort as we saw earlier, interestingly, Anat

was also sometimes referred to as both a fertility goddess as well as Baal's consort (Albright 1978:128,

135). Further, like Baal, Anat was also known to be a war-goddess (Kapelrud 1963:49). This is where

an analytical study of Ugaritic or Canaanite religion becomes a challenge. Often, we see roles and

identifications among the deities being exchanged, to the point that we are left wondering whether we

are dealing with one divine being bearing different identifications or different deities sharing divine

characteristics. In an attempt to set the record straight on the somewhat confusing relationship between

Anat and Baal, Bowman (1978:195) observes, "Anatu's main function was to support Balu in his

efforts to maintain his supremacy in the pantheon." In view of Bowman's analysis of the status of Anat,

which is also supported by Kapelrud (1963:260-63), we would rightly observe together with Handy

(1994:104-5) that in Bowman's mind, "Anat is reduced from being an independent deity to being a

personified aspect of Baal ("his will") . . . [and that] In such a reconstruction the violence engaged in

by the goddess is not thought to be the activity of a goddess so much as an extension of the activities of

the god Baal." Put simply, Bowman sees the concept of hypostasis at work in the relationship between

Anat and Baal which entails that Anat could not have been an independent deity in her own right but

rather an aspect, or the will of Baal in action in the person of Anat. However, in a rather contradictory

manner, Handy (1994:105) argues that there is no convincing reason to view Anat as a hypostasis of

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Israelite religion which had 'evolved' from being syncretistic to being monotheistic. What is going on here, could we be sensing the birth of what would become monotheism in Egyptian mythology? It is such developments in Syro-Palestinian religions (Israel's contemporaries) that we need to pay special attention to in our study of Israel's religious dynamics.

Baal. For one thing, he notes that there is no evidence that Anat was ever subject to the will of Baal. Handy does acknowledge however, that Anat did in fact recognize the sovereignty of El, but that she never attributed the same status to Baal. Anything that Anat did for Baal, says Handy, was done out of her own volition as a loving sister would do to a brother. While denying the assumption that Anat and Baal were a fertility couple, Handy (1994:105) writes, "Furthermore, it cannot be assumed that the pair Anat and Baal were considered to be a fertility god and goddess couple, since it was Baal's rain that brought life to the land, not the two deities' sex life." As we stated earlier, therefore, these ancient Near Eastern religions and the deities they represent are a topic that will continue to invite scholarly investigation, and yet even as that may be the case, we probably will never come to a unanimous agreement on most of the critical issues.

The second god we shall review at this level is another not so prominent deity named Mot. Historically, there seems to have been a strong belief that there was a god of the dead (death) and the underworld (Handy 1994:105). Through the records of Philo of Byblos for example, it was observed that El had designated a particular deity named 'Muth' to be the deity of the dead.[32] While Baal was in some sense seen to be a fertility god on the one hand, Mot was seen to be the god of infertility on the other; which in some sense would earn him the designation, the antithesis of Baal or any other deity that was pro-life.[33] Of interest is the observation which seems to suggest that while Mot was the antithesis of fertility and life, he was in fact the beloved of El designated to receive all living things in the end as death is inescapable (Cassuto 1971:61). The arising question is whether to see Mot as an enemy of El or his divine compatriot. If indeed he was a divine compatriot of El, it would seem that El himself who is by all accounts the progenitor of life was equally the destroyer of life. How paradoxical! These are some of the questions the reader might find to be good topics for further research, but

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32   See Philo of Byblos 1.10.34; cf. Handy (1994:105).
33   See the following: Gordon (1961:184); Smith (1986:321-22); Brubacher (1987:20).

definitely too large for an exhaustive analysis here. Discussions surrounding the goddess Mot have often fallen into two opinions. There are those, as we have already pointed out who think that he was a deity just like any other in the Syro-Palestinian pantheon, and those who do not recognize her as such. Some of the strong views opposing the divine status of Mot are those projected by Healey, who argues that unlike other deities, Mot did not receive food offerings, and that his name is not listed in the standard list of gods (Healey 1986:29; cf. Handy 1994:106). Going back to the subject of hypostasis which we referenced earlier and as a compromise between the two contrasting views, there are those who continue to argue that Mot was an aspect (hypostasis) of El (Smith 1987:292-93).

The third and last deity we shall review on this level is Shemesh also known as Shapshu. Regarding this deity, the reader needs to be reminded that there was a time in Syria-Palestine when the worship of the sun as deity was acknowledged. Like most of the other deities, not much of this deity was known before the discovery of the Ugaritic texts. It is believed that most of what was known about this deity was derived from Shamash, the Mesopotamian sun-god (Wood 1916:72-74). It has long been observed that this deity did not have a gender, which makes it difficult for us to use either of the two appellations, he or she (cf. Handy 1994:107). Since this deity was not clearly attested in the wake of the Ugaritic texts, all the functions of Shamash, the Mesopotamian sun-god, were attributed to this deity which according to Wood (1916:72-74) included Law and justice, life and joy, divination and purification. Perhaps of even greater interest to our study is the observation that at Ugarit, the sun-goddess Shapshu was believed to be a spokesperson of El. As Handy (1994:107) observes, "She delivered El's word in an attempt to bring order to the pantheon [and] in this role she was portrayed as a representative of El and a preserver of order." If Shapshu was considered to be a spokesperson of El, an argument could be made that she might not have been an independent deity as such, but rather a personification (aspect) of El. In all this, the question is whether all the deities we have reviewed were independent deities in their own rights or at most mere figments that found their embodiment in El.

2.4.5 Third level deities in Ugaritic Pantheon

The gods who occupied this level in the pantheon have not been as much attested as those of the previous levels. As it stands right now, we probably know just one major deity from this level; and that is, "Kothar-wa-Hasis" (See Smith 1985:22-26, 463). For the most part, Kothar-wa-Hasis was believed to be the manufacturer of weapons for which he earned the designation, "craftsman deity" some of which Baal used to defeat some of his enemies such as, Yam (see Gordon 1961:93-94). Other than his craftsmanship which was employed in the manufacturing of weapons, Kothar-wa-Hasis is also said to have been skillful in the construction of temples and that he in fact did build one for Baal (Handy 1994:134). Under not so much verified suppositions, different traditions came up with deities they believed to be variants of the Ugaritic Kothar-wa-Hasis. For example, in Mesopotamia the god Ea was believed to be the equivalent of Kothar-wa-Hasis; while in Egyptian mythology it was the deities Ptah and Thot (Handy 1994:134-35).

2.4.6 Fourth level divinities (messenger deities)

The messenger deities occupied the lowest level in the pantheon. We shall not discuss them in detail in here as we have dedicated chapter three for their presentation. They basically existed to serve the deities of the higher levels in various ways including but perhaps not limited to carrying messages from one deity to another. Altogether, the Ugaritic pantheon structure probably looked like the following:

Fig. I: Divine council structure in Ugaritic religion

Level	deities
One	El, and Athirat (Asherah)
Two	Baal, and the 70 sons of El
Three	Kothar-wa-Hasis
Four	Messengers

2.5 Divine council in pre-exilic Israelite religion

2.5.1 Comparisons between Ugaritic and Israelite religions

If there is anything that the foregoing sections of this study have thus far established, it is that, Ugaritic religion was either syncretistic, polytheistic, or whatever term one might opt to use in describing a practise in which religious devotion is made to more than one deity. The records we examined have revealed that the belief systems of the traditions that comprised Syria-Palestine were centered around a pantheon of deities that formed an intricate hierarchical structure. As we have discovered, the Ugaritic structure was headed by the highest ranking deity, El, a responsibility which he sometimes shared with his consort, Asherah. Under circumstances which continue to baffle scholars to the present day, Baal has equally been presented as the head of the pantheon. Since we have already established that the Israelites, the worshipers of a god named Yahweh, existed within the environs of the Ugaritic and Canaanite peoples, the question that the present section wishes to address is whether or not they were exceptional of the syncretism or polytheism that characterized their neighbours.

Even before the religion of Israel is examined in light of that of Syria-Palestine as a whole, by way of making comparisons and contrasts, it is important that we understand the historical background of Israel as an ethnic or religious people group. For that, the question is whether the Israelites were immigrants to Syria-Palestine, or they had been there for as long as there were people in that part of the then world. By necessity, such a question seeks to establish two things; first, if they were immigrants, it could be argued that they may have practised their own religion different from that of the neighbours whom they found in the land. Secondly, if they had always been in the land, then it probably makes a case that it would be difficult to imagine them being different from their syncretistic neighbours. It must be noted however, that neither of these two positions is without exception. The proponents of Israel as an immigrant nation and thus a separate ethnic group have often employed such biblical passages as Exodus 34:11-16; cf. Judges 3:1-7; in which Yahweh instructed the Israelites not to make

any alliance or covenant with the people of the land of Canaan prior to their occupation of the land.[34] The immigration of the Israelites into Canaan has also been supported by the Merneptah stele, an Egyptian inscription dating ca. 1209 BCE; which happens to be the only record mentioning 'Isrir' or Israel (see Redmount 1999:97; Shaw and Nicholson 2002:183-84; Drower 1985:221; Bongioanni and Croce (2003:186). This stele testifies unequivocally that the Israelites once lived in Egypt in agreement with the biblical record (Exodus 6:1-8); which thus confirms the 'immigrant' or conquest hypothesis as some have referred to it (Clayton 1994:157).

In spite of the immigrant or conquest hypothesis which presents Israel as an exceptional religious people group, it has however, long been argued that Israelite culture cannot be separated from that of her neighbours in the ancient Near East (Coogan 1987:115).[35] Further, Gray (1965:155) observes, ". . . Hebrew religion was already a syncretistic product when it first appeared on the stage of history. Before that it had doubtlessly gone through several stages of syncretism, which now we can only conjecture with more or less probability." It has been argued that the designation "God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob" may be indicative of syncretism or polytheism in early Israelite religion in which each tribal group had their own god (see Burrows 1941:10). The designation 'Ancient of Days' of Daniel 7:13 has also been seen to be a reflection of the Ugaritic term 'ab snm' which means 'the Father of Years' as we have already noted earlier (see Gray 1965:155).

The actual role and status occupied by Yahweh in Israelite religion for example, has been a subject of much scholarly debate over the last one hundred years. As it may be expected, any attempt to understand his divine role has never been successfully done in isolation of the gods and goddesses of Canaan with whom he was closely associated (see Smith 2002:1). The reason for this is probably because of some of the factors we articulated earlier when we discussed the sources of Syro-Palestinian

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34 Following this view, scholars like Kaufmann (1960:134-47); Tigay (1987:37-41); cf. Smith (1973:389-95); have gone to the extent of denying the authenticity of both Baal and Asherah as recognized deities in Israel.
35 It is also important to note that some significant differences did exist between Israelite culture and that of the neighbours. On this, see Smith (1973:389-95).

religions. Prominent among such reasons being that ever since the discovery of the Ugaritic texts in 1929, and their revelation of the gods and goddesses that comprised the pantheon, scholars have been curious to know what if any, would be discovered from these texts about Yahweh, the god of Israel (Smith 2002:1-2). Traditionally, the view that has persisted among what we would call orthodoxy biblical scholars is that Israelite religion has almost always been monotheistic, that is, its adherents worshiped no other god but Yahweh; even if they acknowledged that other deities in fact did exist.[36] However, in spite of the view that the Israelites may have been a monotheistic people, and thus separate from most of the syncretistic people in Canaan, other scholars have never accepted such a thesis.[37] These scholars have generally posited that the Israelites might have in fact worshiped the gods of the Canaanites including Baal and Asherah at some point in their history. We will therefore proceed henceforth by investigating how the major Canaanite deities might have been adapted into Israelite religion.

2.5.2 Syncretism in pre-exilic Israelite religion

2.5.2.1 El in the Hebrew Bible

It has been observed that the attributes of Yahweh in the Hebrew Bible can be associated with one or another deity in Canaanite mythology (Walton 2006:101). We know from the Hebrew Bible that unlike the Canaanites whose supreme deity was El, the Israelites looked up to Yahweh as their God. However, the question of distinguishing between Yahweh and El will probably continue to attract scholarly research for years to come. The dilemma begins with a statement supposedly made by Yahweh himself, "I am Yahweh, I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as El Shadday, but by my name Yahweh I did not make myself known" (Exodus 6:2-3). This passage challenges us to revisit our

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36 Cf. Kaufmann (1960:142-47); Ringgren (1966:42, 58, 99); Fohrer (1972:127-30); Ahlstrom (1963:8); Cross (1973:190-91); cf. Smith (2002:3).
37 Ahlstrom (1963:23-24, 50-51); Ringgren (1966:24, 42, 95-96, 261); Fohrer (1972:58, 104).

conceptualization of the Israelite God. Going by this passage, the patriarchs (ancestors of the Israelites) worshiped El and other Canaanite gods long before the Exodus and entry into Canaan (see Gerstenberger 1996:67, 68). Subsequently, the Israelites under Moses came to worship a god named Yahweh and yet as stated, this god came to be identified with the god of the patriarchs as one and the same except they were known by different names. This is where biblical scholarship becomes really interesting. If everything said so far remains true, then it may arguably be asserted that not only was the god of the patriarchs and the god of Moses one and the same, but that even the gods worshiped in Canaan may have all been the same God known by different designations (cf. Smith 2004:153).

In light of this line of reasoning, it may further be argued that the gods worshiped in different ancient Near Eastern cultures including those of the 20th and 21st centuries may in fact be the same God under different identifications. With this identification of the two gods, it became inevitable that all the attributes of El became associated with Yahweh. Likewise, even the goddess Asherah who was long identified as El's wife also came to be identified as Yahweh's consort; while the astral family of El were equally adopted by Yahweh (Smith 2004:153). With regard to how monotheism came to be born out of Israel's pantheon, which as we have seen, was as complex as those of other traditions, Smith's (2004:154-55) has made some enlightening observations. He notes that the first step that Israel took in her promulgation of a monotheistic faith was to reject all foreign gods as non-existent, which he says equally applied to all of Israel's deities other than Yahweh. In order to accomplish that, he notes that Israel had to re-interpret her past faith. Thus some of the deities worshiped in Israel came to be viewed as vestigial (remnants) of the syncretistic past, while the rest were interpreted as foreign deities that somehow found their way into Israelite culture (Smith 2004:154-55).

Moreover, Smith (2001:142-43) argued persuasively that El, and not Yahweh, may have been the original deity worshiped by the ancient Israelites. He observes that the appellative 'Israel' does not contain the divine element of Yahweh but rather El's name as it ends with the element 'el.' He notes that

had Yahweh been the original god of Israel, we probably would have designations such as 'yisra-yahweh' or alternatively 'yisra-yah.' While we do not have reliable historical records tabulating the timeline of the patriarchs and then the Israelites in Canaan, Dever (2005:253) observes that the patriarchs may have entered Canaan early in the 2nd millennium BCE while the Israelites going by the date of the Marneptha stele would have entered Canaan ca. 1200 BCE. Based on this dating, it seems reasonable to argue that the patriarchs may have worshiped El the same way the Canaanites did; which was subsequently inherited by the Ugaritics; and later the Israelites following the exodus. It is no wonder therefore that in the Hebrew Bible the names of the Hebrew god as Gerstenberger (1996:69) cf. Cross 1997:46-7) observes, begin with 'El,' thus El-Bethel, that is the god El from Bethel (Gen 31:13; 35:7); El-Olam (Gen 21:33); El-Roi, that is, an El who sees me (Gen 16:13); El-Elyon, a god most high (Gen 14:18-20); El-Shaddai, an El of the mountains (Gen 17:1); and El-berith (Jg 9:4, 46), an El of the covenant.

Just like the Canaanite El, the Hebrew God is described as being the provider of progeny (Gen 15:1–2; 21:1–2; 24:60; 28:14; 49:25).[38] Both Yahweh and El are characterized as having had their abode or dwelling on the mountains (Cross 1997:55–56). A typical example for Yahweh in this regard would be mount Sinai from which he gave the law to Moses. In Gen 49:25 Yahweh bears the epithet 'Bull of Jacob,' which as we already stated was equally borne by the Ugaritic El. The god of Israel is said to have met Jacob at Bethel Gen 43:14; 48:3); which is usually translated "house of God" and yet Bethel could also be presented simply as "house/temple of El," with reference to the Ugaritic deity. Moreover, it has been observed that most of the epithets of the Hebrew God including El Elohay-Israel (Gen 33:20); El Elyon (Gen 14:18–24 ; Deut 32:8–9); El Olam (Gen 21:33); and El Roi (Gen 16:13) are all related to the ancestral God of Israel, El.[39]

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38   In the Ugaritic texts (I.ii.4) King Keret is quoted to have made a personal request to El, "Grant that I may get sons, grant that I may multiply kin (cf. Driver 1956:29).

39   See Cross (1997:49–60); cf. Smith (2001:48–49, 156–57).

2.5.2.2 Asherah in the Hebrew Bible

The goddess Asherah is equally well attested in the Hebrew Bible, with up to forty references. Her identification has often been torn between Asherahs in the plural, which characterizes her as nothing but a collection of cultic wooden images that were prevalent all across Syria-Palestine; and Asherah in the singular with reference to the goddess herself (see Judges 3:7; 1 Kings 14:13, 18:19; 2 Kings 21:7, 23:4). However, for theological reasons, some scholars have been more comfortable to view Asherah in plural terms thus implying the wooden images. Many scholars have been more comfortable with the identification of Asherahs as in wooden images rather than a goddess Asherah in the Hebrew Bible (see Day 2000:42). The reasons for such characterization could be in an effort to avoid venerating the goddess Asherah that would otherwise make her an equal or competitor of Yahweh. However, objects dedicated to the worship of the goddess Asherah have been attested in the Jerusalem temple itself signifying that whatever the case, Asherah occupied an important status in the cultus (see 1 Kings 15:13; 2 Kings 23:4, 7; 2 Kings 21:7; 1 Kings 18:19). For example, a statue of Asherah is said to have stood in Solomon's temple for two thirds the time of its existence, suggesting that she was probably worshiped alongside Yahweh in some form of syncretism (See Olyan 1988:13).

Like her association with El, the Ugaritic high god, Asherah has equally been characterized as Yahweh's consort (Hadley 2000:86-102). Some excavated inscriptions, one in the heartland of Judah, the other in the northern Sinai contains controversial blessing phrases with possible translations of "Yahweh and his Asherah" (Van der Toorn 1998:88-89). Other inscriptions excavated in Sinai read, "I bless you by Yahweh of Samaria and his Asherah;" while two other inscriptions use the formula: "I bless you by Yahweh of Teman (the South) and his Asherah" (Van der Toorn 1998:89). By way of promoting the exclusivity of Yahweh, it is believed that the Yahweh-alone party who possibly participated in the compilation of the Hebrew Bible, had rejected Asherah's divine legitimacy, which may explain why the Bible does not have language associating Yahweh with a consort (Day 2000:42).

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While scholars continue to be divided on the true status of Asherah in Israelite religion, it would seem that for the most part, the consensus is leaning towards the acknowledgement of Asherah as having been the consort of Yahweh the same way she was for El.[40]

Moreover, a considerable number of small, clay, female statuettes, which archaeologists usually refer to as "pillar figurines," have also been excavated across Israel dating to the 8th and early 7th centuries BCE, at the height of the Judahite monarchy (Kletter 1996:4, 40-41). Whichever way one looks at it, it is probably a fair analysis to say that these figurines characterized Judahite religiosity before the exile (cf. Keel and Uehlinger 1998:327). The goddess Asherah, considered to be an object in the Hebrew Bible, was taken to be evidence of tree worship in Judah and Israel (cf. *S*mith (1972:23). Of interest is the observation by Gerstenberger (1996:27) about the frequent references to the stone pillars (*massebab*) and the wooden pole (*'asherah*) against which the Old Testament warns worship (Ex 34:13; Deut 7:5; 12:3; 16:21-22; 1Kgs 14:23). He notes that while the 'massebab' was a representation of a possible male deity once worshiped in Israel, the 'asherah herself was no doubt a hebraized form of the goddess Athirat, consort of the gods and mother deity in Ugaritic religions. In short, in as much as Asherah was worshiped in Ugarit, so was she in ancient Israel.

2.5.2.3 Baal in the Hebrew Bible

Just like we noted traces of a possible Asherah worship in Israel, it has also been discovered that Baal or some kind of Baal deity was equally worshiped in pre-exilic Israelite religion (Kapelrud 1952:64-93; Smith 2002:43). Some archaeological finds have evinced the worship of Baal in pre-exilic Israel.[41] For example, cultic features including temples dedicated to the worship of Baal, small shrines, open-air sanctuaries, cultic altars excavated at Zorah, Megiddo and Tell en Nasbeh have all been attested. Cultic objects including libation bowls, pottery incense stands, steles representing deities, as well as other

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40   See the following: Grabbe (2000:214); Grabbe (1992:54-55); Keel and Uehlinger (1998:281-82).
41   For more details on Baal and other deities' worship in pre-exilic Israel, see Sitali (2014:13-36).

artificats relating to pagan worship, have all been discovered in pre-exilic Israel.[42] Another argument in favour of Baal worship in Israel is the prevalence of biblical polemics against such worship (see Jg 2:11-13; 3:7; 1 Sam 7:3-4; 12:10).

One way in which the cult of Yahweh has been identified with that of Baal is through Yahweh's conflict with the sea, which scholars have repeatedly postulated to have derived from the mythological Ugaritic conflict between Baal and Yam (Wyatt 2005:72). In the continuing comparisons between the two deities and their religions, some have been of the view that Yahweh was essentially some kind of Baal.[43] Even as Wyatt (2005:72) has rightly observed, the problem we find in our attempt to identify Yahweh with other ancient near Near Eastern deities is whether or not we can be able to demonstrate that the perceived similarities can be applicable to every other aspect of their cults. In other words, just because some similarities are noted between Yahweh and any other deity, does not warrant that the two are essentially one and the same. For example one notable dichotomy between Yahweh and Baal, is that whereas Baal is said to have once died and risen, we do not find the same phenomenon attested for Yahweh. That said, the challenge therefore is to find another way of accounting for the true meaning of the similarities that existed between Yahweh and Syro-Palestinian deities.

From the perspective of the advocates of an exclusive and distinct Israelite religion, the tendency has been that of seeing all deities known from the text of the Hebrew Bible as hypostases of Yahweh (cf. Smith 2001:74-76). McBride (1969:5) has described hypostasis as follows:

> a quality, epithet, attribute, manifestation or the like of a deity which through a process of personification and differentiation has become a distinct divine being in its own right . . . Such local manifestations, or hypostases, were not understood to be foreign gods adopted into a polytheistic pantheon. Rather they were abstract aspects of Yahweh that were personified and given substance.

Under the ideology of hypostasis, the mythological deities that were comparable with Yahweh and somewhat posing as his competitors all came to be identified as his manifestations or aspects. Such a

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42   Albright (1942:36-67); cf. Kapelrud (1963:3-16).
43   See Day (2002:71-72); Kloos (1986:93, 123-24); Smith (1990:12-1541-47); cf. Wyatt (2005:72).

characterization of the deities as it may be expected, must have been promoted by those who advocated for a monotheistic view of the Israelite God. Under hypostasis, the deities were not held to be functionally and essentially distinct from the god they represented. Rather, they served as his extension —implementing his will. Consequently, some passages in the Hebrew Bible which reference Yahweh's attributes such as "the Spirit of the Lord" (Isa 61:1; 63:10); and "the Glory of the Lord" (Ez 18:10) among others, have all been characterized as referring to Yahweh's hypostases.[44] Of interest is the view that 'glory' ". . . is not simply intended as an attribute or descriptive word about God; rather, the word *kabod* describes an observable phenomenon, something that is actually seen by people (Everson 1979:165). Without knowing all the facts upon which Everson bases this statement, it would be of interest to know how he compares glory as a hypostasis of Yahweh, with other hypostases such as the deities El, Baal, Asherah, and all others who have equally been described as hypostases of Yahweh. Whatever the case might be about the claim of hypostasis, I find it difficult to understand how such deities as Baal among others could be reduced to a hypostasis considering the polemics waged against Baal worship in the Hebrew Bible (see Josh. 24; 2 Kings 18:1-5, 10:18-28; Jer 2; Ezra 9:6-15). Why would the Bible attack Baal worship if Baal himself was believed to be a hypostasis of Yahweh? In view of such questions, it is probably fair to maintain that pre-exilic Israel worshiped other gods including Baal alongside Yahweh.

2.5.3 בְּנִי הָאלֹהִים in the Hebrew Bible

The attestation of the 'banei elohim' in the Hebrew Bible has long been established and we do not wish to repeat everything about it here. We will therefore only draw some parallels between its usage in the Hebrew Bible and the Ugaritic texts thereby making a case that the syncretism in Syria-Palestine characterized Israelite religion as well. The two main passages that scholars have often analyzed in an

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44   For the view that the Spirit of Yahweh entails hypostasis, cf. Koch (1970:885).

effort to discover its import are Genesis 6:1-4; and Deuteronomy 32:8. As it was pointed out earlier, El and Asherah were believed to be the parents of the divine sons in the Ugaritic pantheon (Handy 1994: 77-9). These divine children who occupied the second tier of the council have also been known as the "seventy sons of Athirat [Asherah]" (Smith 2001:45). In Ugaritic religion these divine sons were gods or 'great gods' to use Mullen's words (Mullen 1980:186). Scholars have continued to argue over the noun 'elohim, whether to translate it as gods in the plural or simply god in the singular. Perhaps a more convincing explanation is the one by Rollston, who says that the noun is morphologically plural and yet semantically singular, which he believes to be the context in which it is used in the Bible in reference to Yahweh.[45]

While context has often been a powerful tool in determining whether 'elohim is used in the plural or singular in a given passage, Steussy (2003:11) observes that in some passages 'elohim features both in the plural and singular. He cites Ps 82:1 for example and notes the following:

> Here, *elohim* has a singular verb and clearly refers to God. But in verse 6 of the Psalm, God says to the other members of the council, "'You [plural] are *elohim*.'" Here, *elohim* has to mean gods. In a few places, the meaning is unclear. In Gen 3:5, the snake tells the woman that when she and her man eat the fruit of the forbidden tree, "'you [plural] will be like *elohim*.'" Will they be "like God" (*New Revised Standard Version*) or like "gods" (*King James Version*)? We cannot say for certain.

To make a case in light of our study, it is those passages which refer to Yahweh the God of Israel in the plural that are problematic to the theology of the Hebrew Bible which is bent on a monotheistic view of Israelite religion. For how else can Yahweh be viewed in plural terms other than that the divine council concept in Ugaritic literature is equally evinced in the Hebrew Bible? In the context of the divine council in Israelite religion, Yahweh could only be viewed in singular terms in light of his status as head of the pantheon in which he was also elevated to the status of a national God (Rollston 2003: 102). As for the plural aspect, we can probably agree with Ringgren and Ake (1974:67-84) who suggest that it could simply be a remnant of early Israelite polytheism in which devotion was placed not in one

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45   See Rollston (2003:102); cf. Ringgren and Ake (1974:267-84).

god but many. An analysis of Genesis 6:1-4 has therefore been noted by scholars like Haag (1972:157) as a "fragment of mythical narrative" originating from Ugarit.

By way of tracking the adaptation of the Ugaritic council in the Hebrew Bible with reference to the 'sons of god(s),' Hendel (1987:16) observes that *bene-ha-elohim* are to be identified as the lesser gods who comprise Yahweh's assembly (Job 1:6; 2:1; Ps 29:1; Ps 89:7). Hendel goes on to make a case that these divinities had been with Yahweh from the dawn of creation (Job 38:7) and that they were the same ones who were subsequently apportioned among the nations (Deut 32:8). As he observes, the *bene-ha-elohim* of the Israelite pantheon are the counterparts of the *bn ilm* in Ugaritic mythology with whom they share a range of functions. Further, Hendel (1987:16) writes, "The chief god of the pantheon, El, is called *ab bn il,* "father of the sons of El," which indicates that the term *bn il* originally included the notion of the patrimony of El." In short what we find here is some kind of a replica of the Ugaritic divine council in the Hebrew Bible almost in every sense. A number scholars are somewhat agreeable that the 'sons of the god(s)' are reminiscent of the sons of El reflected in the Ugaritic texts (see Sitali 2014:32-36). For example Brueggemann (1982:71) observes that the sons in question are "lesser gods in a polytheistic understanding of the world (see Childs (1960:49). Westermann (1985:371), while supporting the idea that the sons were gods, has gone further to criticize those who think they were angels instead. Picking on Delitzsch, a proponent of such a view, he writes, ""It is surprising that . . . these scholars, who otherwise are so careful and precise, have not noticed that the two words are concerned with very different phenomena and occur in completely different contexts . . ." (Westermann 1985:371). We can understand Westermann's frustration against those who attempt to represent the sons of the god(s) as angels. It just doesn't make sense from whichever perspective you look at it because under no circumstance can the Hebrew 'banei' (sons) can be translated as 'malaki' (angels). In light of everything we now know about the divine councils evident both in the Ugaritic and Israelite religions, it seems convincing to deduce that there lies some striking

similarities between the Ugaritic El and the Israelite Yahweh. The identification between the two leading deities would likewise lead character resemblances between the 'sons of the god(s)' in their respective councils (cf. Parker 1999:794). The attempt on the part of some scholars to translate 'banei elohim' other than 'sons of god(s) has almost always been in an effort to preserve the monotheistic exclusivity of Yahweh. This is the point Rollston (2003:103) is making when he writes, "Certain segments of Judaism and Christianity have been slow to embrace the idea that early Israelite religion originally accepted a pantheon of deities (but with Yahweh as the national deity of Israel)." Based on the information we have reviewed, the structure of pre-exilic Israelite pantheon probably looked like the following:

Fig. 2: Divine council structure in Pre-exilic Israel

Level	Deities
One	El and Asherah
Two	Baal, plus sons (children) of El, Asarte, Resheph, etc
Three	Other lower ranking deities
Four	Messengers/ Angels

2.5.4 Reality of Josianic reforms

The reforms by King Josiah (2 Kings 22-23) have long been noted by some Hebrew Bible scholars as a turning point in Israelite religion.[46]   What seems to be assumed is that it was during this period that Israelite religion may have undergone some cult transformation; resulting into a cult purified of its Canaanite heritage, "cult centralization, exclusive worship of Yahweh, idol criticism and law-based religion" (see Pakkala 2010:201-2). Though not agreeing with all the purported impact of the Josianic reforms on Israelite religion, some scholars acknowledge that King Josiah just like Hezekiah (2 Kings

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46   For example see, Albertz (1994:199); (Albertz 2007:27-36); Davies (2007:65-77).

18:4), did transform the cult to some extent.[47] These observations or rather arguments are of interest not only to the present chapter but to the overall thesis of our study. The case we are making is that Israelite religion only became either mono-Yawhistic or monotheistic after the exile and any assertion to the contrary therefore poses a challenge to our hypothesis. It is for this reason why the Josianic reforms have become an important component in our study. The question therefore is whether or not the reforms did in fact happen; and if so, what actual impact did they exert on Israelite religion in the 7th centuries BCE, when they are believed to have taken place?

While there have been persuasive arguments in favour of the authenticity of these reforms, as is always the case, there have also been views to the contrary that have questioned particularly their historicity (Davies 2007:65-77; Grabbe 2007:204-207; cf. Pakkala 2010:202). As we shall see later in the study, when we discuss Israelite religion in the Persian period, the Josianic reforms have often been identified with Deuteronomy, a book which equally evinces cult reformation in Israel, thus positing that they might have been instituted within the same time frame (see Pakkala 2010:202; cf. Romer 2005:55). On this, we would have to get into another debate regarding the dating of Deuteronomy which itself has never been resolved with unanimity and for which we certainly do not have enough time and space at this time.[48] If indeed it is true as Pakkala (2010:203) observes that 2 Kings 23, in which the reforms are detailed is the most edited chapter not only in Kings but probably in the entire Hebrew Bible, then we have reason to hold on to our assumptions about the reality of the reforms with caution.[49]

Further to everything said this far, several factors have been cited that discredit the historicity of

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47   see Collins (2007:86, 150-51); Sweeney (2007:402-403, 446-49); and Romer (2005:55); cf. Pakkala (2010:201).
48   The dating of Deuteronomy has often fallen between the time of the Josianic reforms (7th - 8th century BCE), and the Persian period (539-333 BCE). The difficulty one finds is that not all the chapters of the book could have been written within the same time frame. I shall argue in this study however, that based on some historical and circumstantial factors, the portions that address the transformation of Israelite religion may be dated to the Persian period.
49   Textual redaction as we shall discover later in the study was apparently a big practise in the text of the Hebrew Bible. As it may be expected, the final text of the redaction process reflects the theological views of the redactors.

the Josianic reforms. From the outset, it has been observed that none of the biblical texts that are presumed to directly depend on 1-2 Kings such as 1-2 Chronicles makes any reference to such reforms in monarchic Judah (Pakkala 2010:204). If this observation is correct in every sense, it surely gives us reason to question everything we have believed about the reforms. For one thing, the text of Chronicles even as we shall notice later, is a composition that was put together by someone with a theological view intended to portray Israelite religion as a monotheistic one. That said, it surely would be surprising if such a compiler would ignore such reforms bent on promoting the exclusivity of Yahweh the God of Israel. Another reason that warrants doubt in the authenticity of the reforms can be derived from the religious experience of the Jewish community at Elephantine, Egypt. This Jewish group had emigrated from Judah in the wake of the Babylonian exile and certainly after the purported Josianic reforms. Their cultic practises evinced a syncretistic form of religion in which Yahweh was worshiped along with other deities, completely different from what the reforms promoted. Further, they are also reported to have decided to build a temple for Yahweh right at Elephantine, contrary to Jewish faith that demanded that the temple was only to be situated in Jerusalem as that was the only centre for legitimate burnt sacrifices.[50] The question therefore is, if indeed there were significant religious reforms in monarchic Judah, why is it that we do not find the impact of such reforms in the cultic practises of the Elephantine Jewish community who had immigrated from Judah? Again, this is another reason to question the historicity of the Josianic reforms.

It would seem that what we find in the so called reforms in monarchic Judah may really simply have been polemics aimed at attacking the syncretism that characterized pre-exilic Israel. As we observed earlier, there is no doubt that the two kings, Hezekiah and Josiah were bent on reforming Israelite religion into a form that would preserve Israelite devotion exclusively to Yahweh. They certainly attacked all foreign forms of the cultus including standing stones, holy trees, Asherah, Baal,

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50 For a detailed presentation of the cultic practises that characterized the religion of the Jewish community at elephantine, see Gerstenberger (2011:126-39); Boccaccini (2000:391); Rowley (1958:257); cf. Pakkala (2010:204).

and astral deities all of which as Pakkala (2010:207) observes, were "worshiped as Yahweh's hypostases." However, in view of what has been noted this far, it is probably a fair analysis to contend that the reforms in question were not reforms as we would want to understand them but rather polemics at best. Unless all these observations can be challenged otherwise, we will continue to build on the thesis proposed by the present study that pre-exilic Israelite religion remained syncretistic until sometime after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 587/6 BCE (see Noth 1967:91-5).[51]

2.6 Conclusion

When we introduced the present chapter, we undertook the task of evaluating and comparing the religions of both Ugaritic and pre-exilic Israelite religions; and that is just what we did. While the main focus of our study was on the nature of pre-exilic Israelite religion, Ugaritic became indispensable because it offers an original native record not only of Ugaritic religion but also that of other ANE traditions including Canaan and pre-exilic Israel. Unlike the text of the Hebrew Bible which was written long after the events it recorded, which has also gone through extensive redaction, the Ugaritic texts provide us with the actual text used by the ancient people of those traditions. Regarding the extant sources we reviewed, we cannot overemphasize the need for caution in the manner we use them. We discovered that while we appreciate the invaluable data they contain, without which we would know close to nothing about religion in the ancient world, it is equally important that we do not rely on any single source to the exclusion of the rest. The main reason for this is because most of our sources have missing portions through wear and tear considering their age. It is important therefore that we complement the insufficiency of each source with other sources that may possibly have what is missing from all others.

It has long been argued in ancient Near Eastern studies that the religions of Syria-Palestine,

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51 This study will continue to contend that only during the Persian domination of Judah did Israelite religion become monotheistic, that is, the belief in one God while denying all others.

including Ugarit and Canaan among others, were either syncretistic or polytheistic. Our task however, was to prove whether or not pre-exilic Israelite religion was equally syncretistic. A review of an early Hebrew Bible passage (Ex 6:2-3) has shown that while the Israelites came to worship Yahweh under Moses, the truth is that their ancestors—the patriarchs, had worshiped El, the Canaanite god. Based on the evidence we evaluated, it would seem that all the cultural groups of people back then were worshipers of the same god, El; but who would assume a new name at the time of Moses during the Exodus. Our critical analysis of the epithets borne by El has revealed that Yahweh the god of Israel equally bore the same epithets. Thus epithets including but not limited to 'bull of Jacob,' El-Elyon, El Olam, and El-Roi, which were traditionally borne by El, had equally become associated with Yahweh the god of Israel.[52] Another striking similarity between the Israelite religion and that of Ugarit/ Canaan, is the usage of the designation בְּנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים which may be rendered 'sons of the god(s)' or 'children of the god(s).' In the Ugaritic religion as we have already elaborated, these beings occupied the second level of the pantheon in a polytheistic setting, and we would also emphasize that they were fully fledged deities. Likewise, our review of Genesis 6:1-4 has shown that these divinities are equally attested in the Hebrew Bible and probably under the same status. While the tendency among some Bible scholars has been one of relegating these divine beings to that of Angels or something else, it has been argued persuasively by other scholars that Genesis 6:1-4 evinces remnants of Israel's early polythiesm.

Moreover, two events that could potentially argue in favor of pre-exilic Israelite monolatry and thus contradicting the thesis of this research, are the reforms by Kings Hezekiah and Josiah (2 Kgs 18:4) and (2 Kgs 22-23) respectively. However, our critical analysis particularly those by King Josiah has raised questions regarding the historicity and thus authenticity of such reforms. In the wake of the Babylonian invasion, a group of Jews had fled Jerusalem and went to Settle at Elephantine, Egypt. Had there been some significant reforms that translated into a transformed religion in Jerusalem, the same

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52   See Gen 33:20; Gen 14:18–24 ; Deut 32:8–9; Gen 21:33; and El Roi Gen 16:13).

would have been evinced in the cultic practises of the Jews at Elepahntine. Instead, the religion practised among the Elephantine Jews was as syncretistic as it could get, as they worshiped Yahweh along with other deities. In view of all these compeling facts therefore, we contend along with Gnuse (1997:180) who sees pre-exilic Israelite religion to have originally been consistent with that of polytheistic Canaan, but later transformed to a monotheistic one:

> In our new perspective we recognize that there were not two religions . . . There was one religion undergoing a transformation, like a butterfly in its cocoon undergoing change until it would burst out and fly. The struggle in early Yahwism in the pre-exilic period would lead to the bursting out of monotheism in the exile.[53]

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53   While acknowledging that 'formative' monotheism may have been born during the exilic period, this study, as we have stated before, builds on the hypothesis that exclusive monotheism was only realized in the Persian period during which time the books of the Hebrew Bible were brought together into something closer to their present state (cf. Gerstenberger (2011:384, 387).

CHAPTER 3
MESSENGER DEITIES IN THE UGARITIC AND PRE-EXILIC ISRAELITE RELIGIONS

3.1 Introduction

In chapter two, it became clear that pre-exilic Israelite religion was as syncretistic as all other religions in Syria-Palestine. Almost all the deities attested in Ugaritic texts were equally evinced in the text of the Hebrew Bible in one way or the other. As we shall discover later, it has been strongly argued by some, that in fact the tendency to worship other gods alongside Yahweh may have continued even long after the exile. To that effect, Smith writes, "[syncretism] was dominant in the cult of Yahweh at Jerusalem to the very last days of the first temple."[54] However, the present chapter is dedicated to an analysis of a special class of beings that arguably would transform Israelite religion from one of syncretism to a monotheistic one; that is, the messengers (angels). As the general introduction to this study has already pointed out, these beings had facilitated the development of monotheism in Israelite religion through their replacement of all possible competitor deities against Yahweh; leaving him as the only legitimate God. These messengers were believed to have originally been gods or sons of gods who were later transformed into angels who were to serve Yahweh as his messengers and servants.[55] Commenting on the transformation of the messengers, Grabbe (2000:224) observes that the gods worshiped in pre-exilic Israelite religion were 'demoted' to the status of angels and demons after the exile. In view of Israel's strong monotheistic drive which permeates the text of the Hebrew Bible, some of the issues regarding the status of messenger deities include questions like: What was their origin? What were their names or designations if any? What were their roles or functions? Above all, the most critical question especially with regard to their status in early Israelite religion is whether or not they were divine beings? Whichever way this question is addressed would require further elaboration. For

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54   Smith (1987:19-21, 35).
55   Grabbe (2000:224).

example, if it is to be argued that they were divine, we would have to explain how any divine beings would co-exist with Yahweh, who was posited to be the only divine being in Israel, without conflict. Likewise, if it is to be answered the other way round, that is to say they were not divine, we would still have to explain how the divine Yahweh would relate and interact with non-divine beings without discord. In order to address these questions, we will begin by presenting a discussion on the nature of messenger deities in the Ugaritic texts where they are well attested after which we shall evaluate their status in the Hebrew Bible.

Moreover, this discussion will not be complete until we discuss the similarities and differences that might have existed between Israelite and Ugaritic religions in their conception of messenger deities. Any similarities in this regard will contribute to the overall thesis of the present study, that pre-exilic Israelite religion, like any other ancient Near Eastern tradition, was polytheistic. Any differences on the other hand, will not only isolate Israelite religion as having been a rare case of a monotheistic faith but will also lead us to investigate when if ever, might have been the turning point at which Israel 'evolved' from a syncretistic faith to a monotheistic one. It is important to mention here that studies on the status of the beings we have come to know as angels, both in Ugaritic and the Hebrew Bible, have been ongoing among ancient Near Eastern and biblical scholars for a long time. In the recent past, Palomino has done an in-depth study on the subject in his doctoral dissertation entitled "Lesser Gods of the Ancient Near East and the Old Testament."[56] Following in his footsteps, Handy has equally done a commendable job of outlining not only the status of messenger deities in Syria-Palestine, but all other known deities who later came to be equally attested in the text of the Hebrew Bible.[57] More recently, Cho has also done an excellent job of analytically elaborating on the names, titles and, roles of messenger deities in both Ugaritic and the Hebrew Bible.[58] This study and the present chapter in

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56   See Alomia (1987:1-577).
57   Handy (1994:65-167) is one of those who have argued for a four tiered pantheon in Ugaritic religion, described from the top as: Authoritative Deities, Active Deities, Artisan Deities and, Messenger Deities.
58   In Cho's (2007:137-200) presentation, he uses the designation "Lesser Deities" in reference to all other deities other

particular will utilize some of the findings from these sources in order to make the case that the beings characterized as angels in the Hebrew Bible were originally deities in Syro-Palestinian religions including that of pre-exilic Israel.

3.2 Messenger gods in Ugaritic religion

3.2.1 Titles of messenger deities in Ugaritic literature

As we already stated in chapter 2, messenger deities occupied the lowest level in the Ugaritic pantheon (Handy 1994:149; Smith 2004:101-02). This class of deities was identified by different names and titles. In discussing the titles or names of messenger deities, it is important to note that from time to time these deities may be identified by different names based on the task or role that they may be performing at the time. Thus, in addition to being messengers, which in itself is descriptive of a role, they may also be known by a different designation based on their mission at the time (Cho 2007:138). An example in this regard is that of the two messenger deities of Baal who, when sent to Anat, were identified by different designations including *'glm* (*m*), *'nn ilm, dll or dd*[59] The first messenger title we shall evaluate is *mlak,* which as Handy (1994:152) observes, has come to be understood in Western religious literature as 'angel.' It derives from the Ugaritic root *l'k* which carries the idea of sending or 'to send' a messenger, or sending a messenger to deliver a message.[60] In order for us to get the intended import of Ugaritic *mlak,* it is important that we track its possible cognate terms, especially in the major Semitic as well as non-Semitic languages. In the Sumerian culture of Mesopotamia, for example, they used the term Sukkal in reference to a messenger deity. As Meier (1999:46) observes, "[Sukkal] could designate a position of intimacy and authority second only to one's lord or mistress." From this observation, it seems that messenger deities occupied an important position in their respective

than El and Yahweh respectively, and for the most part comprise the messengers and servant deities. However, on the status of those he has singled out as messenger deities.

59   See KTU 1.3 iii 32; KTU 1.3 iv 5; KTU 1.4 vii 45; KTU 1.4vii 46 respectively. Cf. Cho 2007:138.
60   For the idea of sending a messenger, see Driver (1956:158); Rad (1964:76)—cf. KTU 1.2 i 11 and KTU 1.4 v 41. Moreover, for the idea of delivering a message, see KTU 2.14.7.

pantheons which as already stated, was only second in rank to that of the sending deity. It needs to be stressed therefore, that under no circumstance was the messenger ever considered to be either equal or above his superior deity, making it clear that a messenger served his master in a subservient capacity. Further, the fact that there was intimacy between the superior deity and the messenger is also worth noting. With such intimacy, which probably translated into a harmonious relationship, it was to be expected that either parties were comfortable within their respective statuses without rivalry. Of interest is the Akkadian cognate for Messenger, 'Suk-kal-lu' (Sukkallu) which entails a vizier or personal assistant to the gods (Alomia 1987:219).[61] Again, each of these cognate terms explicitly suggests that messenger deities were not competitors but rather subservients of their superior gods.

Perhaps nowhere is the intimate relationship between superior gods and messenger deities more elaborate than in the hymn addressed to Enlil (cf. Kramer 1963:121):

> When, in his awesomeness (Enlil), he
> decrees the fates,
> No god dares to look on him,
> Only to his exalted vizier,
> the chamberlain Nusku,
> The command, the word of his heart,
> Did he make known, did he inform,
> Did he commission to execute
> his all-embracing orders,
> Did he entrust all the holy laws,
> all the holy decrees.

From this hymn, it is not only evident that messenger deities served their superior gods by running their errands, but that they unequivocally enjoyed an intimate relationship with them. As viziers of the superior gods, they were privileged to a knowledge of the will and plans of their masters more than all other deities in their pantheons. In Ugaritic literature, one of the named messenger deities is *Ilsu*, often referred to as 'ngr il, that is "divine herald" or *ngr bt b'l* "divine herald of the house of Baal" (cf. Alomia 1987:233-34). Through all these cognate terms referring to messenger deities, what is

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61   The messenger role was not exclusively designated to male deities, as it was equally assigned to female deities as well.

indisputable is the fact that they existed solely to serve their superior gods. While it is true that they were divine beings, their divinity did not put them on the same level of authority as their master gods. Of interest is the way the messenger deities conducted their mission in Hittite religio-cultural settings in which the messengers were to carry a staff, on which there was a symbol of the particular god whom they represented (Alomia 1987:230). It would seem that such a staff signified that the messenger was not on his own mission each time he carried it, but rather on the sending god's mission.

Another title of the messenger deities in Ugaritic literature is 'glm, which may be translated into English as, "lad" or "youth" (see Wyatt 2002:58; Oldenburg 1969:191; cf. Cho 2007:140-41). Thus we find the messengers of Baal, Yam, Mot, and Athirat, all bearing the designation 'glm with its various translations.[62] The designation of a messenger deity as 'glm with the translation of "lad" would be of interest not only in the context of the Hebrew Bible but in Jewish culture as well. In Mark 16:5 for example, the three women are said to have found a young man, youth, or lad in the tomb of Christ who told them Christ was risen and was no longer there. The question is whether or not the conception of angels as youths or lads may have traditionally originated all the way from Ugarit through ancient Israel into Jewish culture. Moreover, it would not be a far fetched idea to postulate that the reason angels were conceived as lads of youths was probably due to the nature of their mission or work. As messengers, angels were expected to run errands of their master gods, which in itself demanded that they be strong and energetic such as youths would normally be.

The designation *'glm* has also been translated as "heir" particularly from the construction 'glm il which is to say, an heir of El (Wyatt 2002:184). Others have also translated *'glm* as "servant," thus someone who renders service to another, usually of a higher status (cf. Driver 1956:29). Of interest also is the postulation that 'glm could mean an "agent god," that is, a special being who carries the duties of

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62   For the messengers of Baal (Gupan and Ugar) see KTU 1.3 iii 8; 1.3 iv 5; 1.3 v 15; 1.4 v. For the messengers of Yam see KTU 1.3 i 13, 19, 39. For the messengers of Mot, see KTU 1.6 vi 8. For the messengers of the goddess Athirat, see KTU 1.4 ii 29.

serving as an assistant to a high ranking god (Wyatt 2002:417). Considering what we now know about the mission of the messenger deities, that they were considered to be special assistants to their respective master gods would not be surprising. This idea of an agent god seems to have sparked some scholarly response in which it has been associated with different connotations. For example, Herdner (1978:32) thinks the designation may mean a young god. For his part, De Moor (1978:162) suggests that the designation may be in reference to Baal. While a precise definition of 'glm with an aspect of being an agent god (messenger deity) may not be exhaustively rendered, what seems clear is that all these designations put together are a reference to a class of subservient deities who operated under master gods. Along with the messenger deities' designations of *mlak* and 'glm, another popular title is the Ugaritic *'n n* which has been translated variously as 'divine cloud,' or 'divine laborer.'[63] The etymology behind this designation is of great interest. As Cho (2004:147) observes, it is posited that it originates from a background in which it signified being poor, afflicted or humble. It is further observed that the second *n in* Ugaritic *'nn* which is a nominal suffix, adds the meaning of one who is submissive such as would be expected of a servant (Good 1978:436-37). It has likewise been observed that the Arabic form of Ugaritic 'nn which is *'anna* carries the idea of 'presenting oneself,' to intervene or probably to mediate.[64] It has well been noted that these different epithets *'nn* or *'anna* have often been employed in reference to the messengers of El (KTU 1.1 iii 17) and Baal (KTU 1.4 viii 15) in the Baal Cycle (Cho 2007:148). Perhaps there is no better conclusion on the character and identity of the "clouds" in question than that of Wyatt (1992a:422) who writes, "The clouds are to be seen now as companions, now as a vehicle for the god. The very chariot is animate and divine." Assuming Wyatt is

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63   In general terms, 'nn refers to clouds (see KTU 1.4 iv 59). Scholars have long established that this Ugaritic designation is the equivalent of Heb. עֲנָנ—clouds (see *BDB* 777-8; *HALOT* 857-8). In its Hebrew context the term implies a deity (see Mann (1971:21-22; 1977:96); Van Zijl (1972:22); Clifford (1972:112, 125); Wyatt (1992a:422); cf. Cho (2007: 147).

64   The idea has been expanded by Cassuto (1971:137, 167) as 'representatives'; by Driver 1956:79, 89, 97) as a lackey or servant; by Kaiser (1962:60, 242) and Oldenburg (1969:192) as 'devotee;' and by Renfroe (1992:24) as 'helper' or 'assistant.'

correct in every sense, this observation continues to make a case that the messenger deities, in spite of whatever name or epithet they may be known, existed solely to serve their master gods. As we have argued before, they did not consider themselves as competitor deities but rather subservient beings.

Messenger deities in the Ugaritic texts have also been known by the designations, '*dll* and '*dd* both of which tend to carry the same meaning. It has been suggested by some authors that the epithet '*dll* could mean something like 'guide,' that is, someone who carries the duty of guiding something or someone (see Albright 1933:18; and Driver 1956:154; cf. Cho 2007:152). That messenger deities could be guides in Ugaritic religion is not crystal clear, bearing in mind that their duties were carried out between gods. However, the messenger task of being guides would be unquestionable in Israelite religion where as we shall discover later, messengers operated between Yahweh and humans. Thus, it is to be understood that as guides, these messengers (angels) would serve to guide humans in their endeavor to understand God and other related religious issues. The Aramaic cognate (dalilu) renders '*dll*, as "broker" or someone who mediates between two entities (see Margalit 1980:169, 245; cf. Cho 2007:152). Likewise, the Akkadian cognate, *dayyalu/ dajalu* which literally means inspector, has been contextually translated to mean "courier, messenger or mediator" (See De Moor (1971:168).

Regarding the naming of messenger deities in Ugaritic literature, it seems that not many of them are known by name. As it stands at the time of writing this dissertation, only two pairs of named messenger deities have been well attested, which includes Baal's messengers—Gupan and Ugar; and Athirat's messengers—Qadesh-and-Amurr (see Cho 2007:155). It has been observed by some scholars that Ug. *gupan*, is probably the equivalent of the Heb. (גֶּפֶן) and Akk. *Gapnu* which carries the connotation of "vine."[65] For his part, Cassuto (1971:131) posits that it probably translates Heb. (גָּנֵף), which may be rendered as "wing." On the other hand, Ugar has been thought to have originated from the Akk. Ugaru which means 'field' (see Albright 1941:41). Alternatively, it could also be rendered as

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65   See Albright (1941:41); Pope (1965b:284-85); and De Moor (1971:53).

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'agaru' which would then carry the meaning "hireling" (see Cassuto 1971:131; cf. Cho 2007:156). Going by some of the derived meanings of the names of these messenger deities, for example 'wing' or 'hireling', they still seem to fall within the corpus of their nature and mission. That is to say, they continue to be identified as agents of their supreme gods. Further, it has also been arguably suggested that being the only ones named in Ugaritic literature, these messenger deities could be a prototype of the archangels Gabriel and Michael, who happen to be the only angelic beings named in the text of the Hebrew Bible (Cho 2007:294).

Moreover, in view of all the epithets we have reviewed, the underlying meaning of Ugaritic *mlak* continues to be 'messenger' in spite of the different semantics brought about by the different linguistic cognates. This is particularly true based on whichever translation is rendered for KTU 1.4 vii 45—*dll al ilak l bn ilm mt 'dd l yd il gzr*—which has been translated as "I shall surely send a messenger to divine Mot, an envoy to the beloved of El, the hero" (cf. Gray 1965:53-54; Renfore 1992:87).[66] Again, while these messengers were divine beings as attested in Ugaritic texts, it remains true that ontologically they were of a lower class. They did not consider themselves to be equals of their master gods, nor did the master gods consider them as such. Rather, they faithfully served their superior gods in subservient capacities. This fact will become even more significant in the text of the Hebrew Bible in light of Israel's promulgation of a monotheistic faith.

3.2.2 Roles of messenger deities in Ugaritic literature

As Cho (2007:137) has observed, it would seem that all the deities other than El were generally identified as lesser deities, and that these deities had designated roles of which that of messenger, while it may have been the main one, was in fact just one of them. The following is his observation in this regard:

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66   Ugaritic *dll* or Ar. *Dalilu* (messenger) in KTU 1.4 vii 45 has variously been translated as 'guide' (Albright 1933:18).

The roles of the lesser deities in the Ugaritic texts and the Hebrew Bible can be arranged broadly as messengers, warriors and others such as mediators, guardians, chanters or servants. Among them, the "messenger" role is taken as one of the primary tasks of their mission in the Ugaritic texts and the Hebrew Bible.

From this observation, it would seem that while the messenger role was one of the primary tasks carried out by the lesser deities, it surely was not their only responsibility. Evidently, different classes of lesser deities carried out different designated tasks.[67] That being said, our main concern in the present section is to discuss the role of the messenger deities; that is, the lesser deities who were categorically designated as such. For as Alomia (1987:218) has pointed out, there were in fact certain gods whose sole mission was that of messenger. Stressing the role of message delivery as the messengers' primary role, Handy (1994:159) likewise writes, "Their entire existence, as presented in the surviving Ugaritic literature, consisted of a highly restricted series of actions, all related to the conveyance of divine communication." Thus, there is no question that the main role of the messenger deities was the delivery of messages between the major gods. The message conveyance role was so characteristic of the messengers so much in fact that the messengers simply became the messages they delivered (cf. Handy 1994:160). All so, because the messengers repeated the message they delivered verbatim (cf. KTU 1.2.I.17-19; 33-35). Put differently while describing the same concept, the messengers were representatives or simply extensions of the gods who sent them on errands (Handy 1994:160). In other words, what made these messengers essential was not anything intrinsically embedded into their nature but rather the message they were to deliver on behalf of their master gods.[68]

Right from the outset, it is important that we take into consideration an important observation made by Handy (1994:149), "In performing this function, the messengers delivered the text of their

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67 However, as we shall discover later, some deities who did not typically belong to the messenger deity category, had occasionally performed the role of messenger either under El the supreme god or under some other major deities.

68 The reader is encouraged to note how this insignificance of the messenger gods in Ugaritic literature will unfold as we discuss it in the context of Israelites whose monotheistic drive denied the existence of other divine beings beside Yahweh.

superiors' speeches without amplifying the content, adding their own comments, or in any way inserting themselves into the job." From this, it seems evident that messengers occupied such a low status in the pantheon from which they did not even have the power to make decisions. Any activity they performed relied solely upon their master deities. They were obedient servants whose duty was to implement the will of their masters. Another way in which their subservient status in the divine assembly is attested is the fact that they had to meticulously take specific orders on how the message was to be delivered to the recipients. A practical example in this regard is evident from the manner in which Yam sent his messengers with a message to the divine council (KTU 1.2 i 13-19). In this text, Yam instructs his messengers regarding some protocol they needed to follow before delivering the message to the recipient.

Further, reading from KTU 1.16 iv, though heavily damaged, it is evident that another duty of the messenger deities was to summon all the gods in the pantheon to meetings that were duly called for by El. Thus Ilsu (ngr il—"divine herald") is one of the named messengers sent to the gods, summoning them to attend a meeting with El.[69] An important observation worth noting is that in all their message delivery missions, or whichever way they were engaged, the messenger deities did their work diligently —that is, promptly, willingly, and correctly (see Alomia 1987:234, 240). This submissiveness on their part seems to have been an important virtue which qualified them for the nature of work they undertook. Only a submissive heart can be able to do the work of a servant with unquestionable success. Regarding the role or function of messenger deities in Ugaritic literature, we need to stress that at no time was their mission extended to humans beings, as they operated between gods. As Handy (1994:161) notes:

> They are not depicted as mediators between the gods of the higher levels and the human world. When the gods in Ugaritic narratives communicated with people, they did it directly.

69   For the translation of 'ngr' as divine herald, see Driver (1956:156-57; cf. Alomia (1987:234), n. 4.

Communication between the gods in *De Dea Syria* and their devotees was also direct, through the statues representing the gods in their temples"

Moreover, as one of their roles, Ugaritic messenger deities were believed to have the power to help sterile couples dealing with issues of infertility (see De Moor 1980:305-10). It is not very clear how this role was carried out in practise.

3.2.3 Order of message delivery in Ugaritic literature

In the procedure of receiving and delivering messages, it is noted that the messengers literally prostrated themselves before the superior gods as a way of paying homage and thus demonstrating their subordination (Alomia 1987:232), n. 1. In KTU 1.3 iii 10 for example, Baal, in sending his messengers to Anat instructs them, "at the feet of Anat bow and fall down; pay her homage and honour her, and speak to virgin Anat, say to the Beloved of the Powerful One; 'Message of valiant Baal, word of valiant Warrior'" (cf. Wyatt 2002:77). It is generally observed that prostrating oneself before a superior being, such as a god in ancient Near Eastern culture, was a way of acknowledging one's inferior status comparatively (see Gruber 1980:292). Thus, each time the messenger deities received orders from the sending gods with the specific instructions including that of prostrating before the gods, they were perpetually reminded of their low and subordinate status in the pantheon.

As observed by Alomia (1987:232), the communication between gods through the messengers could be viewed as a three phased procedure which involved the sender through the messenger to the recipient and then the recipient back to the sender through the same messenger. Elaborating on this procedure, Alomia (1987:232), n. 2 notes:

> The triple procedure can be formulated in a general way as: (1) the "sending" or "charging" of the message by the sender to the messengers, (2) the "conveying" of the message to the addressee, (3) the 'answer" of the consignee to the received message, usually through the same emissaries who transmitted the former communication. This typical pattern is seen in KTU 1.3 iii 9-31 with the charging of a message to Anat from Baal through the messengers. Then in KTU 1.3 iv 7-20, they convey the message of Baal to Anat, and finally in KTU 1.3 iv 22-32, Anat responds to Baal

through the same messengers.

The procedural steps followed in the dispatch of messenger deities may be more or even fewer in some cases depending on which perspective the author may be focussing on; yet in principle, the different views seem to be underscoring the same thing. In the case of Alomia as we just saw above, the procedure of dispatch could be summarized into three steps. Though different from Alomia in wording, Cassuto (1971:42) equally sees the procedure of messenger dispatch to be three phased.[70] For his part, Cho (2007:163) has expanded it into five parts.[71] Moreover, Del Olmo (1980:52-62) unlike all others sees the dispatch procedure to comprise four steps.[72]

Regarding the procedure of message delivery, it was not uncommon for the supreme gods to send some of the major gods instead of the messenger deities. An example to this is found in KTU 1.4 12-41, in which Attart asks Anat to convey her message to Baal. Likewise, Attart and Anat are presented as Baal's messengers before El, the head of the pantheon (KTU 1.4 iv 13-18).[73] It would seem that under circumstances not so much clear to a modern reader, the superior gods had the pleasure of sending some of the senior gods who may have probably willingly complied (Alomia 1987:233).

Ugaritic epistles often began with a three-part heading though admittedly, the order of the contents differed from letter to letter. A typical Ugaritic letter as observed by Handy (1994:160; cf. KTU 2.12.1-5; 2.13.1-4; 2.10.1-3):, would thus begin with wording looking something like the following:

1. *l* + proper name ————————— to so and so
2. *rgm* ————————————— say!
3. *thm* + proper name/ title ————— a/ the message of so-and-so

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70 1. Sending god's instruction to the messenger; 2. Delivery of the message to the recipient; and 3. Recipient's reply to the message (cf. KTU 1.1; 1.3).
71 1. The sending of messengers by their sender; 2. The travelling of messengers; 3. The arrival of messengers; 4. The delivering of the message to the recipient; and 5. The return of messengers.
72 Message, reaction, incantation, and binary forms (order-execution, invitation-acceptance, and deliberation-communication (cf. Cho 2007:163, n. 143).
73 In this procedure, Attart and Anat were sent to the supreme god El, in order to solicit him for a new palace that needed to be built for Baal (cf. Alomia 1987:233).

As a way of emphasizing accuracy and specificity, attention was often placed on the need for repetition of the message both to the messengers and the recipients. Thus in KTU 1.3 iii 20, Baal stresses to his messengers "Let your legs hurry to me! For I have a word that I would say to you, a message that I would repeat to you...(see Cassuto 1971:41; Wyatt 1999:256-58).[74] In light of this revelation, messenger deities at Ugarit did not have individual volition, that is to say, they did not have the freedom to express personal will, as they operated solely under the higher ranking gods' direction (Handy 1994:151). Again, this would only mean that in their major role of conveying messages, they had to do so without questioning any aspect of the message whether or not they understood it.

Another fact we need to mention is that while the major gods had the privilege of sending any messenger deity of their choice, it would seem that they had specific ones with whom they were associated and thus communicated. This is particularly true as we have already referenced the case of Baal who had Gpn and Ugr as his special messengers (see KTU 1.4 vii 53-55). Like Ugr and Gpn who were often sent on missions together, it also seems to be an established order in Ugaritic literature that messengers were often sent in pairs.[75] In Ugaritic literature, messenger deities could also be female deities—thus instead of dealing with male messenger gods alone, the text could also read "messenger goddesses" (see KTU 1.16 iv 3-4, 7-8, 11-12).[76] In due course, we shall find out how this may have featured in Israel's view of angels, whether or not female angels are attested. It is probably in view of these observations put together that it has been observed by some that messenger deities were considered to be nondescript, adding that they were not treated in detail as individual beings whose legitimate status was defined by their role as messengers, and whose authority was derived from the

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74 It can only be assumed that the reason why there was so much emphasis on repetition in the message to be delivered was probably a way of authenticating that the message did not originate from the messenger but from the high ranking gods. Thus as already stated, it was to ensure that the messenger delivers the assigned message without himself inserting into it or for some reason tempted to modify its content.

75 Ginsberg (1944:29); cf. Kapelrud (1952:82).

76   Since the major reason for discussing messenger deities in Ugaritic literature is to discover how the concept of messenger deities (angels) was adapted in Israelite religion, it would be interesting how the question of angelic gender was dealt with.

sending gods (Handy 1994:151; cf. Sitali 2014:94).[77]

Moreover, further making a case on the fact that the messengers were subservient beings in the Ugaritic pantheon, it has been noted that on occasion Yam could dispatch his messengers with the words *tb'. 'lm[m*—which has been translated as "Depart boy[s."[78] Following this translation, the messengers in question are equated to boys who as it may be expected, should take orders from those perceived to be older and superior to them. Putting all these observations into perspective, we cannot overemphasize the fact that the messengers occupied the lowest status in the Ugaritic pantheon, and that they faithfully served their master gods without complaint. While they played an important role in the daily affairs of the pantheon, at no time did they compete for mastery with their masters.

3.2.4 Theophany of the Messenger deities in Ugaritic texts

This sub-section seeks to explore the question regarding the divinity of the messenger deities in Ugaritic religion. The question is whether or not it can be demonstrated from the extant sources that the messengers were as much divine as any other deity in the Ugaritic pantheon. One way in which such a question may be explored and thereby arrive at some kind of conclusive answer is by going back to some of the designations or epithets we already reviewed, by which the messengers at Ugarit were known. Prominent among such designations are *'nn,* and *g'lm,* both of which carry the idea of *mlakm* or messengers. As we saw earlier in the present chapter, while *'nn* has been variously translated, some of the most significant translations under the current context include "divine cloud" or "divine laborer" (cf. Wyatt 1992a:422). Whichever way one looks at it, an analysis of these translations compel us to conclude that the messengers in Ugaritic literature were believed to be divine beings. Likewise, while *g'lm* has been translated as 'servant,' still, there are those that have explicitly rendered it as 'an agent god' (Wyatt 1992a:422) or even 'a young god' (see Herdner 1978:32). Again, the idea that these

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77   This observation will be of particular interest on how it might have been adapted into Israelite religion in which Yahweh was considered to be the sole legitimate deity without competitors.

78   Cf. KTU 1.2 i 22-24.

messengers were divine or gods is perceivably persistent in these sources (see Handy 1994:157). In view of these arguments, we can agree with Alomia (1987:237) who observes that the epithets or names of these messengers "appear with adjectival constructions with ilm that unequivocally indicate their divine nature" (cf. KTU 1.4 viii, 15; 1.3 iv 32).

Another argument in favour of the divinity of the messengers in Ugaritic literature can be drawn from the experience of Baal's messengers who were sent to the goddess Anat. In KTU 1.3 III 32, when Baal's messengers approached Anat, it is believed by the authors of the text that she actually saw gods. Thus, the translation of (Ug. *hlm.'nt.tph.ilm)* renders "Lo, Anat saw gods" (cf. Handy 1994: 157). It has also been observed that when the messengers of Yam appeared before the gods of the pantheon with Yam's message, the gods fearfully paid homage to them (KTU 1.2 i 23-24). Thus the Ugaritic passage (*t'gly ilm risthm l zr brkthm w l kht zblhm b hm*), translates into: 'The Gods lowered their heads onto their knees, and onto the thrones of their princeships' (cf. Cho 2007:175).[79] Thus far, we have seen that it was the duty of the messenger deities to bow or prostrate themselves before both the sending and the recipient major gods each time they were in the business of transmitting messages. However, in the context of the tablet here under discussion, what we find is a reversal of the norm in that it is the major gods instead who bow before the messengers. Thus what we find here is an unprecedented order of doing things. According to Wyatt (2002:60), n. 108, "It is presumably the text on the tablets, carrying Yam's demands, which cows the gods, rather than the messengers themselves." All the same, whatever explanation may be given regarding this phenomenon, it probably does not rule out the divine status of the messengers.

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79 With a combined effort by different scholars, some key words in (KTU 1.2.i 23-24) have been analyzed, all of which emphasize the fact that the gods did in fact pay homage or bow before the messengers of Yam, thus acknowledging their conceivable divine status. For a partial bibliography, see the following: De Moor (1971:68, 232); Driver (1956:79); Clear (1976:4); Gibson (1978:4l); Coogan (1978:87); Pardee (1997:246); De Moor (1987:32); Smith (1994:266); cf. Cho (2007:175).

Furthermore, the arrival of messengers in Ugaritic literature was often associated with the appearance of light. Thus we read in KTU 1.2 i 31-33 regarding the arrival of Yam's messengers: "As a blaze they appeared; a sharpened blade was their tongue." Considering that we are so far removed from the times of the Ugaritic culture, we would probably be in a better position in our bet to understand the 'light' theophany by drawing some parallels from comparable occurrences in the Hebrew Bible. Thus, Cho's observation at this time is of essence, "This scene is reminiscent of an action that Moses took before the messenger of Yahweh appeared as a blazing fire (Ex. 3:1-6). The awe, which the gods in the pantheon felt, may be the same that Moses felt whilst looking upon the flaming appearance of the messenger at Sinai..." (Cho 2007:178). Thus like the burning bush (light) theophany witnessed by Moses evinced the presence of a deity, the light associated with Ugaritic messengers could also signify divine presence.

3.3 Messenger deities in early Israelite religion

3.3.1 The origin of מלאכים in Israelite religion

As we discovered in chapter two, pre-exilic Israelite religion had a lot in common with that of Ugarit. Thus, it is not uncommon to find Ugaritic religious features mirrored in Israelite religion, especially in the biblical literature exclusive to the early or pre-exilic period. In light of this realization, it is incumbent upon us that we draw clear parallels between the two religious traditions regarding their conception of messenger deities. Thus, the messengers' characteristics evinced in the Ugaritic texts shall be tracked in the literature of the Hebrew Bible, carefully paying attention especially to the differences between them. Such differences will be considered to be a result of textual redaction following Israel's dedicated effort to promote monotheism in which they were to purge the text of the Hebrew Bible of its Canaanite heritage. It is important to note that belief in angels has never been

exclusive to Israelite or Jewish religion, as it is well attested in other traditions too.[80] The question of

the origin of the מלאכים (messengers, angels) in Israelite religion has not been resolved with unanimity.

Among divergent views, there are those who argue that belief in angels may have originated from the

'pagan' cultures surrounding and possibly even prior to the emergence of Israel (Smith 1972:445-46; cf.

Handy 1994:152). Before we analyze this belief, Handy's (1994:152) elaboration is worth noting:

> According to this theory, belief in "angels" formed part of the less-knowledgeable system of beliefs
> that existed prior to the development of a pure monotheism. The retention of beliefs in these beings
> in the literature of the biblical books was seen as an example of the tenacity of ingrained religious
> ideas even when a superior religious vision has supplanted them.

In hindsight, Handy raises very important issues that need further analysis. If indeed belief in angels

originated from a less knowledgeable system of beliefs that existed before the development of

monotheism, then we might as well say arguably that belief in angels has a pagan origin. And if so,

then there are two possible explanations regarding the belief's incorporation into Israelite religion. First,

in all probability, it has to be argued that Israelite religion itself must have once been as syncretistic as

all the other belief systems from which the belief in angels originated. This conclusion is made based

on the fact that monotheism, the belief in one god while denying the existence of all others, was a late

development in Israelite religion as Handy points out. Before this development therefore, we have no

reason to deny that pre-exilic Israel shared in the less-knowledgeable belief systems which presumably

among others, included the expression of faith in multiple gods. As Handy has elaborated, it is without

question that even after Israel's 'newly found faith' of monotheism, traces of paganism, syncretism, or

simply polytheism have persistent in the text of the Hebrew Bible as remnants of a practise that was

once Israel's own. Thus, as we have already argued in the previous sections, the beings that came to be

identified as angels were once divine beings (gods) both in Israel and the rest of the ancient Near

Eastern traditions. Secondly, if indeed Israel once expressed faith in multiple gods just like all other

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80   Many authors have demonstrated that belief in angels is attested in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic faiths. For a
      bibliography, see: Murata (1987:324-44); cf. Handy (1994:152), n. 11.

traditions in Syria-Palestine, then we also have to find an explanation on how Israel broke away from such gods while upholding the status of messengers or angels. Obviously, the question then is, how did the turning point come about in Israelite faith, which led to Israel's distinction from all other traditions?

The other interesting view about the origin of belief in angels asserts that angels were a much later formulation by some Jewish theologians in order to fill the place left by the now non-existent belief in gods other than Yahweh.[81] This belief is better understood in light of our findings in chapter two, in which we discovered that the idea of a pantheon was common to both pre-exilic Israel and other ancient Near eastern traditions. When Israelite religion became a monotheistic faith, we would imagine that they were faced with the challenge of upholding such a faith while recognizing the other divine beings alongside Yahweh in the pantheon. Again, probably no author at the time of writing this dissertation is more elaborate on Israelite dilemma on this issue than Handy (1994:153):

> In this theory, belief in "angels" provided a theological position that allowed for nondivine yet supranatural beings to carry on the responsibilities previously understood to have been the duties of various Syro-Palestinian deities. When the belief in several gods was no longer recognized and only the one god, Yahweh, was believed to control all things, angels were perceived as obedient to, and extensions of the one true god. These heavenly beings were not thought to have come from the native religious world of Syria-Palestine but to have developed in Jewish communities under the influence of Persian religion.[82]

While these two views may sound different from each other, essentially they seem to be in agreement and thus complementary. For one thing, they both tend to acknowledge that pre-exilic Israel once practised some form of syncretism. The difference between them seems to be a matter of priority rather than substance. That belief in angels came from a less-knowledgeable belief system before the development of monotheism, does not contradict the fact that Israel's theologians had subsequently formulated a similar belief for the purpose of harmonizing it with their now developed monotheism. In other words, Israel's theologians used an already established belief (angelology) as a tool which helped

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81 For a bliography on how this transition in belief from one of many gods to one, see: Handy (1994:153).
82 This view will proor a bivide a basis or platform upon which to evaluate the hypothesis which is at the core of my dissertation (thesis), which is that the gods once worshiped by pre-exilic Israel were all 'demoted' or reduced to the status of angels in the Persian period, making Yahweh the only legitimate God. Throughout the remaining chapters —4, 5, and 6, I will be endeavoring to authenticate this hypothesis.

to promote monotheism while acknowledging the multiplicity of other deities in existence, but who did not pause a threat or competition against their sole deity, Yahweh. Thus, if Israel's theologians deserve credit, it was for their initiative to reduce the status of all other deities to that of messengers so that there was only one legitimate God while the rest were to serve as his servants or messengers. Otherwise, the concept of angels was really not their own initiative or formulation as it has been suggested. Again, both of these views shall be the basis of our discussion in the chapters that follow.

Moreover, while using different words, Tuschling (2007:13) for the most part seems to agree with the views presented above regarding the origin of the belief in angels. He argues that by the time Judaism emerged, some subordinate divine beings (angels) existed among the pagan cultures that lived within the environ of the Jewish people. Even more important in light of our study is his observation that these angelic divine beings were "a relic of the pre-monotheistic early Israelite past; they represent a continuing tension within monotheism from the beginning" (Tuschling 2007:13). A strong assertion has been made that the beings that came to be identified as angels in the Hebrew Bible were originally gods in Canaanite/Ugaritic religion (Tuschling 2007:14). It is contended that such titles as "sons of God" (banei elim) in the Hebrew Bible (e.g. Ps 29:1) have been interpreted as angelic titles (Tuschling 2007:14). Overall, all these observations put together, are aimed at making a case that the religion of the Hebrew Bible and that of Canaanite or Ugaritic traditions are of a common origin. It is evident in these sources that the author is of the view that originally angels were as much divine as any other being in the Syro-Palestinian pantheons, and that until Israel's promulgation of a monotheistic faith, angels were as much gods in early Israel as they were in Canaan. As Tuschling (2007:14) further observes, "this shows angels being used to safeguard monotheism; similarly, Biblical statements about God which were later held to be theologically unacceptable were attributed to angels. However, the title 'benei elim' in Psalms 29:1 probably originally indicated full divinities."

From all the three views on the origin of belief in angels stated above, the recurring view seems

to be that angels served to safeguard monotheism. Tuschling's statement that angels were 'a relic of the pre-monotheistic early Israelite past' is an acknowledgment of the hypothesis pursued by the present research, which is that, angels were originally gods who were later 'demoted' to the status of messengers or servants. As Tuschling has rightly observed, without some form of theological intervention, these angelic beings would continue to pose some tension within monotheism. This is to be understood as implying that having the existence of any divine beings alongside Yahweh would not be compatible with monotheism—the belief in one god while denying all others. Based on this analysis, the initiative by Israel's theologians to 'demote' the messenger deities to a non-divine status therefore, paved way for the compatible co-existence of monotheism and angelology. However, a mere declaration of any of these assertions without substantiation does not amount to fruitful research findings. As I stated in my proposal to the present research, we shall spend more time and space attempting to substantiate in practise just how the messenger gods became identified as messengers or servants.

However, scholars like Eichrodt (1967:195) does not see the origin of angels from the same point of view as that of the scholars we just discussed. While he acknowledges that angels serve as intermediaries between the high gods and mankind in different religions, he does not believe that angels were once gods who were 'demoted' to the status of angelic beings. Rather, he sees a two fold origin of angels: First, that angels owe their origin to Israel's bid to empower their God by equipping him with a heavenly court populated by the angelic beings; and secondly, that angels originated from the ubiquitous animistic belief in spirits which was probably inherent in most cultures at the time (Eichrodt 1967:195). In rejection of the view that angels could have originally been gods who were subsequently 'demoted' to the status of angels, Eichrodt (1967:195) writes:

> It is therefore completely unnecessary to suspect that behind these angelic beings stand the gods of an earlier time, who were stripped of their sovereign status and degraded to the level of servants of Yahweh only as a result of Mosaism. If so, then Israel's forefathers must have had a monstrous

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number of gods! Furthermore it becomes increasingly apparent that it is mistaken to picture the foundation of a religion as necessarily involving the absorption of the deities that preceded it by, so to speak, taking them on a domestic staff and giving them sinecure positions.

Either views, that is, those who argue that angels were former gods demoted to the status of angels, and Eichrodt who is against such a view are convincing in their own rights. That being said, in order for one to take an informed position, it is important to address these views in light of the whole topic under discussion. One such aspect of the topic that can shed light on the identity and origin of angels is "The Names and titles of messengers in the Hebrew Bible" which immediately follows hereafter. As it will be discovered, the fact that angels in the Hebrew Bible bear designations that were borne by deities in the ancient Near East tends to be a persuasive argument that angels may have originally been gods in early Israelite mythology.

3.3.2 Names and titles of messenger deities in the Hebrew Bible

While scholars have observed that the verbal root *lak* from *mlak* is not attested in the Hebrew Bible, it has equally been noted that when the mem (m-) prefix is attached, we end up having the noun mlak denoting messenger).[83] Following this observation, it has been suggested that Heb. malak may be a loan word probably borrowed from Ug. *mlak* (Meier 1999:45). Meier thinks that *malak* could probably be "a relic of a once more generative root that otherwise disappeared in Hebrew because of a semantic overlap with a preferred and less specific term שָׁלַח 'send' (Meier 1999:45).[84] Of interest is the observation that while *mlak* almost always denotes divine beings in the Ugaritic texts, it could be used in reference to both human and divine messengers in the Hebrew Bible (e.g. 1 Sam 11:4; 1 Kgs 19:2)[85] The messengers in the Hebrew Bible are really nothing but a representative extension of Yahweh's

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83   See for example, Meier (1999:45; cf. Cho 2007:181).
84   The preference for a less specific term in the broad context of our study may fall under the topic "Textual redaction" which we shall discuss later in chapter six.
85   As we have already stated and will continue to do the same throughout this study, it must have become a welcome practise in Israelite religion to identify the messengers in question with human beings considering that Israel was bent on promoting a monotheistic faith in which Yahweh was the only legitimate God

presence, authority and activity (Ps 103:20).[86] Cho's (2007:182) elaboration on the polymorphic nature of the term mlak in the Hebrew Bible is informative:

> Since humans could be perceived as messengers dispatched from Yahweh, it applies to his human messengers: sc. prophets (Isa 44.26; Hag 1.13), priests (Mal 2.7), and kings (l Sam 29.9; 2 Sam 74.17, 20; 19.28 [ET 271]). In some biblical narrative passages, it has been difficult to identify which figure this term represents due to its polymorphic usage to indicate either a human or divine messenger (cf. Judg 2.1-4; 5.23; Mal 3.1; and Eccl 5.5)':13. Hence it may be determined in the context of the text.

Based on the polymorphic nature of the word mlak in the Hebrew Bible as Cho has succinctly elaborated, it is incumbent upon the reader to analytically determine when the term is used in reference to a human or a divine being. More often than not, understanding the context aids in making such a determination. It would seem that the tendency to use mlak and its respective cognates for both human and divine beings is not exclusive to the Hebrew Bible tradition.[87] An important observation regarding the usage of the word malak in spite of its different cognates is that almost always, it altogether carries the connotation of one who is a "lesser agent" of a master.[88] Up to this point in the discussion, it still remains that messengers in the Hebrew Bible like in Ugaritic literature, are equally subordinate beings who serve their supreme god. Thus, the messengers in the Hebrew Bible exist to serve Yahweh, who is not only supreme but the only legitimate God.

In the text of the Hebrew Bible, only two angelic beings are mentioned by name, that is, Gabriel (Dan 8:16; 9:21) and Michael (Dan 10:13, 27; 72:l).[89] While it is not crystal clear why this is so, it is probably not too far fetched an idea to think that in light of the continuing bid to promote Yahweh's monotheistic exclusivity, the authors of the text may have deliberately done so as a way of down

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86   Cf. Meier (1999:46); Sitali (2014:95).
87   Noted cognate messenger terms and their respective traditions in which they are used for both human and divine beings are attested in Cho (2007:182), n. 233.
88   See Moore (1895:185).
89   Dating the book of Daniel has never been established with unanimity by scholars as views are split between the 6th C. BCE and the 2nd C. BCE. Attempting to enter into such a discussion at this time might really just cause a deviation from the topic at hand. Our major concern at this time therefore is to know that the book of Daniel, understandably written sometime after the exile, is the only canonized book that mentions angels by name. For a discussion on dating the book of Daniel, see Archer (1994:423-424).

playing the messengers' prominence which would otherwise have threatened the exclusive status of Yahweh. As we already discovered, it is possible that in the pre-exilic period, the Israelites may have recognized and probably even worshiped the gods recorded in the Ugaritic texts who as this study will continue to argue, were subsequently converted to messengers.[90] The meanings of the names of these two messengers essentially make a case in favour of their subordination to Yahweh. The name Gabriel for example, from 'geber' (strong man),[91] has been translated variously to mean either 'strong man of God' (Alomia 1987:450); 'God is great' (White 1975:618); 'God has shown himself strong' (Brueggemann (1962:332); or "God is my strength" (Davidson 1967:117). More recently, the name Gabriel has been understood to mean God is my hero/warrior.[92]"

An important observation about Gabriel is that he exhibits the appearance of a man (Dan 8:15) in which case he is characteristically referred to as "the man Gabriel"—(וַיְהִי בִּרְאֹתִי אֲנִי דָנִיֵּאל אֶת־הֶחָזוֹן וָאֲבַקְשָׁה בִינָה וְהִנֵּה עֹמֵד לְנֶגְדִּי כְּמַרְאֵה־גָבֶר.),[93] translated as: "When I, Daniel, had seen the vision, I tried to understand it. Then someone appeared standing before me, having the appearance of a [strong] man," (NRSV). The emphasis on the humanity of Gabriel continues to support the argument that Israel's theologians were bent on promoting Yahweh's monotheistic exclusivity in the text of the Hebrew Bible after the exile. However, that messengers in the Hebrew Bible were divine in spite of Israel's move to suppress such divinity may be argued from Dan 7:16. Arguably, "one of those who were standing by," who made the interpretation to Daniel could have been a divine being because only a divine being incomparable to Daniel in wisdom and understanding could have undertaken such a task.[94] Again, the

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90 This study has dedicated the whole of chapter two discussing the question on whether or not pre-exilic Israelite religion was as syncretistic or polytheistic as that of Ugarit. While this author has determined that this was indeed the case, the reader is encouraged to carefully go through the material and make own conclusions on the subject.

91 On the usage of geber (גבר) See Kosmala (1968:160)—Kosmala elaborates that (גבר) carries the sense of a "male person who distinguishes himself from others by his strength, or courage, or uprightness, or some other quality".

92 See Fitzmyer (1981:328); and Collins (1999:338).

93 See Collins (1999:338). In this case, Gabriel was described by the seer in anthropomorphic terms See Porteous (1965:127); cf. Collins (1993:304-10).

94 See the explanation by Collins (1993:311); cf. Cho (2007:184), n. 244.

point to be made in all this is that while the authors of the Hebrew Bible frantically ensured that angels, formerly messenger deities, were to be striped of their divinity, it still remains that remnants of such a status were not altogether eradicated, making a case that the angels of the Hebrew Bible were originally gods.

Turning on to Michael, the only other angel mentioned by name, we discover that the name is mentioned three times in the Hebrew Bible, and that all references are only in the book of Daniel (10:13; 21; 12:1). The name Michael means "who is like God?" (Mach 1999:569). It could alternatively mean simply, 'one who is like God' (Barton 1912: 157-58). The reference in Daniel 12:1 describes him as "a great prince" which no doubt makes him a prominent and probably a heavenly being in Israelite religion (cf. Mach 1999:569). While the angel Michael is mentioned only in the book of Daniel as we have already seen, it seems that the name Michael itself may be found in several other early biblical books including some New Testament references as well (Jude 9, Rev 12:7). However, since our interest for now concerns how it relates to angelology in early Israelite religion, we shall focus on its origin and usage in Israel. Some of the attempts made in the quest for the true origin of Michael have led some scholars to associate him with the Canaanite god, *Mikal* whose name derives from the root *yk'l* which means 'to be able' (see Mach 1999:569). While this identification of Michael with the deity *Mikal* may not be unanimously accepted among scholars, the fact that an angel can be identified with a god, itself makes a case in favour of the hypothesis that angels in Israelite religion were originally gods. In the Akkadian tradition, the equivalent form of Michael is Mannu-ki-illi or Maniki (see Alomia 1987:455 n. 2).The name was also attested in documents found at Nimrud dating to the 7th century BCE (See Segal 1958):139-45; cf. Alomia 1987:455, n. 3).

Other than Michael's identification with the Canaanite deity Mikal, and its usage with reference to angels, the name itself has been well attested in early Israelite history. It seems that, almost always, those that bore the name Michael were somewhat identified with greatness of sorts. For example, an

Isaacharite who bore the name was also designated "the chief man" (1 Chr 7:3). Likewise, David had a warrior whose name was Michael (1 Chr 12:20). Moreover, one of the leaders of the exiles who returned from Babylon along with Ezra was also named Michael (Ezra 8:8) (cf. Alomia 1987:454 n. 3). In view of these observations, it seems crystal clear that in the minds of the Israelites, the name Michael and even more so as it related to an angel carried the connotation of someone who was great and always available to provide leadership to his people in times of need. It is also probably fair to conclude that the Israelites may possibly have been familiar with the character named Michael before Daniel came to identify him as an angel. It is in light of this last supposition that the identification of Michael with the Canaanite deity Mikal comes into play. Michael, may have been a name of a foreign deity they might have possibly worshiped in syncretistic pre-exilic Israel, who subsequently came to be identified as an angel in the wake of the monotheistic campaign after the exile.

With regard to angel Michael, all three references in Daniel describe him with the designation of being a "prince." Thus in (Dan 10:13) he is referred to as אַחַד הַשָּׂרִים—"one of the princes." In Dan 10:21 he is referred to as מִיכָאֵל שַׂרְכֶם—"Michael your prince." And then in Dan 12:1 once again he is referred to as מִיכָאֵל הַשַּׂר הַגָּדוֹל—"Michael the great prince." In order to grasp the true import of these references, we need to understand the idea behind the designation "prince" as used in these verses. It has long been noted that the noun שַׂר (prince) appears some 421 times in the Old Testament, and that for the most part it is used to describe the high ranking profiles of persons in their politicl, private, cultic, and religious life (see Alomia 1987:456). Synonyms would include words like chief, captain, governor, ruler, and steward. Of even more interest in light of the present study is that the designation is equally used in reference to military commanders, both of earthly (Judg 4:2; 1Sam 17:55); and heavenly (Josh 5:14-15) armies; and also that in some messianic sense, it could reference God himself (see Mckim 1979-86:3, 971; cf. Alomia 1987:456).

As Collins (1999:662-63) has noted, the best way to understand the idea behind the usage of

'prince' is to go back in time to the ancient Near Eastern world during which the deity was viewed from a divine council perspective. Back then, as adduced by such passages as Deut 32:8-9 the most high God had "apportioned a ruler over every nation, but Israel was the Lord's portion."Worth noting at this point is Collins' (1999:663) observation, "It should be noted that in the Hebrew Bible prior to Daniel, the Lord serves as ruler of Israel, a role given to Michael here." In the context of the divine council paradigm, the Lord (YHWH) was a subordinate god who presided over the nation of Israel under the supreme God, El. That being said, in light of Collins' statement, when YHWH became the supreme God of the Israelite divine council, the angel Michael, the prince took that role as his subordinate deity. Obviously the rhetorical question that would arise out of this is whether or not Michael at one time in the history of Israel could have been as much a god even as YHWH was. If he was, the question again is how did he transform into the angelic status? If he wasn't at all, again the question is why would he play that role in the post-exilic era which was originally exclusively YHWH's? As the reader may notice, addressing these questions within the broad context of the present research would no doubt lead us to possible conclusions that angels could have been deities prior to the development of exclusive monotheism in Israelite religion. Furthermore, the polymorphic ontological nature which we earlier talked about in the case of Gabriel, seems to have equally applied to the angel Michael in that both angels bore human characteristics in addition to their possible divine otherness. Also, based on the references about Michael in Daniel, one senses that there exists a hierarchy among the angelic beings in which Michael himself seems to be at the top of the ladder. This can be observed from the case in which Gabriel recognizes Michael as belonging to the class of principal princes as well as being a great prince who alone can render help beyond what any other angelic being can afford.[95]   For all this, Alomia's (1987:457) comments are informative:

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[95]   One senses the authority of the angel Michael above all others from reading some of the references to him in the book of Daniel in which he is described as an exceptional prince (e.g. Dan 10:13).

As one looks at the usage of [שׂר] sr in Daniel, one notes that the pattern of use is the same:
it properly points to a person of heirarchichal authority. It is used no less than 17 times—12 for
human dignitaries—referring to important persons, not only for those of the kingdom of Judah but
also including Babylonian dignitaries and the rulers of the persian and Greek empires. In addition,
he also uses it to indicate heavenly characters. Thus, unquestionably the term also ought to convey
the same clear meaning of high position and authoritative heierarchy when it is applied to the
angelic characters."

Now that we have discussed the only two named angelic beings in the Hebrew Bible who both

happen to be in the book of Daniel, we shall now present and discuss some other designations by which

angels have been characterized in Israelite religion. The Hebrew Bible is replete with different words

by which angels are characterized. Perhaps we do well to begin with Eichrodt's observation who says,

"With the conception of Yahweh as the God of heaven all kinds of figures of the supra sensible world

are inseparably connected, which may be subsumed under the general heading of *angels*" (Eichrodt

1961:194). Other than the *mal'akim e*pithet which we have already looked at, angels have also been

referred to as בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים "sons of god" (e.g. Gen 6:2; 4; Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7; and Deut 32:8). Other

variants to this designation include בְּנֵי עֶלְיוֹן "sons or children of elyon" (Ps 82:6); and בְּנֵי אֵלִים "sons or

children of elim (Ps 29:1; Ps 89:7). The fact that these messengers (angels) are characterized as sons or

children of the gods in each of these variants essentially grants them the likelihood of being divine

beings (see Parker 1999:794). Regarding the designation בְּנֵי אֵלִים, for example, Parker has observed that

אֵלִים is preceded by the word "assembly" in Ugaritic texts (cf. KTU 1.4 iii:14) which makes it

somewhat confusing whether to render it as "assembly of the children of El", "assembly of the children

of the gods", or "assembly of the divine beings." However, he is pursuasive in his suggestion to say,

"the simplest solution is to assume that *bn ilm* was understood as an idiomatic periphrasis for 'the gods',

i.e. 'the divine beings'" (Parker 1999: 794). What makes translation of these designations rather

confusing as Parker and other scholars have long observed lies in part due to the difficulty with which

the divine names אֵלִים and אֱלֹהִים are to be rendered whether plural or singular (see Burnett 2001:1-152).

More often than not, scholars have had to depend on the context in order to make a determination.

Whatever line of thinking one might adapt, it seems evident that all these designations are well fitting titles for the beings we have come to know as angels. It is undeniable that sometimes we would have to make a determination on when the designation is refering to the superior deity such as Yahweh in the case of Israel or El in Canaanite mythology, and when it is an explicit reference to angels. However, it is increasingly becoming clear that in most of those traditions where these designations have been used, the references have been to angels for the most part. In the Hebrew Bible for example, the designation, בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים "sons of (the) god(s)" tends to be strongly linked with the *malakim* (angels). This is evident from an analytical reading of Job 1:6; 2:1and 38:7. Moreover, in light of the subject at hand, these designations assigned to angels tend to argue in favor of the line of thinking that mesengers or angels were originally conceived of not only as divine beings, but possibly as deities in their own right.

Angels in the Hebrew Bible have also been identified by the term קְדֹשִׁים, literally "the holy ones" (Ps 89:6, 8; Job 5:1; 15:15; Zech 14:5; Dan 4:14). The term is a noun, masculine, plural—thus holy masculine beings. In our attempt to identify the *kadoshim,* an analysis of the root *QDS′* in most ancient Near Eastern traditions has shown that it is often used in connection with a deity. In the Ugaritic tradition for example, *QDS′* was often used as a divine epithet which could refer to the supreme god El, but sometimes could also refer to some cultic personnel.[96] Other than it being an epithet, *QDS′ was* portrayed to be a particular deity on some Egyptian monuments believed to be of Canaanite origin. This assumption however, has found resistence in ANE scholarship (See van Koppen &. van der Toorn (1999:415). The Masoretic Text (MT) renders the adjective קָדֹשׁ—"the holy One" as a name for Yahweh (van Koppen &. van der Toorn 1999:415). Similarly, some Bible passages attest that this term refers to Yahweh. However, as observed, the lack of a prefixed article makes the references to Yahweh to be either singular (Isa 40:25; 57:15; Hab 3:3; Job 6:10) or plural (Hos 12: 1; Prov 9: 10;

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96   On the interpretation of קָדֹשׁ as an epithet for El, see Pope (1955:43-44); and Van der Toorn (1996:326).

30:3).[97] That the root קֹדֶשׁ with reference to Yahweh could be either or both singular and plural takes us back to the much debated form, Elohim, which depending on the context can be treated as such. While scholars like Noth (1967:226) observing from Dan 7:21 have observed that the designation may be referring to human beings, the argument put forth by Collins who supports the view that they are divine beings is more convincing. In view of the attack on what he believes to be the heavenly host in Dan 8 comparable to the one in Dan 11:36, Collins (1993:319-20) has argued persuasively saying, "these events are understood as an assault on the heavenly host and ultimately on God himself." Putting all this into perspective, the only plausible explanation about the identity of the קְדֹשִׁים, "Holy Ones" is to postulate that they are divine beings (lesser deities) in the company of Yahweh (cf. Job 5:1; 15:15). Again, in view of the overall thesis of the present study, it would seem that angels may have originally been identified as deities in ancient Israelite mythology; but as we shall discover in the latter chapters, they may have been maintained in Israelite religion in form of messengers subordinate to Yahweh the only legitimate God.

Another designation for Angels in the Hebrew Bible is אַבִּירִים —a*bbirim* (Ps 78:25). While most Hebrew Bible versions have gone on to translate this designation as "angels" the Hebrew word itself may be literally translated as the "mighty ones." We read in Ps 78:25 that the Israelites were fed by God with the food of the 'mighty ones.' Most translations including (LXX, Vulg., Syr.) render the 'food of the might ones' as angels' food. Thus we also find LXX (Ps 77:24, 25) rendering the designation as 'angels' (cf. Alomia 1987:459). It is probably with such understanding in mind that most versions have rendered it as such; which explains why the Wisdom of Solomon (Wis 16:20) would read "Thou feaddest thine own people with angels' food." The root אַבִּי (abbir)—mighty (one) has long been known to be an epithet for Yahweh (cf. Isa 49:26; 60:16; Ps 132:2-5) which might have originally applied to El as well. It carries the idea of one who is strong and powerful such as would be characteristic of

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97   For an analysis, see Van Der Toorn (1996:326).

rulers and heroes (Sam 21:8; Isa 10:13; Job 24:22; 34:20; Lam 1:15).[98] Some have observed from such ancient texts as KTU 4.33:26; 4.628:5 that the designation especially as it applies to Jacob (thus *abir yacob)* would be an epithet for the storm god in Canaanite mythology (see Kockert 1999:573). Whatever the case, the fact that an epithet that applied to gods in mythology and subsequently to Yahweh could also apply to angels offers us the need for further research on the original nature of the angelic beings. Again, the question is, could it be that angels were once gods before they came to be identified as angels in the Hebrew Bible? In view of all the foregoing, answering such a question in the affirmative would not be far from reality.

3.3.3 Functions of messenger deities in the Hebrew Bible

It has long been noted from the text of the Hebrew Bible that angels undertake different resposibilities. Among others, there are those who bless and praise Yahweh (Ps 103:20); Others communicate between heaven and earth (Gen 28:12), while there are also those who protect the God-fearing believers from harm (Ps 91:11-12). As Meier observes, angels in the Hebrew Bible serve as representative extensions of Yahweh's authority and activity.[99] Going by the original usage of מלאך, Meier (1999:47) notes that strictly speaking the designation 'messenger' was only assigned to those that God sent on missions with specific messages; unlike the English translation "angel" which could refer to all of God's supernatural assistants. He further elaborates saying, "When English borrowed the term 'angel' from Greek, it was not in its earlier sense 'messenger' but in its later significance of any supernatural being under God's authority" (Meier 1999:47). In light of this enlightenment, it would seem that the primary function of angels in the Hebrew Bible was that of conveying messages from Yahweh to different designated recipients. More specifically, it is believed that messengers in the Hebrew Bible conveyed messages from Yahweh to human beings (Cho 2007:188).[100] Moreover, in view of the observations above, in

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98 Cf. Kockert (1999:573).
99 Meier (1999:47); cf. Ps 103:20.
100 In their mission of delivering messages from Yahweh to their human recipients, it is traditionally held that the

which the role of a messeger was primarily to convey messages, the term "messenger" would therefore not apply to other supernatural beings in the employ of Yahweh who performed different roles other than that of conveying messages. Examples in this regard would include the two classes of supernatural beings, the Cherubim and Seraphim.[101]

It must be stressed that in the text of the Hebrew Bible there is only one legitimate God, Yahweh. That being said, we would therefore not expect the angels in the Hebrew Bible to communicate between Yahweh and any other gods, as they did not exist. It makes sense therefore, that angels in the Hebrew Bible could only communicate between Yahweh and human beings. This fact has elaborately been made by Handy (1994:161) who writes, "Even though there was only one recognized deity in the narratives of the Bible, he also used messengers for communication. Obviously, as a single deity, he would not use messengers to deal with other gods, but biblical מַלְאָכִים were sent by Yahweh to send messages to mortals." This observation raises a follow up question which is, whether or not there might have been a time in the history of Israel when Yahweh, like his counterpart El, could have dealt with human beings directly. Could there have been such a time in the history of Israelite religion when Yahweh was able to physically appear before human beings, who could personally see him and even touch him? While evidence of Yahweh's physical appearance before men is lacking in the text of the Hebrew Bible, what we do know is that he did speak to humans directly (see Gen 17;1-2—Abraham; Ex 19:3-6—Moses; 1Sam 3:11-14—Samuel; 1Kings 3:5—Solomon; Isaiah 6—Isaiah; Jeremiah 1—Jeremiah; and Ezek 1-3—Ezekiel; cf. Handy 1994:161). Earlier on, we discovered that when the Ugaritic superior gods needed to convey a message to human beings, they personally appeared before men without the mediation of messengers.

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messengers often flew. Thus in Dan 9:21, reads: "while I was still in prayer, Gabriel, the man I had seen in the earlier vision, came to me in swift flight about the time of the evening sacrifice,"

101 Meier (1999:47). In this reference, Meier posits that going by the frightful appearance of the Cherubim and the Seraphim, it would be very unlikely for them to serve as mediators between God and man. He further notes that nowhere in the whole Old Testament is such an activity attested.

However, in the Hebrew Bible as we just saw, Yahweh could not personally appear before humans as they could only hear his voice. This is probably owing to statements like the one presented in Exodus chapter 33:20 which reads, "But," he said, "You cannot see my face, because a man cannot see me and live." In light of the associations and identifications we have thus far presented between ancient Israel and Ugaritic religions, we would not be too far removed to assert that there might have been a time in early Israel when Yahweh, like El, may have possibly appeared before humans in person. We can only postulate that texts like Ex 33:20, may have only come to be included in the text of the Hebrew Bible in the wake of Israel's determined effort to promote the monotheistic exclusivity of Yahweh through textual redaction. Perhaps no one has been more outspoken and elaborate on the role of textual redaction in the Hebrew Bible than Edelman. In the following quotation, she describes in detail how textual redaction was employed in the bid to promote the monotheistic exclusivity of Yahweh in the Hebrew Bible:

> It is important to realize that the text of the Hebrew Bible is the product of a long, editorial process. Its final shapers were monotheistic and they wanted the inherited traditions to reflect their own religious beliefs in a single creator deity, Yahweh, who had at his command various lesser divine beings who also populated heaven, the angels. Had they created the texts themselves, they almost certainly would not have included the scattered references to Asherah, Nehushtan, Plague, Pestilence, Death, Sun, Moon and other lesser deities, which they have gone out of their way to turn into cultic objects used in the worship of Yahweh or turn into mere abstract qualities (cf. Edelman 1995:16, 17).

Of interest is the observation that the messengers in the service of Yahweh carried out their messenger roles volitionally, promptly and without complaint (see Handy 1994:162). This observation is backed up by Cho's (2007:186-87) analysis of Ps 78:49 which reads:

יְשַׁלַּח־בָּם חֲרוֹן אַפּוֹ עֶבְרָה וָזַעַם וְצָרָה מִשְׁלַחַת מַלְאֲכֵי רָעִים

"He sent upon them His burning anger, Fury and indignation and trouble, A band of destroying angels" (NASB).

He observes that the use of the Piel in Heb. שָׁלַח, which is active, singular, masculine, third person—"to send" could be used to make a case that the messengers in question are not forced by Yahweh to carry

out the mission for which they are sent, but rather that they did so volitionally. Again, this continues to build on the argument that angels in the Hebrew Bible were submissive to Yahweh and were therefore in no position whatsoever, to pose a threat against the exclusive status of Yahweh.

In the Hebrew Bible, it is believed that messengers were to be listened to by the recipients as if they were the voice of Yahweh himself; and through the person of the messengers, Yahweh's presence was assumed (see Gen 16:13; 31:11-13; Ex 3;4; Judg 6:11; cf. Handy 1994:162). The question that continues to drive research on the true nature of angels in the Hebrew Bible springs from their characterization as representatives of Yahweh. If they were considered to be Yahweh's representatives (hypostases), could they themselves be anything but divine which is what Yahweh is? Furthermore, if we come to the conclusion that they were divine, could we equally say that they were gods just as they were believed to be so in Ugaritic literature? Considering that angels are closely related to Yahweh in the Hebrew Bible in which they are his messengers and servants whom he personally sends on different missions, we would imagine that the intimacy between the two parties did ocassionally bring them into face to face meetings. If such personal and physical encounters did happen, in which the angels physically saw God, then we need to find an explanation for Ex 33:20 in light of such a relationship. If no human being can see God and still live (Ex 33:20), could it be that angels were not only non-human but possibly divine and thus gods in their own right?[102]

The relationship in status between angels and humans on the one hand, and that of angels and God on the other, continues to attract attention in biblical scholarship. However, Eichrodt's (1967:201) analytical elaboration is informative:

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102 We shall end the present chapter with a sub-section in which we will analyze comparatively the status of messengers (angels) between the Ugaritic literature and the text of the Hebrew Bible while paying special attention to the differences that lay between the two religious traditions.

> Another feature which serves to highlight the divine exaltedness is that the angels far surpass men in intelectual power; it is proverbial to say of a clever man: 'He has wisdom like the wisom of the angel of God to know all things that are on the earth' (1 Sam 14:28; 19:28). At the same time, however, the gulf between them and God is strictly maintained, and in this way, too, the exaltation of the deity is emphasized: 'Behold, God puts no trust in his holy ones, and the heavens are not clean in his sight' (Job 15:15).

From this quote, Eichrodt raises several issues that make an important contribution to the present discussion on the ontological status of angels in relation to both men and God. First of all, he raises the fact that angels serve to highlight the exaltedness of God. The best way to understand this is probably in light of his explanation that angels surpass men in terms of intellectual understanding; as angels are believed to understand all things on earth, the kind of understanding which is not found in men. Thus, angels are by virtue of status way above that of men. However, when compared with God, Eichrodt notes that there exists a gulf between angels and God, who is considered to be way highly exalted above the status of angels in all aspects including but probably not limited to knowledge, understanding and power. It is in this case that angels would probably serve to highlight the exaltedness of God in that while they are more superior to men, they themselves are subordinate to Yahweh, thus portraying him as the sovereign God above everything on earth and the cosmos at large. From all this, the authors and scholars on these topics, leave us with the question on whether or not angels are to be considered as divine beings in the Hebrew Bible.

3.3.4 Messenger theophany in the Hebrew Bible

We begin this subsection by stating unequivocally that in the theology of the Hebrew Bible, angels have never been acknowledged as divine beings or gods; as Yahweh alone is proclaimed the sole deity (see Handy 1994:157, no. 23). As Ringgren (1966:100) observes, while angels may be described as mighty warriors and servants of the sovereign God, they are in no way considered to be divine beings.[103] Rather, he posits that they were probably believed to have a human form just as it might have

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103 On this distinction, see Ringgren (1966:95)

been the case with the angelic being often characterized as 'the angel of Yahweh' (Ringgren 1966:100). However, based on the identification between Ugaritic and Israelite religions, it would seem that the divine status attributed to messengers in Ugaritic religion might have equally been applied to angels in early Israelite relgion.   Thus, Handy (1994:157) would argue, ". . . the nature of these beings [angels in the Hebrew Bible] as gods had not been entirely lost."[104] When exactly and why Israel decided to distinguish her view of angels from that of Ugarit who viewed them as divine beings continues to be a major topic of research now and in years to come. Scholars have often argued that it was a determined effort on the part of biblical authors to present Yahweh as the only legitimate God in the Hebrew Bible, while excluding messengers from ever being considered divine. As we have pointed out repeatedly, Israel's determined effort was driven in part, by her desire to promote Yahweh's exclusive monotheistic status.[105]

Amidst all the mysteries surrounding the true nature of angels, the actual form or appearance of angels has never been determined with certainty. While scholars have observed convincingly that for the most part, angels have often been indistinguishable from human beings, they have equally noted that there are times when angels have exhibited supernatural characteristics (Meier 1999:45, 48).[106] For his part, Westermann presents angels in human terms, so much in fact that one may not be able to distinguish them from human beings (Westermann 1985:243). It is unquestionably true that angels have often been associated with a human form or appearance. However, it is equally undeniable that on certain ocassions angels have exhibited some kind of divine traits characteristic of a deity. In Ex 3:2 for example, the מַלְאַךְ יהוה (angel of the Lord) is reported to have appeared to Moses in a burning bush.

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104 In what follows henceforth, the reader will come across certain biblical passages in which the identities of both angels and God are so conflated that it makes it difficult to distinguish between the two—making it seem as if the angel and God are one and the same. It is in light of this that one would think that at one point or another in the history of Israelite religion, angels might have been conceived as gods prior to their degradation to the status of messengers or servants.

105 For references on this, see Eichrodt (1967:220-27); Lang (1983:50); cf. Handy (1994:159), no. 31.

106 Meier made his observations based on biblical passages including: Gen 19:1-22, 32:25-31; Dan 8:15; and Judg 13:3-23, which portray angels in anthropomorphic terms. However, he is equally aware that some passages like Dan 10:6 do depict angels in supernatural terms.

Moses did not see the angel in order for him to tell whether or not it was of a human appearance. Instead, he heard the voice of none other than Yahweh himself. The appearance of the angel in this case was theophanic, that is, exhibiting an appearance that can only be associated with a deity. In Ex 14:19-20, the angel bears the appearance of a pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night which protected the camp of Israel against the Egyptian armies in their migration to the promised land. Again, none of the people including Moses himself ever saw the actual appearance of the angel, but it was clear that the scene was theophanic—manifesting an appearance of a deity.

Likewise, in Ex 23:20-23, Yahweh promises to send an angel who would go with the Israelites into the land prepared for them, and of interest, this angel is said to have the power to pardon their transgressions in the event that they sinned. We would expect that only God, and not an angel or any other being would have the power to pardon transgressions. In these biblical passages as the reader may notice, the person of Yahweh is often confused with that of the angel to the point that makes it difficult to distinguish between the two. An important fact worth noting in these narrations including Num 20:16 is that there is a difference between the messengers in the person of Moses and that of an angel even as God sends both of them from time to time. Hamori notes that whenever the messenger in question is Moses for example, the Hebrew would read אִישׁ הָאֱלֹהִים (man of God) and not מַלְאַךְ יהוה which characteristically references an angel (see Hamori 2008:105, no. 3). In this case the identity of the angel is different from that of both Moses and Yahweh, and yet from time to time the tendency to identify the angel with either of the two lingers on. The challenge compacting the failure to know the actual appearance of angels is the fact that more often than not, the closest that they have come into contact with humankind is through their voices (Hamori 2008:106). Thus, in Gen 21:15-20 a voice was heard from heaven calling to Hagar; and likewise in Gen 22:9-19 a voice called to Abraham from heaven. Other than angels' self-revelation through their voices, the other way by which they have

interacted with humankind is through dreams and visions.[107] Since dreams and visions are often subject to interpretation, which may or may not represent the reality of the angels' essence, we cannot consider them as being all-sufficient in describing the identity of angels. While a few instances in which angels seen in visions have been identified as men in earlier texts of the Hebrew Bible (e.g. Ezekiel 9:2, 3, 11; 10:2, 6), it has been observed that for the most part, it is in the texts of the post-exilic period that we find more references to divine beings [probably including angels] in human terms (Hamori 2008: 106).[108]

Other than those instances in which angels are associated with human appearances, it has also been noted that there exist some passages in the Hebrew Bible in which angels are referenced without any physical portrayal at all.[109] The ambiguity with which the nature or form of angels is described in such Hebrew Bible passages has contributed to the difficulty of understanding their true identity. Moreover, of all the angelic characterizations in the Hebrew Bible, perhaps none are more intriguing than those instances in which the identity of the angel is indistinguishable from that of Yahweh. Such instances beg answers to the question on whether or not angels are one and the same with Yahweh except that they might simply be his attributes; and if so, could angels be as much divine as Yahweh is? Representative of those that have questioned the somewhat indistinguishable relationship between Yahweh and messenger is Uffenheimer who writes, "In some instances, the Bible does not draw a clear distinction between god and His minions and the angel of the Lord (Ex 3:2, 4; etc), so that it is very difficult to discern the separate existence of the angel" (see Uffenheimer 1986:147).

The first instance in which the identities of both deity and angel are indistinguishable is in the

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107 For instances in which men interacted with angels through dreams, see Gen 28:10-22; and Gen 31:1-13. For instances in which angels have been seen in visions, see Zechriah 1:6-7:8; and Zech 1:12-13; 2:7.

108 Just as Hamori in this reference has encouraged an investigation into why there seemed to be a resurgence in the description of divine beings (including angels) in human terms in the post-exilic period, the reader is hereby reminded that the present study is focussed on tracking the changes that Israelite religion underwent in the period in question. As we have pointed out repeatedly, this study wishes to investigate the hypothesis that it was in post-exilic Yehud that all the otherwise once divine hosts of heaven were reduced to the status of non-divine beings to be classified simply as messengers.

109 Cf Genesis 24:7 and 40; Genesis 48:15-16; Judges 5:23; Psalm 34:8; cf. Hamori (2008:106-7).

encounter between Moses and Yahweh recorded in Ex 3:2-4:

> And a messenger [מַלְאַךְ] of Yahweh appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of the bush; and he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire but the bush was not consumed. And Moses said, "I will turn and look at this great spectacle to know why the bush is not burned." And Yahweh saw that he turned to look, and God [אֱלֹהִים] called to him from the midst of the bush, and said, "Moses! Moses!" And he said, "Here am I!" (cf. Handy 1994:157-58).

The reader will notice that in this passage, it was an angel that appeared to Moses in form of a flame of fire from the bush. However, suddenly what Moses heard was not the voice of the messenger but that of Yahweh. The obvious question is, why should it be Yahweh's voice that calls out to Moses and not that of the theophanic messenger? Could it be that the messenger and deity are one and the same? Or what is the relationship between the two? Among the attempts that have sought to explain this rather confusing sudden shift from messenger to Yahweh in this passage is the speculation that it might have simply been an odd confusion in the text.[110] However, this explanation by itself is not as convincing as it could be. For one thing, if indeed it might have just been an odd confusion say in the transmission of the text, we would have probably expected later translations such as the Septuagint (LXX) to have rendered the text differently by way of removing such confusion. Instead, LXXEx 3:2-4 is rendered like all other translations in that it is Yahweh who addresses Moses instead of the theophanic messenger. As others have observed, "It has sometimes been argued that the phrase מַלְאַךְ יהוה ('angel of Yahweh', as it is usually translated) is a technical term for the manifestation of Yahweh and therefore means the god in person rather than the messenger sent by the deity."[111] In this case, the angel in question and the deity it represents, are considered to be one and the same.

While the claim that the phrase מַלְאַךְ יהוה as used in Ex 3:2-4 ought to be understood as a technical term for the manifestation of Yahweh may seem to solve the confusion between the identity of deity and messenger in the passage, it must equally be understood that the true meaning of this phrase has never been ascertained with unanimity. Even before we review the possible interpretations

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110 See Noth (1962:40; cf. Handy (1994:158).
111 On this, see Handy (1994:158); cf. Rad (1962:285-87).

of the phrase, we can question the claim considering that there are different designations for messenger and deity in the passage. In other words, when the reference is to messenger, the term מַלְאַךְ יהוה (messenger of Yahweh) is used; and when the reference is to the deity, אֱלֹהִים (God) is used. In this case, it is clear that the text explicitly distinguishes the two from each other. As Meier (1999:53) rightly observes, the use of the genitive in the phrase suggests a relationship of subordination between two parties. Thus, one party (messenger) ought to be conceived of as a subordinate of the other (God). It is therefore difficult to imagine how two parties in which one is a subordinate of the other could be viewed as one and the same. It has also been observed that both the translations of the Septuagint (LXX)—Gen 16:7; Ex 3:2, 4:24; Isa 37:36, and the Masoretic text (MT)—2 Chr 32:21 render the phrase מַלְאַךְ יהוה in indefinite terms—thus angel or an angel of Yahweh (Meier 1999:54). That the phrase does not refer to any particular angel but possibly to different angels, makes it all the more difficult to imagine how it could refer to God himself as it has been claimed. The question therefore is why the scribe who composed the text would have chosen to confuse his readers by using two different terms in reference to the same being which ends up making the two characters—אֱלֹהִים and מַלְאַךְ יהוה indistinguishable? It is questions such as these that caution us never to take anything at face value in biblical scholarship.

Furthermore, it has also been acknowledged that there are more instances in which מַלְאַךְ and אֱלֹהִים have not been easily distinguishable in the text of the Hebrew Bible (cf. Sitali 2014:101-2). One such passages where the messenger tends to be indistinguishable from Yahweh is Judg 6:21-23. In this passage, we find that while all evidence shows that it was the messenger of Yahweh at work, it turned out to be that the one who addressed Gideon was Yahweh himself. Again, the sudden shift between messenger and Yahweh in these passages has led to scholarly speculations aimed at finding some satisfactory explanations. One explanation that has gained ground in an attempt to resolve the somewhat confusing relationship between messenger and Yahweh is the "interpolation" theory. Under

this theory, it is believed that for some theological reasons the scribes who composed the text of the

Hebrew Bible from time to time did insert the word *mal'ak* where it might have originally read אֱלֹהִים

(God). Meier (1999:58) summarizes this phenomeno as follows:

> The word *mal'ak* was inserted in certain contexts because of theological discomfort with Yahweh appearing as a *satan* adversary (Num 22), or in visible form or with the actions of a man (Gen 16:13; Judges 6; 13; cf. Gen 22:14), or in contexts where the actual presence of God was otherwise theologically troublesome (Ex 4:24). In many passages, inadequate data hinder confidence in determining if the *mal'ak YHWH* is in fact an envoy or an interpolation.

The interpolation theory seems to form part of the broad narrative of textual redaction in the Hebrew

Bible. Based on the theological stance of the scribes, it would seem that they were more than anything

concerned about the preservation of Yahweh's integral exclusivity in which he was to be proclaimed as

the only legitimate God. The interpolation theory just like the redaction process is of great interest to

the present study which seeks to discover how Israelite religion was transformed from one of

syncretism to a monotheistic one through the doctrine of angelology. While it is difficult to single out

the date when this editorial process may have begun, or whether or not it continued over time, it is

generally believed that it probably reached it's zenith in the Persian period. To that effect,

Gerstenberger has elaborated persuasively:

> It remains to be assumed that in that fifth century, when Nehemiah and Ezra literally constituted the community of Yahweh in Jerusalem, almost all the texts still assembled in the Pentateuch today were brought together and codified. The most sacred piece of the Hebrew Bible is a work of that Persian period in which the community of Yahweh was formed. They originated together. . . . But it is in the nature of things that the constitution of the Yahweh communities fully began around their religious backbone, the torah, only after the liberation by the Persians in 539 B.C.E., concurrent with the origin of the Holy Scriptures. This was brought to a a good conclusion in the fifth century B.C.E. . . [112]

Moreover, we also find a somewhat confusing relationship between deity and messenger in

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[112] See Gerstenberger (2011:384, 387). In our quest for answers on how Israelite religion was transformed from syncretism (polytheism) to monotheism, in collaboration with the development of angelology, Gerstenberger's postulation that much of the transformation was carried out in the Persian period has in part inspired the present study to do an in-depth study of the religious activities that characterized the period. Along with Gerstenberger, other scholars have equally stated that the Persian period is seminal in Jewish history, that is to say, it influenced the development of subsequent religious beliefs. See Grabbe *(*2000:13). Also see, Surburg 1975:16).

Genesis 18:2; and 18:33-19:1; in the story of Abraham and his visitors. It would probably not be hyperbolical to say that no passage in the Hebrew Bible has attracted more scholarly speculation on messenger theophany; and the relationship between messenger and deity than these passages in Genesis. In Genesis 18:2, we read:

> And he raised his eyes and he looked and indeed there were three men [אֲנָשִׁים] standing over against him; when he saw them he ran to greet them from the opening of the tent and he bowed down to the ground.

In this passage, Abraham, under circumstances which seemed to be not uncommon, receives three guests identified as males. He demonstrated a gesture of hospitality which was probably according to the conventional culture of his day. There is absolutely nothing out of the ordinary regarding the manner in which he received these guests. However, it is what happens at the end of this visit, as the three men are about to leave that a strange turn of events catches the reader's attention (Gen 18:33-19:1):

> And Yahweh [יהוה] went his way, when he had finished speaking to Abraham; and Abraham returned to his place. And the two messengers [מַלְאָכִים] came to Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gateway of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he rose to meet them, and bowed down with his face to the ground (NRSV).

The reader will notice that at the beginning of this episode, Abraham receives three visitors identified as men. When they depart however, it is now Yahweh in the company of two מַלְאָכִים (messengers) Later on we discover that Yahweh orders his two companions (messengers) to go and destroy Sodom (Gen 19:13). Obviously, the question is just how we ended up having angelic visitors and not the three men who were earlier introduced to us. Of further interest is just how Yahweh finds himself in the picture as one of Abraham's three human visitors. Once again we are faced not only with the challenge involving the true identity of angels, but also how their identity relates to that of Yahweh. In what follows henceforth, we shall review and analyze some of the major scholarly attempts that have sought

to find answers to some of these questions.

Firstly, it has been posited by some that the shift from human to angelic visitors may be nothing but "a discrepancy in the number and identity of Abraham's visitors" (see Hamori 2008:5). In spite of not understanding the basis of this argument, it does not seem to be convincing by any account because the passage states explicitly that Abraham saw three human visitors. Along with the purported discrepancy of identity, it has also been thought that the combination of identities may be a result of the stories' derivation from different sources (Hamori 2008:5). Again, without a clear elaboration that would prove the fact, it is difficult to conclude that the identity conflict in the passage in question is a result of the stories having been drawn from different sources. Westermann (1985:275), probably arguing from the fact that the physical appearance of Yahweh before humans is something that has never been attested in human history, supports the idea that the text may be a product of redaction. That said, how it might have played out in (Gen 18-19) remains to be seen.

Of interest is the observation by scholar Uffenheimer (1986:147), who argues that what we find in Genesis 18-19 is a case of intermingled parallel narratives, "The Bible deliberately intermingles two parallel narratives, one concerning the personal appearance of the Lord and the other the arrival of three male angels, in order to obscure the anthropomorphic nature of God and the distinction between the Lord and his angels (Gen 18-19)" (cf. Hamori (2008:7). Uffenheimer, in a way is in favour of the view that the passage in Genesis 18-19 may have been composed from two different sources; in which case Yahweh may have appeared to man under a different context from the one in which the angels may have done so instead. Undergirding these views according to him, is the desire on the part of the scribe to obscure the anthropomorphic nature of God and the distinction between him and his angels. First of all, proving that the stories came from two different sources even as we saw earlier is a difficult endeavor. Secondly, that there was an attempt to obscure anthropomorphism in so doing does not seem to have been achieved because both the messengers and Yahweh were identified in human guise.

However, what seems to make sense in all these arguments is that the role of a redactor is undeniable. Although we might not understand all the intricacies on how the redaction process was carried out, the motive for doing so is clear, which is that the scribe intended to preserve the monotheistic exclusivity of Yahweh by positing that humans could only deal with fellow human beings instead of Yahweh himself (cf. Lang 1983:50). Thus whether it is Yahweh or supernatural beings such as the angelic beings, they all interact with humanity through humanity. Moreover, in all these narratives, an underlying fact that requires further study is the possibility that sometime in the early history of Israel, Yahweh may have possibly appeared before humans in person just like it was the case with El in Canaanite mythology.[113]

Perhaps basing his observation on what we discussed earlier regarding the intimate relationship that existed between deity and messenger in both the Hebrew Bible and the Ugaritic texts, Caquot, for his part argues that the conflict of identity seen in Genesis 18-19 may be caused by the fact that angels often identified with their senders (see Caquot 1971:121; cf. Hamori 2008:8). This argument like its predecessors is not as convincing as it should be. For one thing, just because the messengers identified with their senders does not mean that they lost their identities to those of their sending deities. Instead, they co-existed harmoniously while maintaining their individuality as we earlier demonstrated. More or less agreeing with Caquot's line of thinking, Westermann (1985:281; cf. Hamori 2008:8) argues that sometimes the sender could be named in place of the messenger, saying that could be what we find in Gen 18-19. He writes, "a messenger (whether of God or of man) represents the one who sends him as he delivers his message; hence the one who gives the commission can be named in place of the one commissioned." Again, while this may be true to some extent, it does not provide an explanation

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113 In chapter two, this study elaborated at length on the similarities that existed between Israelite and Canaanite religions including their conception of the deity. If there is any place where the role of textual redaction is more evident, it is on Israel's monotheistic portrayal of her deity, Yahweh. As we shall discover in chapter four, angels in human guise played a major role in carrying out Yahweh's mission among men, but which he himself might have possibly performed in earlier times. Through textual redaction therefore, the promotion of Yahweh's monotheistic exclusivity led to the reduction of all divine beings to the status of messengers and servants.

beyond reasonable doubt for us to believe that the usage of two different designations יהוה and מַלְאָכִים could both be referring to one and the same being. More of the same speculations include that of Sarna who simply states that the incident in Gen 18-19 is a theophanic scene mediated through angelic messengers (see Sarna 1989:128-29; cf. Hammori 2008:8). At this point we probably agree that what we find in the passage under investigation is nothing but a theophany. However, the main problem we have is how to resolve the indistinguishability of the characters involved—the divine יהוה, and the supernatural often presented as human מַלְאָכִים. Neither Sarna nor any of the other commentators on the subject have been satisfactory thus far.

For failure to come to the real root of the matter, it has been suggested by some scholars that what we find in Genesis regarding the conflicting identities of deity and messengers, could have been intentional on the part of the author of the text. Thus Seebass (1996-2000:127) would argue that the confusion was intended by the author in order "to stress the mystery of God." Likewise, Wenham (1994:51) while acknowledging that the confusion is deliberate goes on to say, ". . . they express the difficulty of human comprehension of the divine world." Arguing that the confusion in the identity of the characters in question was intended by the author in order to highlight the mystery of God in itself does not solve our inquiry into the subject matter. Rather, an investigation into the motivation for doing so would probably lead us close to understanding the true import of the narrative. Furthermore, Hammori's observation (that the confusion was intendend), arguing that such a practise was unprecedented in the patriachal age, casts a shadow of doubt on such a claim. Hammori (2008:9) writes:

> This attribution of the difficulty of the text to the aim of the writer is seen frequently. However, evidence for such esoteric goals, characteristic of much later writing, is found nowhere in the patriarchal narratives as a whole or in any biblical writing that may be understood to pre-date the great changes wrought by the end of Judah. This approach is theologically anachronistic, and reflects the views of the exegete more than those of the biblical author.

While acknowledging the anthropomorphic nature of the passage, different views have claimed

a situation in which the characters at play were all a representation of Yahweh in human guise, either with two companions or in form of three men.[114] Whatever the arguments might be, what is evident in these passages is a criss-crossing and interchange of identities between humanity and divinity for both God and angels. At one time the angels are depicted in no uncertain terms that they are אֲנָשִׁים, that is, male humans or men (Gen 18:2); and yet under certain other contexts they are depicted in terms that portray them as divine beings. For example in (Gen 19:11), they are described as striking the men of Sodom with blindness, a characteristic which can only be attributed to a divine being. Likewise, Yahweh who though being divine, is also seen depicted in anthropomorphic terms as one of the אֲנָשִׁים (Gen 18:1-15) which indicates that he appeared to Abraham and Sarah as a human being (cf. Moberly (1992:20). It is with these observations in mind, especially regarding the true identity of angels, and their relationsip with Yahweh that proves to any would be researcher that more work still needs to be done on the subject. But even more so, is how the angels, who though being so much a part of Yahweh, co-existing with him and sharing in his divinity, could still be the wheel by which monotheism is developed and promoted in Israelite religion. How do we fathom the paradoxical situation in which the presence of other beings who share in Yahweh's divinity, could themselves be the wheel by which a monotheistic faith is facilitated? It is inquiries such as these that have warranted the task of undertaking the present study.

3.4 Angelological differences between Ugaritic and Israelite religions

In this sub-section, we do not merely wish to track the differences in the conception of angels between the Ugaritic and Israelite religions, but what possible explainations might lie behind those differences. While the similarities are equally important, it is the perceived differences that will help in the

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114 For a bibliography on the views that characterize this point, see: Hamori (2008:9, 10). Of interest is Brodie's (2001:246-332) views who writes, "The guest is God in the form of three humans," and comments that the "mysterious figure" has human, divine, and demonic dimensions, but does not explain in detail what this might mean.

determination of when and why the authors of the Hebrew Bible text might have decided to separate their religious belief from that of Ugarit in their conception of angels. As the reader might have noticed by now, there were several similarities between the two religious traditions which have been enumerated, and thus may not have to be repeated here. However, we might just have to remind ourselves about two major similaralities which may warrant mention once again. First, like in Ugaritic texts, messengers in the Hebrew Bible were obedient and thus did just that which they were ordered to do by Yahweh (Handy 1994:162). Secondly, like the messenger deities in Ugaritic literature, angels in the Hebrew Bible had no independent volition, as they only carried out the will of Yahweh (Handy 1994:162). These two observations make an unequivocal case that angels in both traditions were subordinate beings unreservedly loyal to their respective deities.

As far as the differences in angelic conception between the two traditions are concerned, it is vital that we take note of an important observation that will serve as the basis for our discussion. Meier (1999:49) writes, "Some features of divine messenger activity elsewhere in the ancient Near East are not duplicated in Israel's religion by the very nature of Israel's monotheism." Going by this observation, it is to be expected that any angelic aspects that might have compromised Israelite monotheism would have been excluded from their creed. First among the differences is that in Ugaritic religion, the role of messenger is exclusive to the divine realm, which is to say messengers transmitted messages from the supereme god(s) to the lower ranking gods and probably vice versa. It is further observed that when the gods had a message for humans in Ugaritic mythology, they themselves personally appeared before them.[115] In Israelite religion to the contrary, Yahweh's messengers represent him before humans without himself having to do so (Handy 1994:154). As Mendenhall (1973:59) has observed, the messengers in this case are "manifestations by which a deity becomes functional in human experience."

However, it is believed that in early Israelite religion, Yahweh himself used to appear before humans in

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115 On this, see Kockert (2007:74). An example in this case is when El and Baal needed to contact humans (e.g., the kings Danil and Kirta) in which they appeared before them in person.

person just like it was the case with other gods in the ancient Near East (Meier 1999:97). Some have argued that what we find here was achieved through the interpolation theory in which case wherever the text read אֱלֹהִים as having appeared before men, was replaced by מַלְאָךְ (angel) instead.[116] Thus the desire to make Yahweh invisible especially in later texts of the Hebrew Bible may have been an attempt to preserve his monotheistic exclusivity.[117] This tradition in which Yahweh became invisible to man may be the theological framework out of which passages like Ex 33:20—No man can see God and live may have been born.

Secondly, we also need to note that whereas messengers were held to be divine in Ugaritic literature, they were not considered so in the text of the Hebrew Bible which portrayed Yahweh as the only legitimate God while denigrating all others to the status of messenger servants.[118] Again, that Yahweh is proclaimed to be the only legitimate God unequivocally speaks to Israel's promotion of a monotheistic faith. However, that the messengers in Israelite religion could have been gods in early Israelite religion has been defended by Handy (1994:157) who argues:

> The מַלְאָכִים of the biblical texts may well have been less than divine, but some passages imply that the nature of these beings as gods had not been entirely lost. In the Bible, the messengers usually are presented as subservient creatures who do only the will of Yahweh; however, there are some examples in which the distinction between Yahweh and messenger becomes confused [Ex 3:2-4; Gen 18:2 Gen 18:33-19:1].

Thirdly, when messengers arrive at their destination in Israelite religion, they do not pay homage to their recipients unlike the case in Ugaritic literature where such a practise was common. Understandably, the reason for this is because such recipients in Israelite religion are human or mortals who are therefore considered lower in status than the messengers (see Cho 2007:188; cf. Ps 8:6).

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116 See Meier (1999:106).
117 See Eynikel(2007:110-11); cf. Sitali (2014:97). As observed, the fact that only messengers appeared before men sometimes made it difficult to distinguish between human messengers like Prophets and Priests and the supernatural messengers—angels (cf. Hag 1:13; Mal 2:7).
118 Follow this discussion in Eichrodt (1967:2.201); Ringgren (1966:100). Some of the examples in which angels in Ugaritic literature are referred to as gods include: Baal's messenger (s) who at one point were addressed as gods (see Alomia 1987: 237). Also, Asherah's messengers are closely associated with key Ugaritic deities (see Handy 1994:157 no. 24, 25; cf. KTU 1.123.26)

Fourthly, while angels in most ancient Near Eastern traditions are identified by name as we stated earlier, we find that there is no named angel in the Hebrew Bible before the exile. Evidently, angels in Israel only came to be named in the post-exilic period (Meier 1999:53; cf. Dan 8-12). It is not crystal clear why no angel was named in early Israelite religion. However, based on the discussion thus far, it is probably not far fetched an idea to posit that messengers were earlier identified by the same designations by which Ugaritic gods were known. The possible explanation behind this is that, following the development of monotheism, such gods were striped of their divinity thereby not only reducing them to a low status but also eliminating the names reminiscent of their earlier divine status. This is probably in line with Grabbe's (2000:34-35) observation, "Angelology has its roots in the old Israelite religion (some have suggested they were simply the old gods demoted to an inferior status)."

Fifthly, we would do well to conclude this section by stating that whereas messenger deities in Ugaritic literature were accountable to mutiple deities other than El, and probably Baal and Asherah as well, the messengers in Israelite religion were accountable only to Yahweh (Handy 1994:162, 163). The reason behind this phenomenon could be derived from the structural make-up of the pantheons in the contrasting traditions—Israelite and Ugaritic. While the messengers occupied the bottom tier in either of the divine councils, Ugarit had several deities above the messengers; while Yahweh was the only deity above the messengers in the Israelite pantheon. Consequently, it may be said of messenger deities in Ugaritic that they, "were expected to obey the wishes of other deities and to acknowledge their lowly position in the hierarchy (Handy 1994:163; cf. Smith (1984:359), but that in Israel, "Yahweh was the source of all activity carried out by the messengers; [as] no other gods exist to make use of them" (see Handy 1994:162). Again, Yahweh's solitary divine status in the Hebrew Bible over against the duplicity of deities at Ugarit can only be attributed to Israel's dedicated effeorts in presenting Yahweh as the only legitimate God. Moreover, throughout the broader narrative of the present chapter, what seems clear from the section dealing with angelology in Israelite religion is that

the angelic beings (messengers) were nowhere near being identified as gods. In all the sub-sections we presented, it was evident that it was in the minds of Israel's theologians to promote the monotheistic exclusivity of Yahweh through the incorporation of angels who serve him as messengers and servants. Through some of the sources we examined however, we came across some material that somewhat agrees with the hypothesis that, angels could have originally been gods who were subsequently demoted to the status of messengers.

3.5 Conclusion

We have addressed various issues related to the status of the מַלְאָכִים both in Ugaritic and Israelite religions. What became clear in the sources we examined is that in each Syro-palestinian tradition, messengers existed to serve their respective superior deities (Alomia 1987:242-43). The question about the origin of angels in the Hebrew Bible has sparked diverged views from scholars of ancient Israelite religion. On the one hand, some scholars have argued pursuasively that angels trace their origin to the gods that were formally worshiped in early Israelite religion prior to Israel's adoption of a monotheistic faith.[119] However, scholars like Eichrodt (1967:195) have challenged this view of the origin of angels in Israelite religion saying, "If so, then Israel's forefathers must have had a monstrous number of gods!"

In a brief attempt to respond to these contrasting views, we highlighted two angelic aspects that were earlier presented in the study which may possibly enlighten us on which one of the views might be more convincing,—that is "the names and titles of angels in the Hebrew Bible" and; "the theophany of angels in the Hebrew Bible." First, we discovered that the designations by which angels are known in the Hebrew Bible are almost a copy cut of those of messenger deities in the Ugaritic texts which essentially makes them deities of sorts (see Parker 1999:794). Examples include titles like בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים, —"sons of god(s) (e.g. Gen 6:2; 4; and קְדֹשִׁים, literally "the holy ones" (Ps 89:6; Dan 4:14). The fact

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119 Cf, Grabbe (2000:34-35), Tuschling (2007:13-14), and Smith (1972:445-46).

that angels in the Hebrew Bible could bear designations by which deities were equally known argues in favour of the hypothesis that angels might have been gods in early Israelite religion. This would therefore challenge the contradicting view by Eichrodt and those on his side of the argument.

Secondly, in our evaluation of angelic theophany in the Hebrew Bible, we came across passages in which angels were almost indistingiushable from Yahweh (e.g. Ex 3:2-4; Gen 18:33-19:1). None of the speculations attempting to explain the close relationship between Yahweh and messenger in these passages has been accepted with unanimity. However, the interpolation theory in which Israel's theologians inserted the word *mal'ak* wherever it might have originally read elohim in order to preserve Yahweh's exclusivity seems to be a more convincing alternative (Meier 1999:58). Through these angelic theophanic scenes, it may be argued therefore that angels were originally divine beings in early Israelite religion, but a fact which the Israelites themselves seemed to have worked hard to reverse (see Handy 1994:157). Moreover, we can make an important conclusion about the status of angels in the Hebrew Bible in light of Meier's (1999:49) observation, "Some features of divine messenger activity elsewhere in the ancient Near East are not duplicated in Israel's religion by the very nature of Israel's monotheism." From this, it seems plausible that whatever features characterised the messegers at Ugarit essentially applied to the messengers of the biblical tradition. In this case, the differences that currently exist between the two, could only be attributed to the redaction process we have repeatedly referenced.

CHAPTER 4
MONOTHEISM IN POST-EXILIC YEHUD

4.1 Introduction

The material we have reviewed thus far has established that pre-exilic Israelite religion was anything but monotheistic. This is because as we have seen, Israel's religion before the exile was as syncretistic as any other tradition in Syria-Palestine. Thus it may be said that Israel's religion was consistent with that of her polytheistic neighbours in the ancient Near East (Gnuse 1997:180; cf. Stark (2011:70). As this study contends, an exclusive monotheistic faith in early Israelite religion was only realized after the Babylonian exilic period (Stark 2011:70.) While this study is built around the hypothesis that monotheism only came to be realized in the Persian period through corroboration with angelology, the present chapter in particular, focuses on the development of monotheism itself. In order to accomplish this undertaking, first we shall review the rhetoric in support of monotheism, and then we shall evaluate some of the factors purported to have facilitated the development of monotheism in Yehud. After a clear analysis of such factors, we shall then attempt to track some of the developments that arose as a result of the emergent monotheism.

Of further interest to the study is the role of textual redaction in the development of monotheism in Yehud. The study wishes to evaluate some key texts written by the Persian period authors not only for the sake of understanding their religious views about the nature of God, but also how they might have reworked some pre-exilic texts in order to suit their contemporary religious convictions.[120] The role of textual redaction in the transformation of Israelite religion after the exile cannot be

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120 On this point, the views presented by Karasszon (2015:159) are not only interesting but worth serious consideration. While agreeing with most other scholars and authors that the text of the Hebrew Bible in its present form is a re-worked product of the Persian period, he further elaborates that the original prophets did not write books as their work and activity were characterized by prophetic sermons. He goes on to observe that it was in the Persian period that such sermons, probably orally transmitted, came to be translated into written texts. If this analysis is correct, it would go without saying that the texts of the Hebrew Bible in their present state are a reflection of their Persian period authors' theological views; which is why unveiling the role of textual redaction in the overall development of monotheism is an important undertaking.

overemphasized. For as Garbini (1994:180) has stated regarding the importance of the Persian period to the compilation of Hebrew literature, "[this period comprises] two centuries that saw the writing and, most importantly, the reworking of a large part of the Hebrew literature, both that which was retained in and that which was excluded from the religious canons established later." So much focus has been placed on the Persian period in any significant study of the dynamics surrounding the development of early Israelite religion. Be it amazing as that might be, the reader will appreciate to learn that much of the Hebrew Bible was either originally written or revised in the Persian period; which essentially facilitated the exclusive worship of Yahweh.[121] Thus it is the purpose of the present chapter, to investigate some relevant texts from the period in question in order to track how their composition and redaction might have facilitated the development of monotheism.[122] Among others, texts such as 2 Chronicles 31:1 will be of great interest in this undertaking. This is because as a reworked text of 2 Kings 18:4, any changes in Chronicles will speak to the theological understanding of the composers at the time over against those of the source text. Likewise, 2 Chronicles 33:15 which tends to suppress any reference to gods other than Yahweh would also be of interest considering that the parallel text in 2 Kings 21:7 does spell out the name of the female deity, Asherah. The question then is, what does this omission on the part of the Chronicler inform us about his theological views of the Yehudite god? Moreover, we shall conclude with an attempt to draw some lessons from the marriage metaphor in Hosea 2. The idea shall be to discover how the marriage metaphor may have been employed by the

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121 See Davies (1998:106). Gerstenberger has elaborated on how the books that came to comprise the canon of the Hebrew Bible in the Persian period were either original to the period or revisions of older writings (see Gerstenberger 2011:142-273, 274-387). Either way, both records are essential to our understanding about the development of monotheism in corroboration with angelology. Both the original writings and the revisions made to the older writings will enable us to understand the theological framework of thinking that characterized the minds of the authors and redactors of the text.

122 The author is aware of the debates surrounding the dating of much of the Hebrew Bible literature. However, the arguments in support of the Persian period for their final composition are persuasive. Along with Gerstenberger (2011:42-273, 274-387), other scholars have equally argued in favor of the Persian period as being the time frame within which much of the text was codified (cf. Grabbe 2000:13; and Surburg, 1975:16). Further, we may also agree with Römer (2013:2) who observes that both the Pentateuch and the prophetic books were edited in the Persian period.

Persian period redactors of Hosea as a tool with which to promote monotheism over against its possible original interpretation in the eighth century BCE.

4.2 Statements about monotheism in Persian period Yehud

In presenting the present subsection, it is important that we begin by briefly discussing what may be considered an erroneous assertion that is deeply embedded into Israel's belief system. As Trotter (2001:125) has rightly observed, it is generally presented in the text of the Hebrew Bible that Israelite faith beginning with Abram who is believed to have been the first to be called by Yahweh from polytheistic Mesopotamia, Israelite faith has since been monotheistic. In light of this assertion, those in pre-exilic Israel who practised faith in other gods along with Yahweh, are believed to have been apostate syncretists. Such a characterization tends to imply that most of the Israelites were monotheists except for an apostate few. More increasingly however, it has become evident that such a representation of Israelite faith is probably nothing but a retrojection of post-exilic theological understanding into Israel's earlier faith (see Trotter 2001:125). He goes on to argue that such a practise "was only the reading (and writing) of the later normative Yahwism, Yahwistic monotheism, into the earlier periods, as the supposed pristine state of Israelite religion, that caused the plurality of the earlier periods to appear as syncretism" (Trotter 2001:125). In view of these observations, in which Trotter is probably not alone, it seems plausible even as we have stated before, and will do so again in chapter six, that the text of the Hebrew Bible in its present state is a product of the Persian period. It is a redacted record of Israelite faith by the monotheistic elites who were charged with the task of compiling the Scriptures (cf. Trotter 2001:144).[123] Thus, through redaction and retrojection, these authors presented Israelite faith to have been monotheistic as far back as one would imagine, which as we saw in chapter two, is not a fair and accurate historical record.

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123 Along with Trotter, other scholars have equally noted the role of textual redaction in the Hebrew Bible during the Persian period including Römer (2013:2); Schearing and McKenzie (1999:64); and Dušek (2012:91).

Unlike the foregoing assertion, it has long been argued by some Hebrew Bible scholars that Israel's faith in Yahweh was probably never more consolidated than it was in the Achaemenid period (539-333 B.C.E.). Thus describing the period, Albertz (2003:435) for his part writes, "No era in Israel's history contributed more to theology."[124] Several other scholars have argued emphatically that only in the Persian period do we find an exclusive worship of Yahweh which at the same time may have possibly denied the existence of other gods. Becking (1999:1), while cautioning his readers about the challenge of inadequate evidence about the religion of the Yehudites, nevertheless argues that it was only after the exile that Yahweh became Israel's sole deity of worship.[125] Following Becking's caution, it is important that all arguments in favour of an exclusive worship of Yahweh in Yehud be critically analyzed in light of all available data on the subject.

In a statement, Crawford (1905:103) writes, "The evidence goes to show that under Nehemiah the little Judaean community was definitely Yahwist and so continued; . . . The century 550-450 BCE thus witnessed a noteworthy cultic evolution or reorganization—the final triumph of Yahweh in Israel." In a build-up statement, Crawford (1905:105) emphatically pointed out that the final triumph of Yahweh into a monotheistic deity after the exile was achieved through the dedicated effort of the Yahwist minorities returning from exile. This statement may be understood to imply that there had to be a deliberate effort on the part of the returnees who presumably had learned important lessons on the need to trust Yahweh in exile, to co-operate with their religious leaders in promoting exclusive monotheism.[126] Joining the ranks of other scholars who have written in favour of the proposition that exclusive monotheism characterized religion in Yehud, Trotter (2001:154) specifies that exclusive

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124 Cf. this observation with that of Gerstenberger (2011:428).
125 This fact is to be understood against the background that before the exile (see chapter one), the Israelites worshiped many familial protective deities (cf. Van der Toorn 1996:4-7). Also, as earlier stated, Yahweh was a national deity who presided over all the familial deities in existence (see Grabbe 2004:240-44; Edelman 1995:18-25; Becking 1999:5-6; Smith 2002:185-86). In view of all these observations put together, the argument is to be validated that it was only after the exile that Israelite religion became monotheistic.
126 Persian period prophets such as Zechariah (10:2; and 13:2) both evince Zechariah's denunciation of pre-exilic household gods whom he characterized as deceitful idols. It would thus be without question that the combined efforts between the Yahwists and their leaders ultimately consolidated monotheism in Yehud.

monotheism was particularly the religion of the literate elites in Yehud.[127] Indeed it is to be expected that earlier in the Persian period, exclusive monotheism was probably practised only among the returning literate elites who themselves were the compilers and redactors of the religious traditions. We would imagine that the people who remained in Judah just like those who had fled to Elephantine, Egypt, probably continued to be syncretistic or henotheistic Yahwists who worshiped Yahweh along with other familial deities. It could be postulated therefore that only after some time, and who knows how long, would most if not all the inhabitants of Yehud might have converted to an exclusive monotheistic faith.

Contributing to the conversation about the development of monotheism in Yehud, Gnuse (1997:194) writes, "Ultimately, we must admit that monotheistic Yahwism became a reality only after the exile in the Second Temple period, and our past stereotypes of that age as dull and legalistic must give way to characterizations which stress its brilliance and creativity." Like all others referenced before him, Gnuse continues to make a case that exclusive monotheism was only realized in Persian period Yehud. Of further interest is Grabbe's (2000:318) observation that there is no documented evidence of a persistent polytheism in the Persian period in any Jewish texts or any other sources. In light of what has been presented thus far, the Jewish texts would probably be the last place where we would expect to find any documented evidence of persistent polytheism, considering that the authors of such texts themselves were monotheists. However, that no other sources outside of the Jewish texts evinced polytheism gives us reason to believe that the Persian period was truly seminal to the development of monotheism. Obviously, the written texts are probably the only reliable window through which we can glance into the religious life of the Yehudite community in order for us to understand what characterized their belief system. The written texts, just like the hymns or psalms

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127 Later in the discussion, Trotter's assertion will have to be reviewed in light of other claims which present Yehudite religion as having been predominantly monotheistic. The question to be discussed in this case shall be whether Yehud was exclusively monotheistic or there existed some quarters that still practised other forms of inclusive monotheism.

would typically inform us of any people group's religiosity. And so, as Grabbe has already noted that none of the Jewish texts of the Yehudite period evinces a persistent polytheism, it could only be that polytheism to a large extent might have given way to monotheism by the time of the Persian period.

It has also been observed that the major literary texts surviving from the Persian period, including Chronicles, all portray the worship of gods other than Yahweh as illicit (Trotter 2001:144).[128] The prohibitive nature of these texts against syncretism or better still polytheism in the Persian period would no doubt have ultimately led to the development of exclusive monotheism.[129] Of further interest on arguments in favour of exclusive monotheism in Yehud are the testimonies of some renowned Greco-Roman writers who noted that Yehudite religion was primarily monotheistic. Thus writing about 300 BCE in retrospect, Hecateus of Abdera, a Greek historian (*apud* Diodorus of Sicily 40.3.4) noted, "But he [Moses] had no images whatsoever of the gods made for them, being of the opinion that God is not in human form; rather the Heaven that surrounds the earth is alone divine, and rules the universe."[130] Hecateus' testimony about the absence of images in Jewish religion more than 30 years after the Persian period could not have been mere speculation. In all probability and being Greek himself, he could have chosen to be silent on a subject such as aniconism which was typically not promoted among his own people. His decision to document it therefore can only speak to how aniconism uniquely and exclusively characterized the Jewish people prior to his time of writing. Again, his observation continues to build a case in favour of the Persian period to have been characteristically exclusive monotheistic.[131]

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128 As the present study seeks to establish, passages in the deuteronomistic books of the Bible against the worship of Yahweh along with other deities such as (2 Kgs 21:5), at most may have only achieved monolatry—the worship of one god while acknowledging the essence of other gods. Similar passages in books of the Persian period such as Chronicles would most likely postulate monotheism.

129 The question however, is whether or not the entire population of Yehud took such prohibitions seriously, to the extent that they all became monotheists. This question shall be dealt with later when we review the arguments against the view that monotheism is a product of the Persian period.

130 Cf. Grabbe (2000:218, 219).

131 A case has already been made, and will also be discussed later in the present chapter that the text of the Hebrew Bible which was probably available to historians like Hecateus was a product of the Persian period during which time it went through some extensive redaction. It was during the Persian period that any elements of the

Further to its being aniconic, Jewish religion [in the Persian period] has equally been acknowledged by Greco-Roman historians to have been characterized by the worship of one God, thus monotheistic. It has been observed that Saint Augustine with reference to Varro, a Roman writer, is said to have emphatically testified to the Jewish worship of one God (see Donaldson 2007:491-492). Augustine is noted to have observed that Varro and other Greco-Roman writers often identified the Jewish God with their major gods. An example cited in this case is one in which the Romans identified the Jewish God with their major deity, Jove (Jupiter) (see Donaldson 2007:491-492). Whichever way this identification of Yahweh with the major Greco-Roman gods may be understood, it is probably true that the lower-ranking deities under the major gods such as Jupiter were considered to be mere aspects or representatives of the major gods in whom absolute authority was vested. Also, that Yahweh, could be compared to such major gods unequivocally speaks to his conceivably exclusivity and greatness among the Greco-Romans.

4.3 Factors that led to Yahweh's monotheistic exclusivity in Yehud

As we have already seen, the statements about monotheism in Yehud are many, varied and we might add, somewhat convincing. Having said that, this study would not be complete without a detailed delineation of the factors that might have led to the development of monotheism in Yehud. In what follows therefore, we shall attempt to discover some of the key factors that might have led to Yahweh's monotheistic status.[132] Right from the outset, it is important to note that some, if not most of these factors may have to be either derived or implied, as they might not be as explicit as one might expect. First, we need to stress that the theological conception of the Babylonian captivity was very significant to the transformed view of religion in Yehud. Israel as a people were priveleged in that before any

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polytheistic past in Israelite religion was emended from the text in order to represent the faith of the authors who themselves were monotheists (see among others, Trotter 2001:135; and Handy 1996:42-43).

132 This section on the factors that led to Yahweh's monotheistic exclusivity may also be found in its entirety with minor modifications in my MA Thesis, Sitali (2014:47-56).

calamity fell upon them, their God would have warned them through his prophets (Amos 3:7). However, more often than not such warnings were usually unheeded, in which case Israel suffered the consequences. This is what happened when the Northern Kingdom of Israel was conquered by the Assyrians, and when the Southern Kingdom of Judah was subsequently captured by the Babylonians in what later became known as the Babylonian captivity or exile. In spite of repeated warnings by the prophets, the Judeans could not learn about the bitter consequences of disobeying Yahweh from their Northern neighbours (cf. Mckenzie and Kaltner 2007:16. The major sin of their disobedience was their persistence in worshiping Yahweh along with other deities.

Under the persuasion of such deuteronomists and prophets, King Josiah was led to instituting some major mono-Yahwistic reforms that were aimed at promoting monotheism against syncretism in their religion. In spite of his co-operation, King Josiah's efforts only yielded monolatry and not monotheism.[133] In defining monolatry, Becking (2001:192) notes, "'Monolatry' means that the existence and value of other gods are recognized but their veneration by the members of the community is dissuaded." Likewise, Eakin (1971:70) defines it as "the recognition of the existence of many gods, but with the consistent worship of only one deity." As for the use of the expression 'mono-Yahwism,' Becking (2001:192) observes that it presupposes the possibility that the veneration of YHWH differed from place to place in ancient Israel. Thus as we have argued repeatedly, exclusive monotheism was only realized after the exile. Because the Judahites continued to worship Yahweh along with other gods, they were subsequently taken captive by the Babylonians in 586 BCE, destroying Jerusalem and the temple in the process. In light of all this historical data, the question then is just how it might have contributed to the development of monotheism in Yehud. Well, the answer lies in the theological conception of the exile itself. Building on the conception of the exile carried on from the deuteronomistic times, the Yehudites believed that the exilic catastrophic event was initiated by

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133 Some have argued that the reforms by kings Hezekiah and Josiah may possibly never have actually happened. For the explanations behind this argument, see chapter 3 of the present study.

Yahweh as some sort of punishment meant to draw the Israelites back to himself.[134] The understanding was that Yahweh had the power to employ disaster and sorrow as measures with which he could save his people from persistence in sin (see Barton 1911:369). As a matter of fact the times of sorrow in the lives of God's people have essentially been considered to be times of religious growth (Barton 1969:369). In this case, the Babylonian exile has been considered as one such ocassion when the Israelites had undergone moments of sorrow, but which ultimately led to their spiritual growth. Moreover, as Barton (1969:369) further observes, one of the major contributions of the Babylonian exile was that it was "the [one] external event necessary to crystallize the results of prophetic influences which had been at work for a long time, but it was also in part due to the deepening and clarifying of religious perception which disaster and sorrow bring."

Thus in retrospect of the deportations, after they were restored to their homeland, it became clear to the Yehudites that their fate was in the hand of Yahweh and not any of the other familial deities they might have worshiped before the exile. It was their disobedience of Yahweh that led to their captivity, and it was their obedience that led to their deliverance and restoration. The belief system of the Yehudites asserted that it was Yahweh who "stirred the spirit of Cyrus" thereby compelling him to issue a decree of release and restoration to their homeland (Becking 2001:268; cf. Ezra 1:1). Thus the two events, deportation and restoration, were conceivably a demonstration of Yahweh's supreme greatness over the nations and their acclaimed gods. It is in light of this background, that exclusive monotheism came to characterize the religion of the returning Jews in post-exilic Yehud (see Whybray 2003:45-52). Following the other scholars who have written on Israelite religion stretching from exile to restoration, and how the two events corroborated to promote the exclusive worship of Yahweh, Trotter (2001:136; cf. Berquist 2003:32-33) writes, "There is only one God, Yahweh; this one God has

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[134] It is to be noted that while this conception of the Babylonian exile was not exclusive to the Yehudite elites, as it was earlier taught by the Deuteronomists, it probably became more noteworthy in Yehud bearing in mind that the people resonated with the bitter consequences of the event in retrospect.

chosen Cyrus to be annointed, and as Yahweh's chosen, Cyrus will be the means of returning the exiled community to Jerusalem."

Another factor that contributed to the exclusive worship of Yahweh in Yehud lies in the theology that characterized Deutero-Isaiah's message. As an exilic prophet, Deutero-Isaiah's message was for the most part monotheistic in nature (cf. Kapelrud 1982: 50). A review of some select passages indicate that he mocked the Babylonian gods, whom he portrayed as man-made and impotent (cf. Is 41:6-7; 44:6-20; 46:1-13). Yahweh was portrayed instead as the only creator God, who presides over the affairs of humankind (Is 45:1-8). He also portrayed Yahweh as being the only the redeemer of his people, Israel (Isa 43:14-15; 44:6, 24; 48:17; 54:5). It is not clear how much of Deutero-Isaiah's message was assimilated into the religion of the exiles. This is because as we have argued, they might have become exclusive monotheists only in Yehud after the exile. However, assuming that they incorporated this prophet's theology into their belief system, it may be argued that the people were already leaning towards some kind of monotheism during the exile. This view is reflected by Trotter (2001:136) who writes, "[the Yehudites] were most likely representatives of the normative monotheistic Yahwism produced in Deutero-Isaiah and the texts of the Hebrew Bible of the Persian period and later."

The dualistic nature of Yahweh in which he was perceived as being the originator of both light and darkness, disaster and prosperity, which argues in favor of the proposition that he is responsible for whatever happens on earth (Isa 45:7) may have equally contributed to Yahweh's monotheistic status. While reflecting on the events of the exile and their subsequent restoration to Yehud, we would expect the returnees asking themselves questions like, which other deity possesses Yahweh's dualistic nature? Which other deity apart from Yahweh, would have been responsible for both the exilic disaster and the subsequent Judahite restoration? Trotter's (2001:141) comments could not be truer, "the attribution of good and ill, and the destruction and salvation to Yahweh functions at one level to eliminate possible

competitors. No other deity could be responsible for the disaster of 586 BCE nor could any other deity be a source of hope for restoration. There is only one deity who is responsible for both [Yahweh]."

In continuing to explore some of the factors that may have ultimately led to Yahweh's monotheistic exclusivity, Yahweh's status in the pre-exilic period needs not be overlooked. While the natives of both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms of Israel did not practice a monotheistic faith, still, they had Yahweh as their national deity. The tradition that resulted in the national status of Yahweh may be traced back to the days of Saul, the first King of the united kingdom. As Van der Toorn (1996:275) observes, until King Saul ascended the throne, each Israelite clan or tribe worshiped their own tribal deity. In the monarchical era, King Saul had promoted his tribal deity to a national status in order to bring unity in the kingdom (see Van der Toorn 1996:266-67). After the exile however, the Yehudite returnees now without the leadership of a king, had only Yahweh to look up to for guidance. In all matters of morality, faith and practice, it was Yahweh who readily presented himself for guidance. Arising out of such a background, therefore, Yahweh became the only deity of Yehud, resulting into his exclusive monotheistic status. Gerstenberger (2011:436), a renowned Persian period scholar puts all this into perspective as follows:

> Since Yahweh had not grown out of popular religion but as the official deity of the state of Judah and of the Davidic royal house, he had become the best known deity [in Yehud]. Yahweh represented the totality of the political whole. If they wanted to preserve a smidgen of cohension in the period without a king, only Yahweh presented himself as a deity serving as a role model. For the clans and towns, no local numina could have the uniting aura that Yahweh brought from the national tradition.

The concept of redemption, repeatedly articulated in Deutero-Isaiah (Isa 43:14-15; 44:6, 24; 48:17; 54:5), might equally have had something to do with the elevation of Yahweh to a monotheistic status in Yehud. Historically, the concept of redemption was understood by the term *go'el* (Hebrew "gal'al") meaning 'to redeem.' In ancient Israelite tradition, a go'el ("kinsman redeemer") was usually a relative whose duty among others, was to bail out family members who were deep in debt, to the point

of risking being sold into slavery (see Lev 25; cf Kapelrud 1982:54). To the returning Yehudites, therefore, Deutero-Isaiah's characterization of Yahweh as "go'el" ("kinsman redeemer") would have reminded them of the traditional role of a go'el in their history (see Davies 1983:231-34; cf. Davies 1981:138-44). Yahweh was therefore concieved to be their go'el not only from the exile, but also from any other future calamities. It is no wonder therefore, that, after their release from exile, an act they attributed to Yahweh's intervention as go'el, the Yehudites elevated Yahweh to an exclusive monotheistic status. Again, like we stated earlier, most of these factors that facilitated the monotheistic status of Yahweh have to be derived, as they won't present themselves outrightly.

The Torah, which Gerstenberger (2011:387) describes as the religious back-bone of the Yahweh communities in post-exilic Yehud equally had something to do with the development of monotheism in Yehud. It has been observed for example that the origin of the Holy Scriptures may be traced to the Persian period. While acknowledging that the art of writing was present both in the pre-exilic and exilic periods, "the need for tradition by the communities of Yahweh . . . called for a broader training of those who had to deal with the written word of God" (Gerstenberger 2011:388). Out of the concern for well trained scribes of the law, Ezra would subsequently assume the fully developed title "scribe of the law of the God of heaven" (Gerstenberger 2011:388; cf. Ezra 7:12). As Berquist (2003:236) observes, the Yahweh traditions were later bound into the canonized text of the torah. The canonization of the Torah and scripture as a whole, provided a stable foundation for the religion practised by Yahweh's people (Berquist 2003:236). The Torah was a source of knowledge about Yahweh. Through the Torah, the will of Yahweh for his people both for their daily life and conduct in worship was revealed. Earlier in the History of Israel, God spoke to his people in person. In Yehud however, the Torah came to be Yahweh's voice to his people. As Berquist (2003:238) further observes, "The priestly influence within Yahwism emphasized that the past times of God's direct interaction with the people were times in the past. God no longer delt directly with human individuals. Instead, God spoke to subsequent generations

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through the scriptures and through those qualified to interpret the scriptures." As Gerstenberger (2002:210) observes, "of the five books of Moses, the torah, only the first is predominantly devoted to narrative material. With the exception of Exodus 1-15, the Exodus pericope, the other four books contain almost exclusively rules for life and worship." In light of the foregoing, how then did the Torah contribute to the consolidation of the monotheistic faith in Yehud? By evaluating the facts we have thus far presented, it is evident that the main character of the Torah is Yahweh and not any other deity. This suggests that by drawing the attention of the Yehudites exclusively to Yahweh, the Torah in a sense could be seen to have promoted a monotheistic faith. Such a conclusion may be drawn from Gerstenberger's view above in which he notes that much of the Torah deals almost exclusively with rules for life and worship. It is in this sense therefore, that the Torah could be said to have promoted a monotheistic faith in the religiosity of the returning Israelites in Yehud.

Apart from the role of the Torah, the manner in which the Babylonian Empire treated the gods of the states they conquered may have also contributed to Yahweh's monotheistic status in Yehud. When the Babylonians (like the Assyrians) conquered foreign nations, they demoted the vanguished gods to a second-tier status in their imperial pantheon. Both Sennacherib and Nabopolassar, once kings of Assyria and Babylon respectively, are said to have stated (in a rather boasting manner) that they carried with them the gods of the states they conquered (Rosenthal 1969:302, 303). By implication, this made the Babylonian god, Marduk, assume the title "king of the gods;" as he was believed to be above every other god in Babylon (see Edelman 1996:21). We would imagine that this situation must have been humiliating to the Judahite exiles; considering how much they venerated Yahweh as their national deity before the exile; whether or not they did so with full devotion. Tigay's (1996:435) comment on this situation is worth noting, "The need to emphsize the monotheistic idea in this period was probably due to the increased exposure of Israel to the triumphant Assyrian and Babylonian empires, which attributed their victories, including victories over Israel, to their gods."

After their restoration, it is to be expected in all probability that the Yehudites would have endeavored to elevate Yahweh back to his "national" status; but of course this time, without other associate deities. The reasons behind this phenomenon are to be assumed. First, the fact that they suffered humiliation in which they helplessly watched their deity subjected to a secondary status, must have motivated them to elevate Yahweh once the opportunity availed itself. This observation further builds on the understanding that their liberation was due to Yahweh's intervention. Secondly, and in a rather related circumstance, the years of exile should have been dark, gloomy and perhaps even depressing. The exiles, like most home-sick emigrants, must have yearningly looked forward to returning home and witnessing the promises of Yahweh fulfilled in their lives. This is the point Gerstenberger (2011:437) seems to be making when he writes, "the zeal for Jerusalem and the promises of Yahweh for his people must have been extraordinarily intense among the exiles." Because the returning Yehudites zealously looked forward to the fulfilment of Yahweh's promises for their lives, including restoration to their homeland, it is without question that they would not have venerated any other deity but Yahweh once their restoration was realized. This, too, may have facilitated the developing monotheism.

Moreover, further explanations may be found in the major shift which occured in the Persian conception of the imperial pantheon. When the Persians conquered Babylon, two things happened. First, the nations under Babylonian dominion were given the freedom to worship their gods as they pleased. Secondly, the gods of the foreign nations assumed a new status in the Achaemenid pantheon. Unlike the Babylonians, who demoted such gods to a lower level, the Persians equated such gods with the new empire god, Ahura Mazda, through the use of a new abstract title, "God of (the) heaven(s)" (see Edelman 1996:22). Thus under the new Persian system, "head deities of national pantheons all became manifestations of a single category of deity, אֱלֹהֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם, which served as a general descriptive designation for the head of the emperial pantheon" (Edelman 1996:22). Moreover, unlike the gods of

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Assyria and Babylon, who were known by the designation "king of the gods," the Persian Ahura Mazda instead, came to be known as "the great god who gave [us] this earth, who gave us this sky, who gave us humanity and who gave his worshipers prosperity" (Jamme 1969:316). Under Zoroastrianism, the god Ahura Mazda ("god of the heavens") had divine manifestations, also known as "Amesha Spenta" or "divine Sparks." These Amesha Spenta, six in number, were emanations of Ahura Mazda, through whom all creation was made. It is important to emphasize that these divine sparks were not divinities that would be characterized as gods in themselves. They were mere attributes of the great god, Ahura Mazda (cf. Boyce 1975:181-228).

How all these developments in Persia impacted Yehudite religion, continues to be a matter of theological speculation. However, first of all, the fact that the Persian overlords gave freedom of religion to all foreign nations including Yehud, itself, was an incentive for the already resolved Yehudites to worship Yahweh in an exclusive monotheistic manner. Secondly, the Persian belief in a single god (Ahura Mazda) with whom the gods of the foreign nations were equated, could have all the more united the Yehudites in their resolve to promote Yahweh to an exclusive status. Thirdly, the manner in which the Persian pantheon was restructured, fusing the major tiers of the active gods into the top tier occupied by the divine couple (leading to one deity), and converting the lower tiers into non-divine messengers, may have contributed to how the Yehudites concieved of their own deity.[135] Moreover, the concept in which all the other gods in Persia were "tolerated" as mere manifestations of the one god, Ahura Mazda, was equally significant to the emerging Yehudite faith. Like the "Amesha Spenta" who were Ahura Mazda's manifestations and emanations through whom he created the universe, the Yehudites may have considered all their pre-exilic familial deities as mere manifestations of the only god, Yahweh. From all these observations, what seems noticeable is that the emergent

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135 The transformation of the pre-exilic Israelite pantheon from one of many gods headed by Yahweh, to one in which Yahweh became the only legitimate deity, with the rest as angels shall be discussed in detail in Chapter Five of this thesis.

monotheism in Yehud was not born out of a single incident or theme. Rather, Yehudite monotheism was born out of a convergence of several factors.[136]

In light of the above parallelisms between Yehudite and Persian religions, we are left wondering whether or not what we find here is a case of borrowing from the Persians by the Yehudites. Did the Yehudites borrow their religious conception of the deity from the Persians or was it vice versa? Apparently, even great Persain period scholars like Grabbe (2000:319) have raised similar questions:

> Two questions remain, however: the first is whether we have borrowings or only parallel developments that arose from some internal logic within Judaism itself. The second question concerns the lateness of much Zoroastrian literature which is a millenium or more after Achaemenid times. . . . At this stage of study, much is uncertain and a decisive judgment is hard to make. The question must remain open for the time being.

Determining a Zoroastrian influence upon Yehudite monotheism can be a difficult endeavor as Grabbe himself has rightly pointed out. And yet to completely deny it, would be an irresponsible option. The plight of the Judahites in exile, as we have already seen, was attributed to their disregard of the prophetic injunction that required them to worship Yahweh in an exclusive relationship. After the exile, presumably because of the lessons learnt out of it, the Yehudites zealously promoted a monotheistic faith.[137] Having said that, it would not be irrational to assume that Zoroastrianism may have somewhat encouraged the Yehudites to continue promoting and guarding their monotheistic faith. How all this may have happened in practise, remains an open question.

Moreover, even if it is to be argued that Israelite religion did not have anything to do with that of the Persians, tracing Persian remnants in the Hebrew Bible has never been a difficult matter. For example, the Zoroastrian designation אֱלֹהֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם (God of Heaven) is prevalent in the Hebrew Bible texts of the Persian period.[138] Further, it has also been observed that the Persian period's developing

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136 For more on the divine manifestation beings known as 'Amesha Spenta,' see Boyce (1975:181-228).
137 On how the exile may have brought about a repentance in the Judahites, see the discussion in Barton (1911:369-78).
138 See Edelman's (1996:22) detailed discussion on how the Persian designations for Ahura mazda tends to have been employed in reference to the God of Israel in the Hebrew Bible.

belief in a resurrection after death, may equally find its best parallel in Zoroastrianism. Likewise, the developing Persian period angelology in Judaism has also been seen to be paralleled in Zoroastrianism (see Grabbe 2000:319). In spite of these observations that seem to favor a Zoroastrian influence in Yehudite religion, some scholars like Trotter (2001:138) have argued to the contrary. Trotter argues that if Zoroastrianism had influenced Yehudite monotheism, Persian religion itself would have demonstrated an explicit monotheistic faith, which arguably it did not (Trotter 2001:138). He further observes that while the other nations under Persian rulership may have also been subsumed under Ahura Mazda, they never demonstrated a monotheistic faith like the Yehudites (Trotter 2001:138). In light of Trotter's observations, it is safe to say that the question of who influenced who in Persia, Zoristrianism or Israelite religion, remains an open question.

4.4 Tracking monotheistic developments in Yehud

4.4.1. Rededication of the Second temple (515 B.C.E)

Following their release from the Babylonian captivity, the returning Judahites now under the Persians, were granted freedom of worship which resulted into the formulation of a confessional community of Yahweh in Yehud (Gerstenberger 2011:428). Some of the theological developments that might have promulgated the exclusive worship of Yahweh during this period as Gerstenberger (2011:429) observes included:

> Rededication of the [second] temple in (515 B.C.E.), forming the essential ordinances of the community, establishing offices and leadership functions, systematizing the annual cycle of festivals, introducing the Sabbath and circumcision as public confessional acts, finishing the compilation and redaction of the Torah, and initiating other structural measures.

It is to be expected that each of these institutions no doubt must have contributed to the exclusive worship of Yahweh leading up to the development of monotheism in Yehud. While an exhaustive analysis of each one of these institutions is in order, we have chosen to elaborate on the two which had greater impact on the subject matter at hand, that is, the rededication of the second temple, and

finishing the compilation and redaction of the Torah.[139] One of the most significant arguments in favour of the commitment of Israel to Yahweh after the exile which at the same time evinced the development of monotheism, was the rededication of the Second temple to him. As Lynch (2014:72) observes, the Persian period text of 2 Chronicles 2:4[5] asserts that the rebuilding of the second temple by the Yehudites was a declaration of Yahweh's superiority over other gods. By all accounts, that Yahweh could be viewed as superior to all other gods in existence through the symbol of the temple, meant that monotheism was truly characteristic of Yehudite religion.

After the first temple was destroyed following the invasion of pre-exilic Judah and the subsequent deportation of some Judahites, the covenant between Yahweh and Israel was somewhat abrogated. Thus, the revival of such covenant exemplified through the rebuilding and rededication of the temple after the exile, must have signified the exclusive allegience of the returning Yehudites to Yahweh. The significance of the temple in the spiritual lives of the Israelites at this time is probably made clearer by none other than Becking (2001:269), who writes that the temple gave the post-exilic Jews a religious identity and ". . . a home to gather and to worship Yahweh in a world where other religions and other forms of Yahwism were present."[140] This temple may have served as a monumental pillar in the spiritual lives of the Yehudites. Its very presence must have continually reminded them of their revived allegiance to Yahweh. Perhaps even more illustrative of this fact is the observation made by Lynch (2014:132) along with other scholars:

> The notion that a deity could manifest itself in real-world entities, and especially in temples and their sacred vessels, was widespread throughout the ancient Near East, lending further significance to the homology between a deity and real-world entities such as temples. Deities could inhabit and animate images, standing stones, statues, cult objects, temples, and temple vessels. One may note

139 Since we have already discussed the role of the torah under the subsection "Factors that led to the development of monotheism in Huddle," the present section will only address the significance of the Second temple. Also, for those interested in a detailed study on each of these institutions and how they might have jointly promoted the development of monotheism in post-exilic Yehud, Lynch's book, *Monotheism and Institutions in the Book of Chronicles,* is invaluable.

140 Later in the present chapter when we discuss the arguments against the idea that monotheism was developed and consolidated in Yehud, we will have to critically analyze how this monotheistic idea co-existed with other forms of Yahwism as observed by Becking.

that all of these objects "housed" deities, and solicited care and devotion from worshipers.[141]

Obviously, Lynch has raised very critical issues pertaining to the religious significance of the temple to the Yehudites that deserve analysis. In view of the above, the question that solicits for answers would be: How much of Yahweh was actually represented by the temple? In order for us to understand how the temple was conceptualized in Yehud, it is important that we address its significance within the broader context of the Ancient Near Eastern religiosity. This is to be understood in light of the conclusions we made in chapter two, in which we argued that pre-exilic Israelite religion was somewhat inseparable from that of the Ancient Near Eastern world at large. It has been observed for example that the temple in Yehud was to exemplify the greatness (גָּדוֹל) of Yahweh; a characteristic which was equally associated between the Mesopotamian head god Assur and his temple (Lynch 2014:103; cf. 1 Chr 16:25). Thus, though not directly answering the question of how much the temple represented the deity in Yehud, it would seem that it served as a visible emblem of the greatness associated exclusively with Yahweh. The comparison of the greatness associated between Yahweh and the temple is probably described nowhere better than in 1 Chronicles 22:5 in which the magnificence and reverence associated with the temple was representative of that of Yahweh (cf. Lynch 2014:103-4). In the ancient Near East at large, temple and deity were conceived to be made out of the same material so much in fact that temples and divine images received cultic devotion (see Ambos 2010:221-27; cf. Lynch 2014:114-15).[142] While temples were closely associated with deities in the Ancient Near East, the book of Chronicles as we shall discover in a later section where we discuss the role of textual redaction in Yehud, tends to carefully distinguish post-exilic faith from not only the iconic but syncretistic religion of the previous era. As Lynch (2014:135) observes, "The temple was evidence of

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141 For a bibliography, cf. Van der Toorn (1997:1-14); Lambert (1990):115-30; Bloch-Smith (2006: 64-79).

142 We do not know how this practise might have specifically applied to the pre-exilic Israelite religion. What we do know in light of what has been discussed so far however, is that by the Persian period, Yehudite religion was aniconic which would not warrant deification of images including the structure of the temple itself in spite of its revered significance.

Yahweh's exalted status, and was not in tension with his exaltation." For the Yehudites, the temple was comparable to Yahweh's exalted status, but was essentially not Yahweh himself. The temple like any other imagery did not have power to save, as such an attribute belonged only to Yahweh (cf. Levtow 2008:57).

4.4.2 Monotheism and the incomparability of Yahweh (Chronicles 17:20)

Some of the best places from which to track the development of monotheism in Yehud would be the book of Chronicles which as we have already stated was one of the original writings exclusive to the period under study. Scholars of Persian period Yehud have often held 1 Chronicles 17:20 "O Lord, there is none like you, and there is no other God but you, as we have always heard," as being a key passage that evinces monotheism in Yehud. Klein (2006:384) for example, while acknowledging that in this passage the Chronicler affirms the incomparability of Yahweh, has gone on to argue that by all accounts this text is the only explicit statement of monotheism in Chronicles.[143] Sherwin (2009:264) for his part argues "This statement [1 Chr 17:20] is clearly monotheistic since it denies the existence and validity of all other gods. It transcends the idea that God is greater than all others or that all others are in some way manifestations of him." In view of Sherwin's contribution, like Klein, he notes that the passage in question is monotheistic in nature. However, he also admits that it does not altogether deny the existence of other gods, but whom he characterizes as mere aspects or manifestations of Yahweh the God of Israel.[144] Johnstone (1997:208) sees in the passage a situation in which David transitioned from a mere confession of the incomparability of Yahweh to an actual affirmation that he was the only God, thus monotheism. That being said however, the argument that this passage can be conceived as

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143 On this argument, see Note No. 77. Other passages believed to express the monotheistic incomparability of Yahweh include Jer 10:7; 1 Sam 2:2; and Isa 64:4.
144 In view of what we established earlier on, in that pre-exilic Israelite religion was either polytheistic or syncretistic like other ANE religions, Sherwin's argument that all other gods became identified as aspects or manifestations of Yahweh would represent post-exilic thinking during which time the Hebrew Bible underwent textual redaction in which the remnants of polytheism were to be done away with. For the prevalence of polytheism in pre-exilic Israel, see for example Van der Toorn 1996:119-50)

being in favour of an exclusive monotheistic faith in that regard, has never been accepted with unanimity. For example Japhet (1997:44) has argued that this passage carries with it some undertones of an acknowledgement of gods other than Yahweh "even after the monotheistic idea was formulated in a clear-cut and uncompromising manner."[145] Another way of looking at this argument is to say that while the Chronicler proclaims the monistic nature of Yahweh on the one hand, he does not seem to deny the existence of other gods on the other hand. The question therefore is whether we can use this passage in defence of monotheism in Yehud or simply use it as an expression of Yahweh's uniqueness in comparison with other deities. Furthermore, based on the observation that the Chronicler's supposed monotheistic text is borrowed from Samuel (1 Chr 17:20//2 Sam 7:22), it has been argued that he does not use it to either initiate or explicitly present the monotheistic claim (see Lynch 2014:31; cf. Japhet 1997:44). If these observations about the chronicler's lack of clarity on the subject under discussion are correct, the obvious question then is why he chose to leave his audience with uncertainty on an important subject at a time when Israelite religion was transitioning to exclusive monotheism. Certainly, not many scholars and authors alike have addressed this question. Japhet's (1997:45) only attempt in her search for answers is simply to say that the book of Chronicles "contains historiography, not religious dogma" (Lynch (2014:31). However, this argument itself is not all convincing because for one thing, the distinguishing line between historiography in general and historical theology is a faint one. It is unequivocal that any historiography that accurately records the culture of any people group would have to address the belief system that characterized them. Thus we would expect the Chronicler to have been as explicit as he could be on such an important subject as monotheism which arguably was the one belief system that distinguished them from all other peoples resident in Yehud.

One way in which to seek an explanation for the Chronicler's seeming ambiguity in his address

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145 Cf. Lynch (2014:31)—As Lynch observes, it might be argued that Chronicles still evinces the older understanding in which other deities existed alongside Yahweh. Along with Japhet's views, these observations would lead to the conclusion that there was probably no conflict between the monotheistic exclusivity of Yahweh and his being one among other deities in Chronicles.

of monotheism at a time it was conceivably explicit, is to review the nature of religion in Syria-Palestine. As we saw in chapter two, early Israelite religion was for the most part indistinguishable from that of her syncretistic neighbours in the ancient Near East. That being said and considering that Chronicles was an early record of Israel's transforming religion in Yehud, it may be argued that the Chronicler's views at this time would not be expected to completely deny the existence of other gods. The very fact that the Chronicler was re-writing Israelite history in light of Samuel-Kings would suggest that he could not altogether do away with his sources even if some of the earlier beliefs were undergoing a transformation. In other words, monotheism in Yehud was a developmental process which became more explicit over time. This is to be understood against the background that early Israelite religion may have begun as a subset of Syro-Palestinian religions in the first millennium BCE (see Frevel 2013:3; cf. Coogan 1987:115).

The problem which scholars of Israelite religion have been faced with over the ages is just how to distinguish it from that of Israel's polytheistic neighbours While the development of monotheism may have reached its zenith in post-exilic Yehud, it would seem that the similarities which hitherto existed between the conception of Yahweh and that of the Babylonian Marduk, the Assyrian Ashur, and Syro-Palestinian Baal-Shamem, were strikingly overwhelming and thus difficult to ignore. It is in light of these similarities that the Chronicler probably found it difficult to address the monotheistic exclusivity of Yahweh with no comparisons to the other major gods in existence. Thus, as Frevel (2013:3) observes, "There are similarities as well as differences, and thus we are left behind again with the problems of conceptualizing Israelite or, better, Yehudite religion as 'monotheism'." In Yahweh's transition to exclusivity in Yehud, the Yehudites themselves likewise were to become an exclusive people different from all others in the wider domain of the province, a point well elaborated by Levine (2002:37; cf. Johnstone 1997:208) who writes, "As the Lord is unique, so Israel is unique. But this uniqueness arises because of the incomparability of the Lord and because of the uniqueness of the acts

he has performed on Israel's behalf . . .”[146] Israel's derived uniqueness, was probably demonstrated by no better institution than the erection and dedication of the Second temple to Yahweh in a land where other gods were worshiped. Evidence of Israel's derived uniqueness in Yehud was also observable from her determined effort to be 'separate' from the peoples of the land in Yehud, while also refraining from marital relations with foreign women (cf. Ezra 9-10; Neh 13). We take cognizance of a key Hebrew word in Ezra 9:1, נִבְדְּל, which carries the sense of separating something for a specific purpose. Some biblical examples of such separation include the case in which the Levites were separated from the rest of Israel and were designated to be the carriers of the Ark of the covenant (Deut 10:8; Num 8:14). [147] Such separation as Carter (1999:311-16) observes could also be denoted by some kind of physical separation such as when the Israelites were to be separate from the rebellious followers of Korah, Dathan and Abiram whom Yahweh was about to consume with fire (Num 16:21).

4.5 Monotheism and textual redaction in Yehud

Right from the outset, it is important to note that the text of the Hebrew Bible as we presently have it is a reworked product of either the Persian period itself or later.[148] As Ben Zvi (2003:45) observes, "In Yehud, prophetic and other written texts were composed, redacted, studied, stored, read and reread by the literati of the period as Yahweh's word and teaching." While some scholars have argued that the compilation of the biblical books may have begun during the Babylonian exilic period, it is generally believed that the work only came to its completion about 400 BCE during the Persian period (cf.

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146 In recognition of Yahweh's acts on behalf of Israel, Johnstone (1997:208) takes note of such acts as the deliverence of the Israelites out of their Egyptian bondage, in driving out the nations of Canaan (cf. 1 Chr 11:4; 22)' and in binding himself to them in perpetual covenant.

147 Cf. Sitali (2014:72).

148 In this section of the study, we shall attempt to discover what portions of the original Hebrew text were redacted or reworked in the Persian period and possibly find out why that was so. Of special interest in this case shall be the work of the Chronicler who as the study shall reveal has been described both as a historian and theologian. As a major contributor to the religiosity of the Persian period, it would be in the interest of the present research to find out what portions of the Deuteronomistic writings he preserved and those he changed to suit his theological understanding. Arguably, it is to be expected that his theological framework of mind must have influenced the Yehudite conception of God.

Blenkinsopp 1992:1). The writings that would subsequently comprise the Hebrew Bible included narratives about Jewish culture and traditions about their relationship with Yahweh which were initially orally transimitted and later bound into the text of what came to be known as the Torah in the Persian period (see Gertenberger 2002:209). Describing the importance of the Torah to the returning Israelites in Yehud, Gerstenberger (2011:387) says it was their religious backbone. In this case the Torah would have been their guide in matters of faith and practise. For his part Berquist (2003:236) says that the Torah provided a stable foundation for the Yahiwists in Yehud. It was believed that unlike the past times in the history of the Israelites when God communicated with his people directly, Yahweh was now to do so through the voice of the Torah (scriptures) and those qualified to interpret it in the Persian period (Berquist 2003:238). As an argument in favor of the promulgation of monotheism through the compilation of the Torah, Gerstenberger (2002:210) observes that much of the five books of Moses (Torah) is really concerned about nothing but rules for life and worship, that is, ethical and cultic instruction respectively. The compilation of the Torah along with all other traditions in Yehud, which thus far had been orally kept could therefore be seen to have consolidated the developing monotheism.

In light of the foregoing, it is important to note that the biblical text, both that which was original to Yehud, as well as the revisions of older writings, would all have to reflect the theological views of the compilers. As we have already stated, these compilers, or better redactors, were themselves monotheists who were bent on purging the texts of their polytheistic past while portraying Yahweh as the sole legitimate object of worship. We would therefore expect some textual variants in some case, especially between the texts exclusive to the period and those they revised, also known as vorlage.[149] This is where textual redaction comes into play. Textual redaction was subtley performed under the guise of 'restoration' of that which was supposedly lost, interrupted or abrogated during the years of captivity (cf. Trotter 2001:125). It was a subtle endeavor because as Trotter (2001:125) further

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149 Vorlage is German (prototype or template) and may refer to the original text which a translator (redactor) reworks to suit his translation (cf. Freedman & Kuhlken 2007:10).

observes, ". . . the concept of restoration was often used as rhetorical camouflage for innovation. The presentation of the new as the restoration of something old and improperly neglected fostered an acceptance of these innovations among the populace by legitimating them as part of their traditional heritage." In light of this comment, it stands to argue that those that were charged with the task of compiling the traditions must have pretty much incorporated their own theological conceptions all in the name of restoration. How much of the text was actual restoration and how much was innovation remains an open question. While it may not be clear as to how much of the earlier (pre-exilic) traditions were maintained and how much were redacted (edited), it goes without saying that textual redaction in the Persian period played a major role in shaping what would become the Hebrew Bible. Overall, observations such as these continue to invite further research from would be scholars in Persian period historiography and religion.

4.5.1 Monotheism and textual redaction in Yehud—Chronicles

The book of Chronicles for example exhibits a high level of textual redaction in the manner in which the author re-interprets the text of the older books of Samuel and Kings. At this point Merrill's (2008:397-412) comments are noteworthy in his observation that while the Chronicler depended on older sources for his compilations, he was free to assimilate, interpret, and even modify such sources in order to suit his own circumstances and religious views at the time. Merrill (2008:397-412) goes on to observe that the differences between his composition and that of his sources are "not indicative of sloppiness or revisionism on his part; instead they contribute to the veracity and effectiveness of the account while reflecting the Chronicler's own unique personality and situation." From Merrill's analysis, it seems plausible that the Chronicler and probably every other composers of post-exilic biblical literature, may have rewritten history in line with their theological conception of the texts at the time. While maintaining the essential framework of their sources, they however adapted them into the

context of Yehudite religiosity. The state and nature of the material that was adapted by the redactors cannot be determined with certainty. Some have suggested, "It was performance and not writing. Consequently, the final form of the prophetic books owes much to the theological work of Scribes in the post-exilic age" (see Karasszon 2015:159). Going by this observation, the prophetic stories such as those recorded in Kings and Samuel were likely transmitted orally from memory and only came to be composed into literary works after the exile. That being said and in light of what we now know, much if not all of the Hebrew Bible is therefore a product of the post-exilic period which in the context of the present study points to Persian period Yehud. Albeit, it still remains that the differences between the Chronicler's redacted (edited) text and that of his sources in Samuel and Kings gives us an idea of that which characterized his mind theologically (cf. van der Toorn 2007:161-62).

As part of what would be categorized under textual redaction in Yehud are a few examples noteworthy in Chronicles. It has been observed by some scholars for example that 2 Chronicles 33:15, tends to suppress some divine names or designations including that of the female deity Asherah, which are employed in some other parts of the Hebrew Bible including the parallel reading in 2 Kings 21:7 (see Weinberg 1988:170-89; cf. Frevel 1991:263-71). More of such names include: אל עליו, אל שדי, אדני, אדונו/ which could be translated in their respective Hebrew order as: "his Lord/my Lord; God the highest, God almighty." As we saw in chapter two where we discussed the divine council in ancient Near Eastern mythology, these divine names were employed in reference to the many gods who comprised the Ugaritic pantheon. It goes without saying therefore that any usage of these names by the Chronicler would not only be reminscent of the polytheistic past but could also sugggest that the belief system associated with it was still in practise by the time of the Persian period (see Lynch 2014:32). And so since the Chronicler as already stated has been described as a theologian who reworked his text to suit his transformed view of the deity, it is no wonder that usage of such designations are to be

suppressed and possibly completely done away with (cf. Japhet 1993:1010).[150] Perhaps of even more interest regarding the absence of the names אדוניו /אדוני in Chronicles is the observtion that they implied connotations of "slave-master" and "ruler-subject" which would probably equally be reminiscent of the bondage that the Israelites suffered during the years of captivity (cf. Lynch 2014:32).[151] It has also been observed likewise, that references to Asherah, the female deity who was the consort of El in Ugaritic mythology are also deliberately suppressed in Chronicles (cf. Keel and Uehlinger 1998:390-91). In some cases the "Asherah" designation is altogether omitted in Chronicles (e.g. 2 Chr 33:15; cf. 2 kgs 21:7). By way of down-playing the status of the goddess Asherah, the tendency has been that of addressing her in the plural ("asherim") so as to imply cultic objects and not a living being or goddess for that matter (cf. Frevel 1991:265). However, this attempt on the part of the Chronicler as a theologian or shall we say redactor, to completely obliterate the goddess Asherah from his text as if she never existed at all has been challenged by some recent archaeological finds. In view of such redactional attempts by the Chronicler, Frevel (1991:264) whom we referenced earlier, contends that the changes in the text are motivated by the Chronicler's monotheistic mindset. In other words, in his promotion of a monotheistic faith in Yehud, the Chronicler was determined to do away with anything that would compromise Yahweh's monotheistic exclusivity. In disagerment with Fravel on the omission of Asherah however, Lynch (2014:33) argues that it is difficult to draw such a conclusion on the basis of a single instance (2 Chr 33:15) in which the Chronicler glosses reference to the female deity.

Another interesting passage in which redaction by the Chronicler can be traced is on his treatment of the passage in 2 Kings 18:4 which he has clearly altered.

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150 On the evidence of instances in which the Chronicler as a theologian redacted some passages in contrast with his vorlage, see for example Abadie (2003:89-104) who contrasts the Chronicler's text (2 Chr 33) against the original text (2 kgs 21). In his contribution, Abadie observes that whereas the parent text (2 kgs 21) describes an impious Manasseh, the Chronicler in his redacted text (2Chr 33) describes a converted Manasseh (cf. Japhet 1993:1001; and Bendavid 1972:151-52). In short as observed, the Chronicler is concerned about the restoration of Israel as a people to her earlier status before the sin that led to the imposition of the exile. Through the return of the exiles, all are to be re-accepted into the commonwealth of Israel on condition that they repent of their past sins.

151 An inquisitive reader my wish to explore this point further;

fig. 3

2 Kings 18:4	2 Chronicles 31:1
He removed the high places, smashed the sacred stones and cut down the Asherah poles. He broke into pieces the bronze snake Moses had made, for up to that time the Israelites had been burning incense to it. (It was called Nehushtan. (NIV).	When all this had ended, the Israelites who were there went out to the towns of Judah, smashed the sacred stones and cut down the Asherah poles. They destroyed the high places and the altars throughout Judah and Benjamin and in Ephraim and Manasseh. After they had destroyed all of them, the Israelites returned to their own towns and to their own property. (NIV).

A few observations to be pointed out in the contrast between the two passages include the fact that while the Deuteronomist (author of Kings) states that it was King Hezekiah who facilitated the described religious cleansing, the Chronicler instead credits all Israel for this activity (cf. Endres 2003:181). The question is why the Chronicler made such a clear contrast against the statement in his Vorlage. Not only have we stated that the Chronicler could be viewed as a theologian, but also that as a redactionist, he tends to portray a picture of a post-exilic monotheistic Israel. That being said, it could be that he intends to present a Persian period Israel whose mind is unanimously set on an exclusive worship of Yahweh to the extent that it is the people themselves who carry out the mass eradication of any object that was deemed to foster syncretism. In this case the people needed no king or prophet to campaign against the worship of idols as it was the case with king Hezekiah which would suggest that the people were still endeared to such a practise.[152] The same mindset in the Chronicler's characterization of Israel's religiosity in Yehud could also be noted about the fact that he does not mention the removal of the bronze serpent from the temple, something that was noted in Hezekiah's reforms (Japhet 1993:962). Could it be that the Chronicler expects his readers at this time to know that the Yehudites pay no allegiance to idols so much that he finds no reason to even mention that the

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152 On this, see Japhet's (1993:961-62) elaborate comments in which she tracks the Chronicler's subtle changes to his vorlage (2 Kgs 18:4).

bronze serpent made by Moses was removed from the temple? We can only speculate, and yet by so doing, we may not be far removed from the truth by assuming that such a rationale may in fact be realistic.

Further, it is also noteworthy from the Chronicler's rewriting of (2 Kgs 18:4) that whereas the Deuteronomist limits the reforms to Judah, the Chronicler extends them to 'All Israel who were present', and then to 'Judah and Benjamin and in Ephraim and Manasseh' which essentially included the northern kingdom (2 Chr 31:1). A synthesis and interpretation of this aspect of the reforms by Japhet (1993:962) is worth noting. She writes, "This is a direct sequel to the atmosphere which permeated ch. 30: the people of north Israel are integrated into the move to centralize the cult in Jerusalem, and make Jerusalem their only temple." Going by this analysis, the very intent to make Jerusalem home to their only temple means that the Chronicler's motive was to promote an exclusive worship of Yahweh as the only legitimate God. By our definition in the present study, this means that the Chronicler as a theologian was bent on promoting a monotheistic faith. This would probably explain why he sought to unify all the Israelites beyond the confines of Judah into the cult of Yahweh. For his part, Pratt (2006:603, 616) observes that the Chronicler paraphrased the statement in 2 Kings 18:4 by stating that the reforms were universal both in Israel and Judah as a way of supporting "the central theme of reunification" in the worship of Yahweh among the descendants of the two Kingdoms. It is arguable therefore, that the Chronicler's mission was to re-unify the Yehudites around a consolidated faith in Yahweh, as evinced by the religious reforms which the Chronicler says were carried out by the people themselves throughout Judah and Benjamin and in Ephraim and Manasseh (2 Chr 31:1 cf. 2 Chr 30:14). The inclusiveness of the reforms by the Chronicler has also been seen as a way of stressing not only the common faith the Yehudites had in Yahweh but also as a way of perpetuating the link in the chain of faith stretching from their ancenstors—Abraham, Isaac, Israel etc. (see Keck 2015:615). Thus the Chronicler's reforms were intended to transcend all the divisions among the tribes of Israel by

unifying them into the worship of Yahweh, the god of the fathers. Again, by all accounts, such reunification around the worship of Yahweh ultimately served to promote monotheism.

4.5.2 Monotheism and textual redaction in Yehud—Hosea

One of the challenges associated with the reading and interpretation of Hosea in Yehud is the difficulty of determining how much of the text was addressed to the eighth-century Israelite audience and how much of it came as a result of textual redaction. Like most other prophetic books, Hosea is believed to have gone through some extensive redaction before it came to its present form (cf. Yoo 1999:178-79). As was earlier noted about Chronicles and the rest of the books that presently comprise the Hebrew Bible, much of this redaction was carried out in the Persain period and beyond. Among the arguments in support of the eighth-century authorship of Hosea is the observation that much of the text of Hosea contains Israelian Hebrew which would thus suggest that the book be exclusively assigned to a pre-exilic authorship (cf. Yoo 1999:178-79). However, the argument of the Israelian Hebrew factor in support of Hosea as a Northern Israelite document tends to crumble in view of the observation that more and more increasingly it has become arguable that the book was shaped by Judaean editors or scribes into its present form (Yoo 1999:179). The use of language (early Israelian Hebrew) in favor of the argument about Hosea's early date further falls short in view of the observation that the northern Hebrew dialect was in fact still in use as late as the sixth-century, that is, during the Persian period (see Bos 2013:16-17). This is to be understood in the sense that the northern Israelian Hebrew did not abruptly cease to be in use even following the major textual redactional work. Furthermore, it has also been noted that apart from Israelian Hebrew, other linguistic usages including Phoenician and Aramaic equally characterize the book (see Ben Zvi 2005:17). Thus we would not argue unequivocally that the entire book of Hosea be assigned to an eighth-century author just because of traces of ancient or Israelian Hebrew in the book because then we would also have to make a case for a late date due to

traces of Phoenician and Aramaic which were spoken subsequent to the northern kingdom of Israel.

Of further interest to the readership and interpretation of the book of Hosea is its exhibition of some deuteronomistic ideas such as the rejection of the worship of Baal and other gods which would characteristically date it to the Josianic period (cf. Ben Zvi 2005:18). Again, the question in this case is whether or not to assign the entire book of Hosea to a pre-exilic author just because it evinces deuteronomistic ideas. However, as Ben Zvi (2005:18) observes, these ideas were equally "integral to the discourse of postmonarchic Yehud as well as that of late monarchic Judah . . ." Furthermore, ideas that promote the rejection of other gods beside Yahweh are equally found in the book of Chronicles, which itself is a post-exilic book (see Ben Zvi 2005:18). Thus just because there are shared ideas against baal worship between the book of Hosea and the deuteronomistic books in itself does not make a reliable argument in favor of Hosea's pre-exilic authorship. Moreover, what tends to concretize the argument that the book of Hosea in its present form is largely a product of post-exilic redaction is the observation that the book does not substantially historize the events it describes. Elaborating on this aspect of the text of Hosea, Ben Zvi (2005:19) writes:

> These are literary and theological texts, not historical compositions in our present understanding of the term. They are not and do not present themselves as true snapshots of any social reality, but represent that which their authors wanted, or at best allowed, their readers to think of these circumstances (cf. Caroll, "Prophecy," 206-08). It is worth stressing also that the book of Hosea itself does not show much interest in historical, particular events, nor does it attempt to convey a strong sense of mimesis. Rather than asking the readers to historize its READINGS, the book is written so as to read them against their *Sitz im Buch* and against more general circumstances.

Ben Zvi's observations above would certainly give us a reason to reconsider the nature of the text of Hosea especially with regards to its purported eighth-century authorship. Obviously if the text is to be characterized as literary and theological, and not a historical composition as Ben Zvi observes, assigning the entire book to an actual historical prophetic author becomes problematic. In this case the easiest option would be to attribute the book to an author or authors whose main goal was to promote

their theological views of the texts over against their original readership through textual redaction.

The problem that exists in dealing with prophetic material including that of Hosea lies in the fact that we are dealing with what was originally oral speeches that later became written material. As Carroll (1991:207-208) observes, "the transformation of oral speech into literary texts . . . displaces the words in such a way that any analysis of them cannot also and at the same time be an account of the original word and situation. Changing situations have changed the import of the words." As Carroll (1991:208) further observes, "Writing is a very powerful transformer of words . . . and enables them to change beyond their immidiate context and to apply to circumstances far removed from their original setting." Furthermore, we also find a situation whereby prophecy in general, which is believed to have been transformed from oral speeches to literary texts, had further gone through editorial processes that ultimately gave them the form in which they presently appear in the Hebrew Bible (Carroll 1991:208). It is in light of observations such as the above that distinguishing between what was original to eighth-century BCE and Persian period Yehud continues to be an open question.

While acknowledging the difficulty of distinguishing between how much of the book was original to the eighth-century prophet and how much could have been added by some editing scribes, there are at least two kinds of material that have been considered not to be original to the eighth-century purported author. First, all the material that make reference to Judah and the Davidic monarchy (e.g. 12:3; 5:5; 8:14) are believed to be additions because, since Hosea was from the Northern Kingdom, we would expect his message to concentrate on Israel (Longman and Garland 2008:216).[153] Secondly, it has also been argued that since prophet Hosea's message was mostly about judgement, passages that describe future hope (cf. Hos 3:5; 11:8-11; 14:2-8) could not have been original to the

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153 These references to Judah in passages that were conceivably originally intended for the northern kingdom of Israel have been seen to be a result of textual redaction. As Emmerson (1984:67) observes: The evidence suggests that neither the reference to Judah in 12:3 nor that in 5:5 originally formed a part of Hosea's message. They are the work of Judaean redactors who are concerned about the corruption in Judah's religious life and sought to confront the nation with a powerful prophetic word, which had already been reinforced by the catastrophe which had overtaken the northern kingdom.

prophet but rather were added through textual redaction in the exilic and post-exilic periods in "order to give subsequent generations the assurance that the Lord had not totally abandoned them (Longman and Garland 2008:217).[154] Overall, others have argued that apart from Hos 1-3 which preserves first person speeches which may thus be atrtributed to an eighth-century prophet named Hosea, the rest of the book either represent the prophet or someone else in speaking roles (see Dearman 2010: 4). Thus as Dearman (2010:4) observes, "It is likely that anonymous disciples had a role in collecting and editing what became the book of Hosea, but one reason for the uniqueness of the book may be that he was a literary figure as well as a prophetic one (Dearman 2010:4).[155]" Further, even as the superscription in Hos 1:1 'in the days of Kings Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah of Judah, and in the days of King Jeroboam son of Joash of Israel' may suggest that the text of Hosea is relevant to the deuteronomistic era, Bos's (2013:122) observation, "What one finds in the book of Hosea . . . is a portrayal of the Israelite experience in the eighth-century heavily filtered and influenced by the Judahite experience of the sixth-century" gives us reason to reconsider what we may characterize as the traditional view of the authorsip of Hosea. Going by Bos's analysis, he tends to acknowledge that the book of Hosea, in whatever form it might have originally been, might have come from as far back as the eighth-century except that its present form is by far different from its original condition due to subsequent editing.

Doubt has also been cast on Hosea's monarchichal authorship owing to the fact that the book does boldly condemn some evil monarchichal practises (cf. Hos 5:1-7; 7:3-7), which Bos (2013:100-101) argues the author would have avoided for fear of the supposed consequences. The literary

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154 On this view, it has equally been argued that because the political fortunes of Israel and Judah were at that time (mostly in the second half of the eighth-century BCE) inseparably connected, it would not be surprising that both nations are mentioned in some references (Longman and Garland 2008:217).

155 The suggestions seems to be growing stronger that the book of Hosea may have originally grown out of a literary composition which subsequently passed through the reworkings of the Persian period literati who may have brought the text to its present form. Just like Ben Zvi whom we referenced earlier regarding the possibility that Hosea may be a literary composition, Dearman (2010:4) has gone on to observe that unlike the acknowledged view that prophets were mostly speakers and not authors, a case is being made that Hosea may be exceptional. As was stated above, this is owing to the fact that Hosea lacks first person speeches associated with him other than Hos 1-3 (cf. Macintosh 1997: iv).

expertise in the book of Hosea coupled with the boldness with which the monarchy was criticized, has also raised the argument that the book could have been the work of a much later skilled scribe considering the rarity of literacy at the time. Elaborating on the fact, and in support of the Persian period as the setting for Hosea, Bos (2013:69). writes:

> Additionally, because the book of Hosea is such a highly sophisticated literary work, it is most unlikely that the author picked up his literary talents outside of a state adminstrative context. In an agrarian society, the motivation to become highly literate simply did not exist for persons not employed by the state. As far as can be determined, there was not a substantial enough market for literary talent; only states could afford to train and employ highly literate scribes. It follows from this, then, that large portions of the book of Hosea, based on the pervasive anti-monarchichal tone alone, must have originated in a non-royal setting. The province of Yehud during the Persian period is thus the most likely setting.

Continuing in the line of these arguments in favor of Hosea's late or Persian period date is Bos's (2013:102-29; 128-29) observation about the dual theme of exile and return exhibited in the book of Hosea which he argues could have only been recorded after the experience of the Babylonian exile. The argument here is valid and well noted, for as Bos argues, the author could only have been someone who himself had experienced the Babylonian exile and the destruction of Jerusalem, making the book to be a product of a date later than both the eighth-century itself and the exile.

In view of the foregoing, while the early date of Hosea continues to be a debatable matter, it is fair to say that the text in its present form is a mixture of early or eighth-century with late or post-exilic material. For example, we may continue to hold the view that Hosea chapters 1-3 which is written in first person speeches be categorically attributed to an eighth-century author. By the same token however, Hosea 4-14 which is written in third person speeches could therefore be attributed to the work of an editor. Therefore, just because the text of the book contains some Israelian Hebrew expressions as it has been argued above does not really guarantee that the book be exclusively assigned to the eighth-century BCE. Obviously as it has already been observed, the fact that the book is equally characterized by some Phoenician and Aramaic linguistic usages means that its content may have been reworked

over a period of time mostly in the Persian period and even beyond. Moreover, the observation that Hosea for the most part is not a historical composition but rather a literary or theological text speaks to the same argument which applies to Chronicles that these books were a product of a redactional work which reflect the religious views of the redactors. All in all, since these redactors were themselves promoters of monotheism, it is to be expected that any ideas that seemed to perpetuate pre-exilic syncretism would have been emended from their compositions. A clear case to that effect is the one raised by Römer (2013:2) who writes, "As already mentioned, the different groups that edited the traditions of the Pentateuch and the prophetic books in the Persian era were hostile to the traditional concept of a divine couple." In this case the Asherah whom we earlier referenced who was conceived of as Yahweh's consort would thus be down played, reduced to a status of an inanimate object such as a pole or tree, or completely removed from the text in order to present Yahweh as the sole legitimate God without competitors.

Our interest in the limited space that we have is to discover what exact changes or additions were performed by Hosea's redactor(s) and how that might have influenced the conception of monotheism in Yehud. As Trotter (2001:154-55) has observed, "The Yehudites who were responsible for the preservation, production and interpretation of the textual traditions of the nation, including the book of Hosea, were almost certainly monotheistic Yahwists."[156] That being said, of great interest to our study at this juncture therefore is how the reading of Hosea in Yehud facilitated the developing monotheism. For one thing, Hosea becomes an interesting source of information about the monotheistic status of Yahweh in Yehud because as it has been noted, "the centrality and uniqueness of Yahweh to the life and cult of Israel is a key feature of the book of Hosea" (Trotter 2001:156).

There are passages in Hosea that unequivocally highlight the close relationship between

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156 Likewise, Garbin (1994:180) while acknowledging the contribution of the Persian period to the transformation of Israelite religion from a syncretistic to a monotheistic one, has gone on state that this was done through a reworking of the existing texts and thereby determining what was to be retained and what was to be excluded from the Canon.

Yahweh and the Yehudites which at the same time portray his central status among them (cf. Hosea 1:7; 3:5; 4:6; 8:2; 9:8; 12:2-6; and 14:1-2). Obviously, a lead question in light of these observations would be just how the reading of Hosea in Yehud might have turned this centrality and uniqueness of Yahweh into what would later become exclusive monotheism. As a way of addressing this question, we would have to examine some key passages in Hosea which evince a tendency towards monotheism. One such passages is Hosea 12:9—"I am the Lord your God from the land of Egypt; I will make you live in tents again, as in the days of the appointed festival." This passage states emphatically that it was Yahweh and not any other god who had absolute authority over Israel because he is the one who had delivered Israel out of her Egyptian bondage who was equally qualified to do anything he intended with the people without ruling out punishment whenever it was called for. In other words, as Nogalsiki (2011:170, 173) observes, this passage was understood by the Yehudites as a reminder of the covenantal relationship that existed between them and Yahweh. Another passage that stresses the exclusivity of Yahweh in Yehud is Hosea 13:4—"But I have been the LORD your God ever since you came out of Egypt. You shall acknowledge no God but me, no Savior except me." Commenting on this passage Stuart (1987:203) writes, "The language of the verse is idiomatic and does not acknowledge that there are real gods other than Yahweh (cf. Is 43:11; 45:5, 21)." Using an observation by Trotter (2001:157), we cannot tell for sure as to how the text of Hosea 13:4 might have been read and interpreted by Hosea's original audience, that is, assuming that the entire book existed in its present form from as early as the eighth-century BCE. However, based on the data we have reviewed thus far and in light of Stuart's comment above, this passage treated under Yehudite context could have been employed by the Yehudite elites to promote monotheism. Likewise, Dearman (2010:321) sees the passage in question as a way by which Hosea emphasized the intended monotheistic relationship between Yahweh and the Yehudites. Thus, "Israel is to know no other deity, a stricture designed to to protect the intimacy of the national covenant, just as it would, the exclusive intimacy of a marriage (see

Dearman 2010:321). The passage placed a binding claim upon the Yehudites, in which no other god was to be acknowledged as saviour beside Yahweh. That the nature of the intimacy between Yahweh and Israel could be comparable to the one we would expect in marriage speaks to its intended exclusivity. Putting these passages into perspective, it seems credible that the Yehudite confessional community of faith, newly returned to their homeland, would have arguably thought of no other God as being legitimate but Yahweh. And by our definition, we would find the development of monotheism right there.

Since our discussion about the interpretation of these passages in Hosea is conceived to be a redaction of earlier traditions, a statement on how they might have earlier been understood is necessary at this point. Again, it is probably true that no one is more explicit on this than Trotter (2001:157) who writes, "As was argued earlier, however, the original eighth-century context for many of these oracles was one in which polytheism was the norm and Yahweh was regarded as the chief deity of an Israelite pantheon." He goes on to observe that Hosea's eighth-century oracles were probably not understood as a rejection of the dominant syncretistic religion, but rather that their specific focus was on the threat "posed by Baal to Yahweh's position of supremacy in the Israelite pantheon (Trotter 2001:157). It is therefore plausible that the Yehudite elites who advocated for exclusive monotheism would have utilized these earlier (ancient) traditions as an interpretive tool with which to promote monotheism. As was earlier elaborated, these passages were formerly addressed within a polytheistic context built around a pantheon in which Yahweh was addressed in terms of being the supreme deity. In other words, under such a context, the existence of other competing deities, among them Baal, was recognized.[157] At best, what we find here is nothing but a clear case of redaction in which ancient texts are re-interpreted to make a case within a different contextual environment.

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157 Cf. Trotter (2001:157) who writes, "These texts most likely represented a pro-Yahwistic, and anti-Baalistic perspective in the eighth-century, but in the new interpretive environment they are much more likely to have been read as support for a strictly monotheistic faith."

The book of Hosea contains texts that evince redaction of sorts. One such texts is Hos 14:9 —"Those who are wise understand these things; those who are discerning know them. For the ways of the Lord are right, and the upright walk in them, but transgressors stumble in them." It has been argued that the literary style of this passage evinces that of wisdom writings such as Proverbs, [to be dated to the Persian period], different from that of prophetic writings. This phenomenon has thus been attributed to a compiler who composed his text later than an eighth-century authorship (cf. Dunn and Rogerson, ed. 2003:685). Commenting on this passage, (Dearman 2010:345) writes, "One can readily see that the terminology of v. 9 (MT10) echoes the contents of the prophecy, with an emphasis on the ways in which the people of Hosea's day missed the mark . . ." This is an editorial viewpoint recommending the readers to learn from the missteps of Israel." Thus, in order for the audience that is being addressed in this passage to learn from the missteps of Israel, such an audience must have lived later than the time of Israel's referenced sinfulness which culminated into the punishment of the Babylonian exile. As Dearman posits, this text could have been inserted into the text by an editor at a later date, and going by the literature we have reviewed thus far, most likely in the Persian period (cf. Longman and Garland 2008:304). Likewise, Longman and Garland (2008:304) while arguing in support of Hos 14:9 as a post-exilic text have gone on to observe, "The vocabulary (e.g., "wise," "right," "walk"), the call to the wise (cf. Ps 107:43; Ecc 8;1; Jer 9:12), and the contrast between them and sinners (e.g. Pr 10:29; 24:16) are all said to reflect wisdom themes and not prophetic material." (cf. Sheppard (1980:129-36)). Again, the underlying fact in all this is that the Hosean text in its present form is a product of textual redaction.

4.6. The marriage metaphor in Hosea 2

In a comprehensive study on the relationship between Yahweh and Israel, Sohn (2001:5-21) discusses several Hebrew terms that describe the husband-wife metaphorical relationship between the two. Of particular interest among such terms is לָקַח which carries several meanings including "to take" (2 Kgs

4:1), "to have for oneself or to possess for oneself," "to marry" (Ex 6:20); or "to choose or select" (Deut 4:34). The passage in Deut 4:34 in which Yahweh is recorded to have taken the nation of Israel for himself is very significant to our understanding of how the relationship between the two is comparable to a marital alliance in a theological sense:

> Or has a god tried to go to take for himself a nation from within another nation by trials, by signs and wonders and by war and by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm and by great terrors, as the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes? (Deut 4:34; NASB).

From this passage, it may be argued that in a metaphorical sense Yahweh "took" Israel for himself to be his wife such as a husband would take for himself a woman of his choice to be his wife. In this case, the ensuing relationship is to be characterized by love and mutual trust. As Clements (1980:38) notes, the phrase "to take for himself a nation from within another nation" describes the intimate relationship between God and his people and that therefore God requires his people to worship him only. Thus we can agree with Sohn (1991:15) that the Hebrew לָקַח in this context implies that Yahweh elected Israel from among the nations.

Baal is another term descriptive of the relationship between Yahweh and Israel, and it means "owner," "possessor." "to rule over," or "marry" (Is 62:5; Deut 24:1, 9-12). Applying the term 'baal' to marriage, Vaux (1965:26) suggests that a husband in this case essentially becomes either the master, ruler or owner of his wife. While Yahweh and Israel are expected to enter a relationship of love and respect for each other, Yahweh's designation as baal in this sense would probably suggest that he nevertheless holds some authority over Israel which Israel herself does not possess. This is what we would typically find in a husband-wife relationship to some extent. Moreover, another term is 'yada' which by translation is rendered "to know." With regard to the term "yada" it has been noted that it could be used variously to denote a personal and close relationship between individuals, but that when it is used betwen marriage partners, the term describes sexual relations (Sohn 2001:18; cf. Gen 4:1). It has also been suggested that it is in the sense of marriage or sexual relationship that yada is used in

reference to the the relationship between Yahweh and Israel (Sohn 2001:19; cf Gen 18:19). However, yada could also entail "to choose" or "to single out" a nation from among other nations (see Speiser 1964:133). In the context of choosing or singling out a people group or individuals, the election of Abraham by Yahweh renders a perfect example (Gen 12:1-3).

The marriage metaphor or imagery in Hosea 2 has been understood variously by Hebrew Bible scholars. For his part, Wolff (1974:16) contends that the infidelity of Hosea's wife (Gomer) to her husband represents Israel's unfaithfulness to her husband Yahweh in which she had indulged in the worship of other gods, primarily Baal. Israel's devotion to Baal instead of Yahweh has been understood as a misunderstanding of the source of fertility in the land (Trotter 2001:158-59). Following this misunderstanding, Hos 2:8 clears the air by stating that unlike the presumption that Baal was the source of their provisions, in essence it was Yahweh who provided for them:

> "She did not know that it was I who gave her the grain, the wine and the oil, and who lavished upon her silver and gold that they used for Baal" (NRSV).

4.6.1 The origin of the marriage metaphor

As will become evident in this subsection, the marriage in Hosea 2, has probably attracted more attention than any other topic in the entire book of Hosea. The story which covers Hosea 1-3, involves a promiscuous marital relationship between prophet Hosea and a woman named Gomer. The narrative in Hosea 1:1-3 informs us that it was actually the lord (Yahweh) who commanded Hosea to marry and have children with this promiscuous woman. In spite of the infidelity of Gomer, Hosea evidently was willing to keep her as his matrimonious wife—forgiving every one of her acts of infidelity. It has been observed that Hosea was probably the first to employ the marriage metaphor of all his prophetic contemporaries (Stienstra 1993:177; cf Kelle 2005:113; Mays 1969:39; and Paolantonio 1989:299). Understandably, such a view is based on the fact that the date of Hosea is much older than most other prophetic writings that reference the marriage metaphor including those of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel

(Buss 1969:111; cf. Kelle 2005:48). Additionally, it has also been argued that there is no reference to the marriage metaphor before the time of Hosea both in biblical and extrabiblical writings (Buss 1969:111). Before we discuss the relevance of the marriage formula in Hosea 2 to the religiosity of Israel, it is important at this point that we establish the source of the marriage metaphor with which Yahweh ultimately came to be associated. In other words, under what circumstances was Yahweh conceived of as a husband? Could it be that other contemporary deities in ancient Near East were designated with such marital titles as husband and wife?

In the mythology of the Ancient Near East, the world within which ancient Israel exisrted, gods were paired with the earth in some kind of sexual union through which the earth was to be fertilized in what some have characterized and sacred marriage (Abma 1999:13). It was also a common practise for gods to be married to goddesses within the same pantheon (Abma 1999:13). Further, capital cities or the goddesses assigned to cities sometimes could be consorts of such cities' patron deities (Abma 1999:13). Again, bearing in mind that ancient Israel was surrounded by cultures within which these mythological divine marriages were practised, their impact on the biblical view of Yahweh becomes of particular interest at this time. It has been observed that just as all other deities in ancient Near East had consorts, thus El and Asherah, Baal and Anat, as well as Tammuz and Ishta, Yahweh in all probability should have equally had a consort. One way in which this claim has been authenticated is through the goddess particularly associated with Yahweh as his consort in the Jewish community at Elephantine—Anat-Yahu (see Van der Toorn 1992:80-101).[158] Based on our findings in chapter two in which Yahweh was often identified with or as El, the fact that Asherah was El's consort would have equally meant that she was Yahweh's consort by association.

It has long been observed that Baal was a very prominent god in ancient Canaan, and that he

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158 Since Elephantine religion was representative of pre-exilic (eighth-century) Northern Israelite religion, it has been observed that Anat-Yahu was essentially considered to be Yahweh's consort in Northern Israel, and that this belief system was brought to Elephantine by the immigrant Israelites, see Van der Toorn (1992:92-95); cf. Abma (1999:17).

posed a great temptation to the allegiance of the Israelites to Yahweh so much that time and again the Bible record states that they "did what is (was) evil in Yahweh's eyes and served the Baals" (Jud 2:11; cf. Stienstra 1993:99). Some early scholarly views (cf. Albright 1957:281) in light of biblical passages such as Jos 1:1-13:7 argued in favor of the conquest theory. The claim behind this theory was that the Israelites were an immigrant nation to Canaan who upon entry into Canaan had decimated the Canaanites along with their syncretistic religions. With regard to the conquest theory, it is important to state that more and more increasingly, scholars are uniting in refuting the view that the Israelites were foregin immigrants to Canaan. It has been argued for example that the Israelites may have in fact been a community that arose 'peacefully and internally in the highlands of Canaan' (see Gnuse 1997: 31; and Stiebing 1989:159-65). Some of the arguments raised by the critics of the conquest hypothesis include the fact that the artifactual remains of Canaan at the time of Israel's purported invasion were consistent with those of the Canaanites (cf. Brettler 2007:95-96). The absence of artifactual evidence associated with the supposed Israelite immigrants to Canaan therefore casts doubt on the conquest hypothesis. It has also been argued that evidence of a conquest in which possible ruins or rabble are to be expected were missing in Canaan at the time of Israel's supposed conquest. Instead, buildings are reported to have been intact (see Brettler 2007:95-96). Moreover, others argue that had the conquest of Canaan by the Israelites actually taken place, we would have expected to find Canaanite material culture including pottery jugs and housing styles replaced by new ones brought by the conquering nation, Israel (Brettler 2007:95-96). All these observations tend to favor the view that the Israelites may have simply been one tribal group among many in Canaan, thus refuting the conuest hypothesis.

As is evident, the story of the exodus and the conquest could be too large for exhaustion here. However, its overall impact on the origin of monotheism in Israelite religion necessitates this brief review. For example, depending on which side of the pendulum one belongs, the conquest hypothesis would suggest that the Israelites would have earlier been monotheists who subsequently turned

syncretists through their association with the Canaanites. Likewise, the view that the Israelites were an internal Canaanite community would suggest that they were as much syncretistic or polytheistic as the rest of their neighbours in canaan. Whatever the case, as we pointed out in chapter two of the present study, it has long been noted that the Israelites did not altogether turn a blind eye to the cultic practises that charaterized Canaanite religion (see Albright 1957:156). If the view that the Israelites were monotheists from their earliest existence as a nation was unanimously accepted in the scholarship of the Hebrew Bible, we would not have the debates that currently question the origin of monotheism, whether pre-exilic, exilic or post-exilic.

With regard to Baal's designation as fertility god, Stienstra (1993:99) makes an important observation that could shed light on the marriage metaphor of Hosea 2 when she writes, "Baal was regarded as the god of fertility in a broad sense. He gave rain – essential in an agricultural society in a dry land – and therefore all the produce of the land, but in addition he was the god who granted children, in other words he was also responsible for human fertility." Like husbands are typically responsible for the fertilization of the female kind among humans, the case for designating Baal as husband could have been derived from his role as fertility god. As it has been observed, "there was a tendency to accept Baal as the god who granted both the fruits of the earth and the fruits of the womb" (Stienstra 1993:99). Such a tendency as we have already stated was to be expected among the Israelites who found themselves in Canaan where the fertility of the land and other forms of life were attributed to Baal and not to Yahweh. In a metaphorical sense, it could be said that as much as the Canaanites were married to Baal, so were the Israelites, as they equally benefited from the fertility attributed to him. Israel's mistaken notion of which deity was behind her sustenance in Canaan—Yahweh or Baal, is probably nowhere made clearer than in Hosea 2. Yahweh's strong words against Israel confirms the fact that she had forgotten the source of fertility and indeed every provision for her sustenance:

She did not know that it was I who gave her the grain, the wine, and the oil, and who

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lavished upon her silver and gold that they used for Baal;" [and therefore] "I will punish her for the festival days of the Baals, when she offered incense to them and decked herself with her ring and jewelry, and went after her lovers, and forgot me, says the Lord (Hosea 2:8, 13; NRSV).[159]

For the most part, what has been well attested are incidents in which deities were married to goddesses or cases in which they were fathers to gods or kings (see Buss 1969:111). In light of this observation, the inferred marriage between Baal and the Canaanites and we might add, the Israelites as well, could only be understood as a metaphor. Thus it is plausible that the author of Hosea may have derived the marriage metaphor in which Yahweh was conceivably Israel's husband from the Baal cult. In view of the powerful status commanded by Baal in Canaan, it is to be expected that the Israelites would have found themselves in a situation whereby their allegiance to Yahweh was usurped by Baal. Thus, in some sense, the Israelites could have practised a case of religious polyandry in which they were metaphorically married to both Yahweh and Baal.[160] The text of Hosea 2:16, "When that day comes – declares Yahweh – you will call me 'My husband' no more will you call me, "My Baal," seems to suggest that sometimes the Israelites may have confused Yahweh with Baal probably to a point where the two had essentially become indistinguishable. Again, it is probably unequivocal that the marriage metaphor in Hosea 2 originated in none other than Baal's fertility cult. A quotation translated by Stienstra (1993:100, n.5) summarizes the fact:

> Now in Canaan the linking of the Baal cult and the cult of the fertility goddess, which had originated in mediterranean countries, had created the picture of Baal marrying the goddess of the earth and the land. This idea could not remain unknown to the Israelites. Starting from the notion of the covenant, Hosea applied it to the relationship of Yahweh and his land and people.

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159 Cf. Trotter (2001:158-59).

160 Polyandry is defined as a marital relationship between one wife and two or more husbands. It is said that this kind of marriage constitutes less than one percent of all marriages in the world today. It has generally been attested among the Nayars and Todas of India; and the Marquesans of Polynesia (see McClenney-Sadler 1968:74).

4.6.2 The 'baals' and 'lovers' in the marriage metaphor

One of the challenges faced by the scholarship of the marriage metaphor in Hosea 2 is the fact that most of the sources derive from "ancient Near Eastern texts that are both culturally and chronologically separated from ancient Israel" (Kelle 2005:72). What that means is that for the most part, scholars would have to determine how this marriage metaphor might have been understood by Hosea's eighth-century audience.[161] In spite of the challenges associated with seeking to understand early Israelite religion through non-Israelite traditions, such an approach has been justifiable on the premise that Israel was ideologically integral to the ancient Near Eastern world with possible shared cultural practises (cf. Muffs 1973:193). However, one approach which has been employed in the quest for the metaphor's conception in early Israelite religion is to investigate how it might have been understood in the Jewish community, still extant during the Persian period, that is Elephantine situated in Egypt.[162] Scholars have argued for example that the traditions and religiosity of Elephantine represent that of Israel stretching way back to the time of Hosea in the eighth-century BCE (see Kelle 2005:73). This is to be understood against the background that the Jewish community at Elephantine, unlike those who had gone through the exile, had a cultural heritage consistent with pre-exilic Judah (cf. Geller 1977:147). While this approach may somewhat fill in the blanks, due to the lack of inner-biblical data regarding the metaphor, caution has equally been raised on how such extra-biblical data is to be treated considering the chronological and cultural diferences between the documents produced by the people groups (see Krugar 1992:48).

In the marriage metaphors of Hosea 2, the one that has attracted the most attention involves the

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161 As we stated earlier, Hosea chapter 2 in particular which contains the marriage metaphor, belongs to a block of texts (Hos 1-3) which is believed to have come all the way from the eighth-century and therefore written by the prophet Hosea himself due to the prevalence of first person speeches (see Dearman 2010:4). Therefore, raising the question on how the metaphor might have been understood among Hosea's original audience is relevant.

162 It is not the intention of the present study in the limited space available to elaborate on everything about marriage in the Elephantine texts. Our intention however, is to point out some differences if any, between the biblical and the Elephantine records, and possibly why such differences do exist. For more on marriage in the Elephantine texts, see for example: Kelle (2005:72-77), and Geller (1977:139-48).

identification of the lovers and baals referenced in verses 5 and 8 respectively:

> For their mother has played the whore; she who conceived them has acted shamefully. For she said, "I will go after my lovers; they give me my bread and my water, my wool and   my flax, my oil and my drink" (5)

> She did not know that it was I who gave her the grain, the wine, and the oil, and who lavished upon her silver and gold that they used for Baal (8) (*NRSV*).

Our main concern at this point is to find out how if any, the interpretation of these metaphors might have facilitated the development of monotheism in Yehud. Traditionally, some scholars and authors hold the view that the 'lovers' and baal(s) with whom Yahweh's metaphorical wife committed adultery, refer to Canaanite gods worshiped by the Israelites in the eighth-century BCE around the time the book of Hosea is purported to have been written.[163] Thus, it has been argued that while the baal(s) refer to the Canaanite god, Baal, the lovers in turn would refer to aspects of the Canaanite god who may have been worshiped at different cultic places (see Dearman 1993:171-91; cf. Kelle 2005:113). Before we investigate the testimony of the Elephantine texts regarding the validity of the claim that the 'lovers' and 'baals' refer to gods formerly worshiped by the Israelites, it is proper that we review the claim in light of its critics. First, on the characterization of the 'baal(s)' as referencing the Canaanite god Baal, Kaufmann (1960:143) followed by Kelle (2005:163) have argued that there was no evidence of Baal worship in eighth-century Israel. Rather, it has been observed that the worship of Baal was a sin committed by Hosea's ancestors going back to their experience in the wilderness, which was no longer practised at the time the book of Hosea was written.[164] Doubt has been cast particularly on the interpretation of the "lovers" as being the Canaanite god Baal, considering that the lovers are in the plural while Baal is singular.[165] The proposition that there was no evidence of Baal worship in eighth-

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163 A partial bibliography on some of those who hold this position include: Birch (1997:27); (Davies (1992:65); Dearman 2010:349).

164 See Kelle (2005:162, n. 235).

165 Along with this query, it has also been wondered whether such lovers should exclusively be characterized as religious beings. Thus, as an alternative, Kelle (2005:112-13) submits that the metaphor of lovers in Hosea 2, could also refer to Israel's political allies with whom she made treaties that were probably against Yahweh's will.

century Israel as suggested by Kelle and Kaufmann may not represent the views of all other scholars and authors who have written on this topic. For example, (Dearman 2010:350) commenting on Hos 2:17—'For I will take away the names of Baalim out of her mouth, and they shall no more be remembered by their name (KJV),' suggests that the use of the plural in reference to baal implies a polemic against polytheism in early Israelite religion.

We have argued in the previous chapters that pre-exilic Israelite religion was syncretistic; which is to say that they worshiped Yahweh along with other gods. The view that Baal could only have been worshiped by Israel's ancestors prior to the 8th century as claimed by some, is doubtful and probably needs further elaboration. The attempt to get at the real identification of the lovers and baals in the 8th century BCE is handicapped by the fact that we have no clear way of verifying it from the text of the Hebrew Bible.[166] It is at this point therefore that our only resort is to turn to some extra-biblical material particularly the Elephantine texts that were earlier referenced. The Elephantine texts do evince records of marriage contracts in early Israelite traditions. Such records describe how the marriage contracts were set up, clearly stating the procedural measures leading to divorce (see Cowley 1923:15). For the most part, such divorce documents recorded the wives' dowry, which would be reviewed in the event that the marriage is dissolved (see Kelle 2005:74). However, it is sad to say that the Elephantine texts themselves nowhere characterize the lovers and baals of Hosea 2, as being the Canaanite god, Baal or aspects of his cult that might have characterized Israelite worship in the eighth-century BCE (cf. Kelle 2005:74). The question then is just where the traditional interpretation of the lovers and baals in Hos 2, as gods other than Yahweh, might have come from? A question such as this leads us back to something we discussed earlier, and that is, the role of textual redaction in the Hebrew Bible. Texts such as Hos 2: 5 and 8 enable us to look into the minds of the Yehudite elites, charged with the responsibility of

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166 It has been observed that the marriage metaphor of Hos 2 itself is not evinced not only anywhere else in the entire book of Hosea but in any biblical on extra-biblical sources such as the old Babylonian and Elephantine sources, see Kruger (1992:12); cf. Buss (1969:87-88).

composing and interpreting the text of what became the Hebrew Bible and conclude that they treated these ancient texts with an orthodoxy bias. It seems evident that while the texts may have originally meant something different, these Yehudite redactors had a way of using such texts to promote the exclusive worship of Yahweh. This is the point that is being emphasized by Trotter (2001:157) who writes, "These texts most likely represented a pro-Yahwistic, anti-Baalistic perspective in the eight-century, but in the new interpretive environment they are much more likely to have been read as support for a strictly monotheistic faith." The end result of such a practise would therefore be in agreement with the hypothesis we have expressed in the proposal of the present study, which is, that monotheism was developed in Persian period Yehud.

4.6.3 The marriage metaphor and monotheism in Yehud

At the end of all this elaborate discussion on the marriage between Hosea and Gomer, and its metaphorical implication for the relationship between Yahweh and Israel, the important question is just how it was utilized by the redactor of Hosea and the readers of the book, to promulgate monotheism. In other words, how was this metaphorical marriage employed by the Yehudite elites as a tool by which monotheism was promoted? Questions such as these are to be addressed in light of some of the claims we reviewed earlier in which it is believed that "the Yehudites who were responsible for the preservation, production and interpretation of the textual traditions of the nation, [in the Persian period] including the book of Hosea, were almost certainly monotheistic Yahwists" (Trotter 2001:54-55). That being said, it is to be expected that these elites would have utilised any religious doctrine that tended to exalt Yahweh in their endeavor to promote monotheism. In this case, just like Hosea was exclusively supposed to be the only ligitimate husband of Gomer, so was Yahweh to be for Israel. In what follows, we shall present a few scholarly statements on the significance of the marriage metaphor in Hosea 2, to the conceptualization of the monotheistic status of Yahweh in Yehud.

For his part, Kelle (2005:48) observes that Hosea's marriage metaphor served to delineate an exclusive relationship between Yahweh and Israel. He notes particularly that this metaphor as it applied to Yahweh and Israel presented a new picture of God that contrasted against the one between Baal and the land (or people) which was characterized by syncretistic cultic practises (Kelle 2005:48). Further, it has also been argued that through the marriage metaphor, Hosea's use of the sexual imagery in an exclusive relationship may have served as a "foil to sexual rites in the Baal cult" (Rillis 1990:200; cf. Kelle 2005:48). Understood simply, the idea in this case was to employ the nuptial language which the Israelites were arguably familiar with from the Baal cult in order to redirect their devotion to Yahweh. Overall, and most importantly, the metaphor "emphasized Yahweh's lordship as a husband, the exclusivity of Israel's relationship to Yahweh, and Yahweh's forgiving love" (Kelle 2005:48); cf Paolantonio (1989:300); and Rallis (1990:201-202). Putting these observations into context, and bearing in mind that the redactors of Hosea were monotheists as we have repeatedly stated, it goes without saying that the marriage metaphor in Hosea served to promote monotheism among the returning exiles. As it was hinted in the references above, it may be inferred that the need for Gomer to maintain an exclusive relationship with her husband meant that Israel (Yehudites) needed to be exclusively married to her metaphorical husband, Yahweh. By the same token, Hosea's demonstrably tolerance of his wife's infidelity would also signify Yahweh's forgiving love towards his metaphorical wife, Israel.

While it remains disputable whether or not there might have been a tendency to worship Baal among the Israelites in the eighth-century BCE, the author or redactor of Hosea would have naturally employed the marriage metaphor in which Gomer went after other lovers to warn the Yehudites against worshiping other gods alongside Yahweh. While it might be true as we have already pointed out in the earlier sections that Baal worship was an Israelite practise before the time of Hosea, there is no question that in light of the book's redactional history, the polemic against Baal worship would have

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been a tool that was utilized to promote monotheism in Yehud.[167] There is no doubt that the context under which these topics were addressed in the eighth-century BCE was different from that of the Persian period. The ambiguity that exists in the usage of the material in Hosea 2 is best raised by Stienstra (1993:98; cf. 102-103) who writes, "It is a matter of debate among exegetes at which point Hosea is describing his own marital situation, and at which point he is voicing YHWH's grievances against his people, speaking as if it is YHWH who speaks." However, as we have repeatedly stressed the role of textual redaction in Yehud, it goes without saying that these topics were allegorically employed to promote the exclusive monotheistic worship of Yahweh in Yehud, even if that may not have been the originally intendend meaning of the text in the eighth-century BCE. The interplay between the original message of Hosea and that which was derived by the monotheistic redactors in Yehud is further elaborated by Trotter (2001:157), "These texts most likely represented a pro-Yahwistic, anti-Baalistic perspective in the eighth-century, but in the new interpretive environment they are much more likely to have been read as support for a strictly monotheistic faith." So, what we find in Hosea is a situation in which an ancient text, probably addressing an altogether different issue, is employed to address a different one under a new theological and chronological context. A reconcilliation of the two is a topic too large for presentation here. However, what is clear is that the book of Hosea and particularly chapter two, describing the marriage metaphor, was utilized by the mono-Yahwistic Yehudites to promote monotheism.

Another interesting aspect of the marriage metaphor in Hosea is its relationship to the covenant between Yahweh the jealous God of the decalogue and Israel his adulterous wife.[168] While Hosea may have been the earliest to use the analogy between marriage and covenant (cf. Abma 1999:23-24), it has

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167 All this is to be understood in light of Stienstra's (1993:99) observation that there was a tendency among the Israelites to confuse Yahweh and Baal considering some of Baal's attractive attributes such as his fertilization of the land, which would naturally have been associated with Yawheh (cf. Hos 2:16).
168 On the metaphorical marital relationship between Yahweh and Israel, his adulterous wife, see for example Weinfield (1992:81-82).

been argued that he may not have been the first to use the metaphor in relation to Yahweh's jealous "with respect to Israel's forbidden veneration of other deities in the Sinai covenant (Dearman 2010: 55)." The analogical language in this case attempts to compare the covenantal relationship established between God and Israel in the decalogue (Ex 20:5; 34:14) with the intimacy established in marriage. Of interest is the observation that neither marriage nor covenant was ever used in the ancient Near East "to define an exclusive relationship between deity and people (see Dearman 2010:55)." In light of this observation, it follows therefore that both the marital metaphor for covenant as well as its related view of God's jealous for his people are concepts which are exclusively unique to the Old Testament and in particular to prophet Hosea (see Oestreich 1998:118-21; cf. Dearman 2010:55).

Margalit (1990:285; cf. Abma 1999:19) assumes a direct connection between Hosea's marriage metaphors and the nuptial relationship between Yahweh and Aserah. She writes:

> The idea of Israel as Yhwh's wife, first encountered in the writings of Hosea in the eighth century, may have originated as a polemical response to the pervasive catchphrase *yhwh w'srth* of contemporary Hebrew inscriptions [...]. Prophets of subsequent generations will develop the polemically-born idea of Israel as Yhwh's betrothed into a major tenet of Israelite religion

Understandably, the biblical writers including Hosea while promoting the monotheistic exclusivity of Yahweh, tactfully replaced Asherah with Israel as Yahweh's wife. In so doing, Yahweh maintains his status as sole deity on the divine level while Israel keeps her place as his metaphorical wife on the human level. In a monotheistic worldview, Yahweh thus continues ro be the sole ligitimate deity without competitors. Putting all this into perspective, Korpel (1990:231; cf. Abma (1999:19) elaborately writes:

> It appears that in Israel the imagery used to describe the love life and marriages of the Canaanite gods was deliberately and consistently transferred to the relation between Yhwh and his chosen people. [...] Whereas in Ugarit it was apparently the intention of the poets to ascribe a splendid and even superior love-life to the deities, the [...] turn to monotheism forced the Israelite tradition to restrict this anthropomorphic imagery to the relation between God and his people.

The statements above, both the one by Margalit and Korpel, make a strong case in favor of the proposition that the marriage metaphor in Hosea could have served as a tool with which to promote monotheism in Israelite religion. The present study has observed in several places that the book of Hosea is largely a product of Persian period Yehud during which it underwent some extensive textual redaction. That being said, we would therefore argue that instead of attributing the replacement of Asherah with Israel to the eighth-century prophet, it seems reasonable to attribute it to the redactor(s) of Hosea in Yehud. As chapter five of the present study will point out, the familial deities that were worshiped in pre-exilic Israelite religion were replaced by subservient angels—messengers and servants in Yehud in order to remove any possible competitors against Yahweh. Ultimately this was a strategy employed by the Yehudite redactors in their bid to promote monotheism. Likewise, the replacement of Asherah with Israel as described by both Margalit and Korpel above could therefore be seen as another move designed to promote monotheism.

In light of the data we have reviewed thus far on the nature of Israelite religion, and how it subsequently became monotheistic, we will have to restate some of our fundamental findings. We begin by reinforcing the argument that pre-exilic or monarchic Israelite religion was anything but monotheistic. As Römer (2013:2) rightly points out, "The Judean religion, during the time of the monarchy, was centred on a national god who had priority over other gods and whose temple (and perhaps statue) was the visible sign of his presence amongst his people."[169] So, going by the definition adopted by this study, monotheism, which is the belief in one god while denying the existence of all others, would have only been realized in Persian period Yehud after the exile. While recognizing the fact that the exilic period may have played a role in redirecting worship to Yahweh in the wake of the deportation misfortunes, we would argue that at most what was achieved could have only been monolatry—the worship of one god while recognizing the existence of others (cf. Eakin 1971:70). It is

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169 This conception of pre-exilic Israelite religion has been the major discussion of chapter two of the present study.

only in Persian Yehud that we find a complete denial of any other gods besides Yahweh. An argument in support of this view may be drawn from a Persian period text and its associated commentary (Hos 13:4)—"Yet I am the LORD thy God from the land of Egypt, and thou shalt know no god but me: for there is no saviour beside me (KJV)." Commenting on this text, Stuart (1987:203) writes, "The language of the verse is idiomatic and does not acknowledge that there are real gods other than Yahweh (cf. Is 43:11; 45:5, 21)."

Inspite of how much we try to make a case for the development of monotheism in Persian Yehud, there continues to be questions about the true nature of this monotheistic faith and the extent to which it was practised. For one thing, as Frevel (2013:7) observes, "Either there are no monotheism-like assertions which make the uniqueness explicit by excluding other deities or forces (e.g. in the book of Haggai), or these statements are flanked by polytheistic, mythological, et cetera. statements, which imply at least a plurality of divine beings." In other words, as we demonstrated in chapter two, the Hebrew Bible from time to time evinces syncretistic tendencies intrinsic in early Israelite religion. This is to be understood against the background that Israel was originally as polytheistic as her neighbours in the Ancient Near Eastern world which invariably translated into the texts that were produced. In the wake of Persian period redaction which in some sense sought to purge the text of the Hebrew Bible of its polytheistic remnamts, it became plausible to argue in favor of monotheism in the Hebrew Bible despite the challenge associated with defining the monotheistic terminology itself.[170] Based on some of the passages we examined, particularly in the books of Chronicles and Hosea, both of which are key biblical texts on Yehudite religion, we were able to gain some snippets of the kind of faith the Yehudites practised. While the case for an exclusive monotheistic faith in Yehud continues to invite further research, the traces of textual redaction in which the elites attempted to reread and reinterpret

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170 On why "monotheism" may still be a useful term in describing the exclusive worship of one god in Israelite religion, Frevel (2013:7) along with other scholars like Keel (2007:21) have argued in favor of the usage of the term for as long as no better term is coined.

the old biblical traditions in order to promote the exclusivity of Yahweh argues in favor of a decided effort on their part to make him the only ligitimate God.

4.7 Conclusion

As this chapter has pointed out, the arguments in favor of the proposition that monotheism was born in the Persian period are many and arguably convincing. Further to all the discoveries we made, the rededication of the Second temple to Yahweh in a world where other gods were worshiped, itself meant that he had become an exclusive object of Yehudite worship. This is to be understood against the ANE background in which the essence of a deity among other practises was exemplified through the dedication of a temple to him (Lynch 2014:132). It is important to highlight that the Yehudite ellites who bore the responsibility of writing, rewriting and interpreting the texts were themselves monotheists (cf. Ben Zvi 2003:36-37;). It is to be expected therefore that the texts they produced would be of a monotheistic nature. Textual redaction therefore became an invaluable tool in propagating religion in Yehud. As we have seen, some older texts were assigned newer readings and interpretations to suit the theological views of the redactors (see Yoo 1999:178-79). The marriage metaphor in Hosea 2 for example, which probably bore a different theological meaning in 8th century Israel, was employed to promote monotheism in the context of Persian Yehud (Trotter 2001:157). This became particularly true as we discovered how the goddess Asherah, once Yahweh's consort was replaced with Israel, as Yahweh's metaphorical wife. In so doing, Yahweh was distinguished from other syncretistic deities of the ancient Near East, presenting him as the sole legitimate God of Israel.

Furthermore, it is probably a fair analysis to say that not all the people resident in Palestine were monotheists. To understand the reason for this phenomenon, it is important to remember that the religion of those that had remained in the land during the exile, was essentially as syncretistic as that of

monarchic Judah.[171] We would therefore expect a continuation of some kind of pre-exilic syncretism in some quarters of the province. For example, of the two temples discovered in Palestine during the Persian period, the material remains have shown that these temples were dedicated to gods other than Yahweh (see Stern 1984:88-114).[172] This, therefore, is indicative of the fact that there were some people within the wider boundaries of the province who worshiped gods other than Yahweh. However, it has also been argued that these remains were not directly in the territories where the former exiles resided (Stern 1999:254-55). This means therefore that for the most part, the Yehudites who had returned from the exile were characteristically monotheistic. Moreover, in view of some of the biblical passages we reviewed, it is fair to say that while the book of Hosea may be attributed to the eighth-century prophet after whom the book was named, it seems plausible that textual redaction continued to reshape the readership of the book in the Persian period. Thus we would agree with Lim and Castelo (2015:32) who write, ". . . much of Hosea was written by Hosea the prophet, yet significant redactional additions were made to the book in the Persian period." The select texts we reviewed from both Chronicles and Hosea evinced clear cases of redaction in which some older texts were edited to suit the theological convictions of the redactors.

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171 This topic has been presented extensively in chapter two.
172 More on the archaeology of Persian period Yehud shall be presented in chapter 6. We bring it here just to make a case in passing.

CHAPTER 5
FROM GODS TO ANGELS: CANONICAL PICTURE

5.1 Introduction

In keeping up with the view that pre-exilic Israel did venerate or possibly even worship other gods along with Yahweh, and that it was only after the exile that an exclusive monotheistic faith was practised, several scholars have observed that the gods formerly worshiped in Israel were demoted to the status of angels. Thus, Grabbe (2000:34, 35) observes, ". . . they [angels] were simply the old gods demoted to an inferior status." While agreeing with this perceived view of angels, (Tuschling 2007:13, 14) conjectures that angels are "a relic of the pre-monotheistic early Israelite past; they represent a continuing tension within monotheism from the beginning." He goes on to say that such titles as "sons of God" (banei elim) in the Hebrew Bible (e.g. Ps 29:1), which originally referenced gods, have all come to be identified as angelic titles in the wake of monotheism.[173] Likewise, Brettler (1989:62) who also agrees with this view of the origin of angels has himself gone on to defend it by arguing that the angelic beings' naming as warriors (גִּבּוֹרִים) in the Hebrew Bible (e.g. Judg 5:23; Joel 4:11; Ps 103:20) "may reflect an originally divine attribute that was transferred to them."[174] For his part, Stark (2011:74) writes, "Sometime after the Babylonian exile and the shift of the Jews to monotheism, the strategy of at least some groups was to demote these messenger deities to non-divine or significantly lesser divine status while flatly denying the existence of other national deities such as Kemosh, Baal, Asherah etc." Moreover, Day (2002:232) draws parallels from the seventy sons of God who functioned under El, with whom Yahweh became identified, and observes that once the pantheon was reduced to two levels, the seventy sons were demoted to the status of angels, the seventy guardian angels attested in 1

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173 This view is equally shared by Olyan (1993:15-16). Also see Edelman (1996:16–17); and Handy (1994:153).

174 This is to be understood against the perception that Yahweh's warrior attribute and all the roles that go with it were subsequently transferred to angel Michael after the divine sons (second level gods) in the pantheon were demoted to the status of angels (see Otzen 1992:114-124). This continues to make the case that angels, including Michael himself, may indeed have earlier been gods prior to their present status.

Enoch."[175]

In view of the observations above, the present chapter seeks to discuss the circumstances under which the gods formerly worshiped in Israelite religion came to be identified as angels in the wake of the development of monotheism.[176] Right from the outset, it is important to note that the journey to exclusive monotheism was characterized by what Becking (1999:1-8) refers to as change and continuity. The aspect of change comes in the sense that Israel endeavored to separate herself from Ugaritic polytheism in search of a monotheistic faith.[177] Thus as part of this change or separation, the people rejected foreign deities as well as their own older traditional deities whom they had hitherto venerated.[178] It is worth noting in spite of Israel's desire for change however, that continuity with the idea of a divine council theme was not outrightly done away with. Obviously, there had to be a way of accounting for the many gods who were either rejected or demoted from their divine status as we just indicated above. That being said, it is in the nature of things therefore that the idea of a divine council was preserved albeit through a reduced structure consisting of two tiers instead of four, with Yahweh at the top and angels (messengers) at the bottom (see Smith 2004:116). In our attempt to authenticate the view that angels were former gods, we shall evaluate four beings that are believed to have originally been deities in early Israelite religion. The four in their order of consideration shall include, *Resheph*, *Deber*, *Qeteb,* and *Azazel*.

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175 It is believed that the seventy sons of El (Yahweh) continued to exist in the book of 1 Enoch as guardian angels (see Day 2002:232).

176 For both the usage of the term 'angel' which comes from the Greek ἄγγελος, and how some former gods came to be identified as angels, see Smith (2004:116-119). Smith (2004:101-123) has elaborately mapped out how Israelite religion which was originally identified with Ugaritic religion through the divine council structure had transitioned to a monotheistic one in which Yahweh ended up being the only legitimate God. In so doing, Smith discusses the role played by the beings we have come to know as angels in facilitating the development of what ultimately became exclusive monotheism.

177 The quest for change and separation from Ugaritic polytheism likely started in the monarchical period possibly during the reforms of Kings Hezekiah and Josiah. With each passing age, Israelite religion was reducing its number of gods which ultimately ended up with Yahweh in the top tier and the angels (messengers, and servants) in the lowest tier by the time of the post-exilic period (cf. Smith 2004:101-116).

178 See Smith (2004:116). As Smith elaborates in this reference, the deities from whom the Israelites separated themselves included the gods of the second level in the divine council hierarchy.

5.2 Resheph in the ancient Near East

5.2.1 Resheph at Ebla

From what we know, Ebla was a city in ancient Syria, that was located southwest of Aleppo, which became popular around the mid-third millennium BCE (see Beattie and Pepper 2001:247-48). In much of this ancient metropolitan, Resheph is believed to have been so popular in fact that a gate was named after him (Blair 2008:44). The evidence in favour of Resheph as a chthonic deity at Ebla has been well attested by different scholars (Xella 1999:701; cf. Blair 2008:45). More that just being a chthonic deity, Resheph was mostly characterized as the god of the royal necropolis, who was also identified as *rasp gunun,* that is, 'Reshef of the garden' (Blair 2008:45; cf. Niehr 2003:85). Some Eblite texts attest incidents in which Resheph was a recipient of offerings from the people, some of which were characterized as 'purifying' offerings (See Münnich 2013:43). In this case as has been suggested by some, such purification would be with reference to disease of some kind **(**Münnich 2013:43). Other than the purifying offerings, Resheph was also a recipient of mineral offerings at Ebla, including among others, 10 minas of silver and 27 shekels of gold (Münnich 2013:43). In all these offering rituals, of great importance is the observation that such practises argue in favor of the view that the people gave to Resheph with the idea of rendering sacrifice as we would find in a relationship between humans and a deity. Such offerings are believed to have been a way of apealing for healing from Resheph (Münnich 2013:44). Again, in all this sacrificial practise, it goes to argue that Resheph at Ebla was considered to be as divine as any other ligitimate god.

5.2.2 Resheph in Egyptian mythology

The presentation of Resheph in Egyptian mythology is quite extensive and therefore way beyond the scope of the present study. Going by the designations associated with his name, it seems evident that he may have been quite a prominent deity in Egypt. Some of them included, 'the great god;' 'lord of the

sky;' 'chief of the ennead of gods;' and 'he who hearkens to prayer' (see Blair 2008:45; cf. Simpson 1953:86 n. 2; Fulco 1976:27). Resheph is attested in Egyptian iconography as having been an aggressive warrior god, which is why it is believed that Amenhotep II made him his protector in his military campaigns (Xella 1999:701; cf. Blair 2008:45). Of interest is the observation that while Resheph may have been venerated among both the high ranking class and the common people alike, he was not part of the Egyptian pantheon, but rather that he continued to be regarded as a foreign deity, categorically referred to as 'resident alien' (see Blair 2008:46).[179] From a stele housed in the British museum (BM 263) an inscription has been attested which reads, "Resheph (*rspw*), the great god, lord for ever, ruler of eternity and lifetime. Resheph (rspw), the great god, ... (?), lord of the sky. All Protection, all life, all stability, and all power are with him. Made in the Place of Truth by the Servant P [...]."[180] While some portions of this inscription are missing, typical of most ancient inscriptions, still the message clearly testifies not only to Resheph's status as a divine being in Egyptian mythology but also that he was a highly esteemed god. Even more interesting is the message in an inscription purported to have been found on stele Hildesheim, in the (Roemer-und Pelizaeus museum 1100). This stele is dated to the nineteenth dynasty (ca. 1200), and it depicts the warrior Resheph holding a mace (axe?) in one hand and a spear and a shield in the other. The inscription reads, "An offering, which the king gives to Resheph (*rspw*), the great god who hears prayer."[181] In all, Resheph seems to have occupied such a special place in ancient Egyptian mythology that in all probability he must have been considered to be a legitimate god among many others.

Other than the inscriptions we just referenced, another way of accessing information about Resheph in ancient Egyptian mythology is through the designations and epithets by which he was known. Three such designations are quite descriptive of his character. First is his designation as

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179 Cf. Fulco (1976:66); Simpson (1953:73).
180 See for example, Lipinski 2009:186-87); Tazawa (2009: 45-46); cf. Münnich (2013:83).
181 Thompson (1970:148-49); Fulco (1976:11-12); Cornelius (1994:28); Lipinski 2009:194-95); Tazawa 2009:40; cf. Münnich (2013:91).

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'warrior god.' It is believed that the Egyptians first came into contact with Resheph during their military campaigns in Syria (see Münnich (2013:111). Under unknown circumstances, they got to learn about this highly militaristic god known as Resheph after which they adopted his cult. He seems to have risen to fame under king Amenhotep II who is believed to have been referred to a "Beloved of Resheph (Simpson 1953:86 n. 4; cf. Münnich 2013:111). Secondly, Resheph was also designated *Divine Protector of Horses (*Cf. Simpson 1960:65). It is not crystal clear as to why Resheph had an affinity for horses. However, Münnich's (2013:111) explanation seems informative when he writes, "It seems that the basis of such a relation is Resheph's connection with war and his fiery temperament. At the same time, one should remember that in the ancient Near East horses were used in war or as quick (and thus exclusive) means of transport, and they were not pack animals, much less used to work on the land." It is to be expected therefore, that for a warrior character that Resheph was, he would naturally be associated with the fastest mode of transport in his time.

Thirdly, Resheph was also known as *a charitable protective deity*. It is interesting to note that Resheph, a deity associated with war, would at the same time be designated as the charitable protective deity.   It has been observed that in several steles [stelae] are found requests directed to Resheph for health and prosperity. One inscription reads, "May he give life, prosperity, health and sharpness of face, favour, grace and life in service of his *ka,* while my mouth is filled everyday with every good and pleasant things until reaching old age (*Egypt 14*). Resheph has also been attested on the Chester Beatty Papyrus (Egypt 22) as one of the gods who protect the worshiper against poison (see Münnich (2013:115). For the purposes of our study, it is not in our interest to get into an exhaustive presentation of all the designations associated with resheph in Egyptian mythology. However, based upon these brief reviews, it seems evident as we noted earlier that Resheph was unequivocally recognized among the most important deities in ancient Egyptian mythology. It is therefore incumbent upon us to track how some of the features of Resheph in ancient Near East at large might have been adopted into

Israelite religion, which we shall discuss later.

5.2.3 Resheph in Ugaritic mythology

In KTU I.15.II:6, the text lists a number of Ugaritic deities who came to bless King Keret and his new consort together with their newly born offspring. Among the listed deities is Resheph, which confirms that he was a recognized god in Ugaritic mythology (see Münnich 2013:126). Resheph is believed to have been ranked fourth in the Ugaritic pantheon after El-Hadad, Ba'al-Hadad, and Anat; and was followed by such gods as Yarikh, Kothar, Athtar, Shapash or Astart.[182] In the same Ugaritic text (KTU I.15.II:6) Resheph is designated, *rsp zbl* which means prince Resheph. As Münnich (2013:126, n. 24; 147) observes, *zbl* (prince) is often a title borne by the most important gods in Ugaritic mythology. That Resheph could be identified by such a designation, exclusively reserved for the most important gods, unequivocally speaks to his elevated divine status in Ugaritic mythology. In a ritual that was conducted day and night in which Ugaritic gods were to receive an offering, Resheph is listed to have received an ewe burnt offering, which continues to make a case that he was identified with the prominent gods worshiped at Ugarit.[183] Resheph had the power to cause death whenever such an act pleased him. For example, he is said to have been responsible for the death of one of King Keret's wives (cf. Münnich 2013:146). One of the main characteristics of Resheph is recorded in KTU 1.78; a text which describes him to have been the goddess Shapash's gate keeper.[184] The chthonic character of Resheph evinced by the text in question has led scholars to concluded that the god Resheph himself was essentially the gate keeper of the netherworld.[185] Among other duties, Resheph was charged with the responsibility of "opening the door of the land of the dead to the setting sun" (Münnich 2013:148).

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182 For more on the order of deities in the Ugaritic pantheon, see del Olmo Lete 1999a:71; De Moor 1970:217; cf. Münnich 2013:156).
183 For a bibliography, see Olmo Lete 1999a:213-19; Pardee 2002:67-69; cf. Munnich 2013:126.
184 Shapash or Shemesh as she was sometimes known was the Canaanite goddess of the sun, also known as the torch of the gods (see Noll 2001:245 cf. KTU 1.2.xv and xxii).
185 This view was first made by Albright (1926:143-54). Over the years the view has likewise been upheld by others including: Pardee (2000:133, n.15); Day (2002:198-99); Tazawa (2009:126); cf. Münnich (2013:147-48.

This suggests that as the gate keeper serving under the goddess Shemesh, Resheph's responsibility would have been that of opening the gate to the netherworld in order to allow the setting sun to shine on the inhabitants of the underworld (see Münnich 2013:148).

One other important characteristic of Resheph in Ugaritic mythology may be drawn from *KTU* 1.82:1-3. While it is a recognizable fact that a considerable portion of the text is damaged, thus hampering a complete accurate translation (cf Lipinski 2009:104), still, we can glean some insights from the reconstructed version which reads: "[Let] Ba'al smite [...] (the breed?) of Tunanu and reveal and pour out the [...] on the earth. Then I shall not feel the curse, then the curse will not be for me [...] (harmful?). The Lord of the arrow Resheph (*b'l hz rs'p*) (is) between the two of you. He will shoot at his kidneys and his heart." In his analysis of this text, Münnich (2013:149) observes, "In this context, Resheph appears as a perilous deity with bow. However, here he seems to be a defender of the people. Resheph stands between the praying person and another deity (demon?) threatening men." From this, it is evident that as a deity in ancient mythology, Resheph was conceived of as a being who had in his best interest the walfare of people. He would often not only defend people from any external force but even more so from other oppressive deities or demons. It is further postulated from this reconstructed text that with the use of the bow and arrow, Resheph had the power to defend people from the incantations of evil magicians or witches, and he could also prevail over diseases ensuing from such incantations (Münnich (2013:149).

In view of these observations, what is true is that while Resheph was considered to be a powerful deity in Ugaritic mythology, his might was never intended to hurt man. Rather, he stood to protect the children of El from any malicious force. This protective and curative characteristic of Resheph will be of great interest to our analysis of the roles played by angels in the Hebrew Bible. In other words, since the present chapter builds on the hypothesis that angels were former gods that were demoted to the status of messengers in the wake of the development of monotheism, the idea shall be to

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track whether or not the characteristics evinced by such gods were reproduced in the angels they became.

Hypostastically, Resheph bears several place names in Ugarit (see Münnich 2013:156-159). Onomastically, we find several theophoric names after Resheph in Ugarit such as *Rashap-abu*, that is, "Resheph is father" (see Lipinski 2009:82). Another theophoric name associated with Resheph is *abdu-Rashap*, translated as "servant of Resheph." We also find *Nu'mi Rashap*, meaning "Resheph is my delight" (Lipinski 2009:84). Altogether, it is estimated that there are at least 129 theophoric names associated with the god Resheph at Ugarit, while references to the god himself are only 52 (cf. Münnich 2013:167). Whatever the case might have been, the numerous theophoric names associated with Resheph speak to the fact that not only did he occupy an important place in Ugaritic mythology, but that he was significantly identified with divinity. In view of the data we have reviewed about the status of Resheph in Ugaritic mythology, the study would not be complete until we discuss how he was adopted into Israelite religion. Considering that Israel was bent on promoting a monotheistic faith in which Yahweh was to be the only legitimate god, with the other gods either denied that they existed or reduced to the status of angels, the treatment of a prominent god like Resheph in Israel is certainly worth our research. In what follows therefore, we shall not only discover the place of this god in Israel, but how some of his characteristics which we have already evaluated might have been reproduced in some of the named angels in Israelite faith.

5.2.4 Synthesis

From the descriptions about Resheph in all the ancient Near Eastern traditions we examined, one gets the sense that he was considered to be a legitimate deity. At Ebla for example, Resheph was a deity associated with the netherworld. He was also a recipient of offerings from the people intended to solicit for his healing. Furthermore, it is probably true that no ancient tradition speaks to the divinity of

Resheph more succinctly than that of Egypt. As we saw from an inscription on a stele housed in the British museum with the message "Resheph (*rspw*), the great god, lord for ever, ruler of eternity and lifetime. Resheph (rspw), the great god, ... (?), lord of the sky," it is beyond question that Resheph was construed as a legitimate god in ancient Egyptian mythology (see 5.2.2 above). From our review of his status in Ugaritic mythology, Resheph had power over life and death, considering that he was designated to be the gate keeper of the netherworld (see 5.2.3 above). All this goes to argue in favour of the view that he was construed as a legitimate deity in these ancient traditions.[186] Putting all this into perspective however, it is Resheph's adoption into early Israelite religion whose primary object of worship was Yahweh that makes great conversation. How would such a highly revered god been compatible with the worship of Yahweh, the only legitimate God of Israel? In light of questions such as these, we will now discuss the status of Resheph in some select Hebrew Bible passages.

5.3 Resheph in early Israelite religion

5.3.1 Introduction

Right from the outset, Smith (2001:68) observes that Resheph is a recognized member of Yahweh's theophanic retinue.[187] In other words, Resheph is a member of the divinities that comprised Yahweh's pantheon. In all, it is estimated that the word Resheph, though not all referencing the deity Resheph, appears about eight times in ancient Hebrew sources, and that 7 of these are recorded in the Hebrew Bible, while the other one is in the preserved Hebrew version of Ben Sira (see Münnich 2013:215-16).[188] Since our interest in all the appearances of this word in the Hebrew Bible is on those that particularly single out the god Resheph and his cult, it is therefore incumbent upon us to analyze only

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186 On the ritual in which the people at Ebla often gave 'purification' offerings to the deity Resheph, see 5.2.1 above.
187 Smith and other scholars (cf. Hiebert 1986:4, 92-94, 123; Haak 1992:83, 90) have long observed that Habakkuk 3:5 is a key passage evincing the important role played by Resheph in Israelite divine council. The text in Habakkuk shall be discussed in detail later. However, we bring it here just as an introduction to what is yet to be discussed.
188 A complete listing of the seven biblical references include: Deut 32:24; Ps 76:4; Ps 78:48; Job 5:7; Song 8:6; Hab 3:5; 1 Chr 7:25; while the eighth one is (Ben Sira) Sira 3:18.

those passages whose focus is on the deity Resheph. Thus the first passage mentioning Resheph which we shall analyze is Habakkuk 3:5.

5.3.2 Resheph in Habakkuk 3:5

לְפָנָיו יֵלֶךְ דָּבֶר וְיֵצֵא רֶשֶׁף לְרַגְלָיו:

"Before him went pestilence, and plague followed close behind" *NRSV*

In our attempt to discuss Resheph in Habakkuk 3:5 and indeed other select passages in the Hebrew Bible, the starting point as we shall discover in what fallows is to note that this deity was adopted into Israelite religion from foreign traditions particularly those of Canaan or Ugarit. Kaiser (1992:180) for example notes, that the words for both Resheph and Deber, another being whom we shall discuss later, were familiar names of deities worshiped in Canaanite mythology. Likewise, Nogalski (2011:683) for his part writes, "The terms for pestilence and plague actually (or in all likelihood) reflect the names of ancient deities. One of the names, *Re'sep* is attested with certainty in the Ebla tablets. . . . Re'sep is the name of a warrior deity, though the word can also mean pestilence."[189] On the origin of Resheph prior to his recognition in Israelite religion, scholars are agreeable though with minor variations that he was imported from foreign cultures. For example scholars like Albright (1950:1-18), and Day (1979:353, cf Münnich 2013:217, n. 8) have argued unanimously that the description of the theophany in (Hab 3) derives from parallels in the Ugaritic mythology.

The variation comes through those who believe that the theophany may have been derived from some Mesopotamian sources (Irwin 1956:47-50); while others conjecture an Egyptian source (see Shupak 2001:97-116). In spite of such variations, what is beyond question is the fact that the theophany is of foreign origin to Israelite religion regardless of whether the actual origin was Ugaritic, Mesopotamian or Egyptian. In light of how much Ugaritic mythology impacted Israelite religion as we

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189 For more on the attestation of Resheph at Ebla, see Hiebert (1986:92-94).

elaborated in chapter two however, it is fair to conclude that while the theophany in (Hab 3) may have been common to other traditions in ancient Near East, Ugarit was probably the most likely source.[190] The idea at this point is to discover whether or not the characteristics with which Resheph was associated in Ugaritic mythology were equally imported along with him into Israelite religion. Such an endeavor seeks to discover what aspects of Ugaritic mythology were continued and discontinued in Israelite religion. Those that were continued would be understood as not having posed a challenge to Israel's developing monotheism, while those discontinued would be otherwise considered as such.

In the Habakkuk passage in question, Yahweh is presented as going out to confront the cosmic sea representing Yahweh's enemies, the godless.[191] One particular continuity in this case is the observation that Yahweh's enemies are comparable with Baal's enemies in Ugaritic mythology characterized as the sea and dragon (Hab 3:8 cf. Day 1979:353). Yahweh's "seven arrows" of lightning have also been compared to Baal's seven lightnings (Hab. 3:9 cf. Day 1979:353). A Ugaritic background of Resheph in the Hebrew Bible is clearly depicted in Habakkuk 3:5, "Before him went pestilence, and plague went forth behind him." Commenting on this verse, Day (1979:353-54) writes, "Pestilence (*deber*) and Plague (*r'sp*) are here clearly personified and behind the latter there certainly lies the Canaanite plague god, Resheph. On the basis of this, one could therefore conjecture that the god Resheph played a part in Baal's conflict with the sea or dragon in Canaanite mythology underlying Hab. iii." What we find in (Hab 3:5) therefore is a case of unequivocal continuity of a pagan god in the Hebrew Bible. The question of compatibility between early Israelite religion and Ugaritic or Canaanite mythology is thus irrefutable. The text of Habakkuk 3:5 evinces a henotheistic faith in the early history of Israelite religion in which besides Yahweh, the primary object of worship, other lesser deities subordinate to him were venerated (cf. Münnich 2013:218).

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190 On the basis of the abundance of the name Resheph in Ugaritic literature, it is fair to credit Ugaritic mythology for being the origin of the god Resheph who was later adopted into other traditions including that of Israel. On this point, see Münnich 2013:124.

191 On Yahweh as warrior, see Day (1979:353) who presents him as coming in a thunderstorm to confront his enemies.

That Resheph was a legitimate deity both in ANE and early Israelite religion in light of

Habakkuk 3:5 has been documented elaborately by Michalak (2012:53) who writes:

> In Hab 3:5 he [Resheph] seems to be a lesser deity who appears in the host of the superior God. This text describes the theophany of a Divine warrior in a thunderstorm. Resheph probably appears in this passage as a member of Yahweh's retinue. The background of this fragment is probably a Canaanite myth presenting Baal's struggle with the sea or dragon. We know that there is one Ugaritic text which depicts Resheph as Baal's ally in the struggle with the dragon. It is interesting that Yahweh in this passage (3:9) is depicted as the archer with the (quiver/seven?) arrows. It raises questions about possible borrowings from the Near Eastern mythological background.[192]

In view of the above, a few observations may be noted. As Michalak has pointed out, Resheph was a

lesser deity who functioned under the head God of Israel, Yahweh.[193] The status of Resheph in early

Israelite religion is comparable to that in ANE mythology in which he functioned as a subordinate god

under El.[194] This kind of comparison has raised the question whether or not what we find here is a case

of Israel borrowing from other Near Eastern traditions regarding the role of Resheph (cf. Michalak

2012:53. At the core of what we would call the "borrowing theory" is the question whether Israel's

religion came through revelation or simply adopted from mythological neighbours. We have discussed

this topic in detail in chapter two and do not intend to do so here. However, we bring the question of

borrowing at this point to make the case that since Resheph was a deity in Ugaritic mythology prior to

his adoption into Israelite religion, so did he become in the Hebrew Bible.

5.3.3. Resheph in Deutronomy 32:24

The text of (Deut 32:24), another text which mentions Resheph, reads, "I will send wasting famine

against them, consuming pestilence and deadly plague; I will send against them the fangs of wild

beasts, the venom of vipers that glide in the dust" (NIV). Again, a critical analysis of this passage

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192 For the association of Resheph in Habakkuk 3:5 with Baal in Canaanite myth, cf. Stephens (1924:290-93); for the identification of Yahweh (Hab 3:9) and Resheph in their association with a quiver of arrows, cf. Day (1979:146).

193 The fact that Yahweh presided over a retinue of divinities subordinate to him in early Israelite religion agrees with the argument we made in chapter two of the present study in which we posited that just like the other major gods of the ancient Near East, Yahweh functioned within a framework of a pantheon (cf. Smith 2002:72).

194 Thus the deity Resheph functioned under Yahweh in early Israelite religion just like another deity by the same name equally functioned under El in Ugaritic mythology (see Pardee 2000:52-53; cf. Blair 2008:47).

shows that the characters at play (pestilence and plague) have been personified. Thus Keil and Delitzsch (1872:101) would write, "Plague and Pestilence, as proceeding from God, are personified and represented as satellites; the former going before Him, as it were, as a shield bearer (1 Sam. Xvii.7), or courier (1 Sam xv:1); the latter coming after Him as a servant (1 Sam. Xxv.42)." While the picture portrayed in the passage in question depicts apostate Israel being punished by their God Yahweh, it is also clear that Yahweh may here only be adopting a role that was originally carried out by Resheph in Ugaritic mythology (cf. Münnich 2013:219-20). A clue from the previous verse (Deut 32:23) depicts Yahweh with his bow to shoot, an act reminiscent of warrior-deities in ancient Near East, obviously including the god Resheph (cf. Fulco 1986:68).[195]

In light of this observation therefore, it stands to argue that the act purported to be carried out by Yahweh in (Deut 32:24), was originally the work of the god Resheph (Münnich 2013:219). Likewise, the text equally depicts a deity spreading plague using his bow and arrows; and in all likelihood this is none other than Resheph himself but whose attributes the redactors of the Hebrew Bible associated with Yahweh the only legitimate God (see Münnich 2013:220).[196] In all probability, the move to associate some or all the characteristic features of mythological deities with Yahweh may have been aimed at diminishing the role of such deities in order to promote the monotheistic exclusivity of Yahweh. On Yahweh's assimilation of features associated with mythological deities, Thompson (1970:151) writes, "Several related ideas show that Yahweh absorbed the functions or at least the terminology used to describe Resheph and other deities." He then goes on to identify some activities performed by Yahweh in the Hebrew Bible which clearly reminiscent the acts of mythological deities. For example, when Yahweh 'descends in the smoky cloud and touches the mountains' (Ps 144:5; Hab

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195 For more on the warrior-role of deities in Ugaritic mythology and indeed the ancient Near East at large, see Michalak (2012:51-52) who along with Resheph mentions other deities including Yarri, Nergal and Apollo. Also, see Smith (2001:68).

196 Later in the study, we will have to discuss how the characteristics of Resheph came to be reproduced in angels, who replaced Jewish gods other than Yahweh.

3:10 Zech 9:14; when he utters in a thunderous voice (1 Sam 7:10; Ps 77:19; 81:8; 104:7); and when he shoots his flashing arrows (Ps 77:17[18]; Deut 32:23), and his shining lightning as a lance (2 Sam 22:15, Ps 18:15[14], 144:5, cf. Zech 9:14). On the imagery of lightning, it is generally observed that it was considered to be a weapon used by mythological gods for sending pestilence to both man and beast (see Thompson 1970:151).

Again, even as we saw earlier, the characters in Deuteronomy 32:24, be it the famine, the consuming pestilence or the deadly plague; the fangs of wild beasts, or the venom of vipers, are all personified. As several scholars have observed, through such personification, the characters in question have been viewed as embodying features of a demon or deity.[197] One of the best arguments in favor of this observation is the fact that later translations of the Jewish canon including Talmud, Targumim and Midrashim render the embodiment of קֶטֶב (destruction) as a demon (see Jastrow 1903:1346; cf. Münnich 2013:220). Of even great importance in light of our study thus far is Blair's (2008:194-95) decision to replace the term 'demon' with the phrase "Yahweh's angels." These observations do underscore first of all that Ugaritic gods such as Resheph were integrated into early Israelite religion without conflict. Secondly, because the exclusivity of Yahweh was at the core of the religiosity of the compilers of the biblical text, such gods were denigrated to none divine beings such as we find in the case of Resheph who is characterized through the imageries of plagues and diseases. However, even with such denigration, the characters in question never completely lost their divine features which explains why they continued to evince characteristics of a demon or deity. Thus Handy (1994:157) would argue, ". . . the nature of these beings [angels in the Hebrew Bible] as gods had not been entirely lost. That their divinity could not altogether be lost and forgoten explains why in Jewish religion such beings came to be identified as angels, demons or lesser gods subordinate to Yahweh.[198]

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197 For a partial bibliography on this observation, see Tromp (1969:162-63); Sanders (1996:193-98); De Moor (1997:251); Day (2002:203); cf. Münnich (2013:220, n. 26).

198 The identification of the person of Resheph as a demon or lesser deity as well as Yahweh's angel has already been made. For the demonic identification, see Jastrow (1903:1346); cf. Münnich (2013:220). For the usage of "lesser

5.3.4 Resheph in 1 Chronicles 7:25

The reference to Resheph in 1 Chronicles 7:25—"Rephah was his son, Resheph his son, Telah his son, Tahan his son" (NRSV)—is not only interesting but frankly one that has led scholars into divergent speculative directions. Unlike certain incidents in the Hebrew Bible in which human beings bore theophoric names, the case in the passage in question identifies a descendant of Ephraim with the actual name of the deity Resheph.[199] In order to appreciate what is at stake in this rare reference, we need to understand Israel's conception of her god, Yahweh, at the time the books of Chronicles were compiled. As we have argued before and will do so again in the ensuing study, Chronicles was a redacted text in which the authors or better still compilers, were bent on promoting the exclusivity of Yahweh in the post-exilic period, leading to a monotheistic faith.[200] That being said, the question then is why a descendant of the patriarch Ephraim would be named after a pagan god who as the present chapter reveals, was being demythologized at the time, considering his incompatibility with the developing monotheism? (cf. Münnich 2013:237).

In light of the foregoing question, some early scholars like Rudolph (1955:72) conjectured that the reference to 'Resheph' in the text could have been nothing but a dittography associated with the name 'Repah' which was mentioned just before that of Resheph. In other words, in Rudolph's, view the reference to Resheph in (1 Chr 7:25) makes the text a corrupt one (cf. Japhet 1993:183). Still, it is arguably dificult to prove the cases of both dittography or corruption in the passage. Just how a claimed scribal error of repetition would duplicate an altogether different term "Resheph" in place of another "Repah" is difficult to come to terms with. Thus there has to be some other convincing explanation for

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deities," see Riley (1999:235). For his identity as Yahweh's angel, see Blair (2008:194-95).

199 There is certainly no evidence that the name *Resheph* in 1 Chronicles 7:25 was intended to be understood as a theophoric name. Among the early detailed works on theophoric names in the Hebrew Bible is the one by Fowler (1988:29-70). That the name Resheph does not appear anywhere in the list of theophoric names in Fowler's work may speak to the argument that the name was not intended as such in the Chronicles passage, thus leaving the option that the name be understood literallily as referring to the deity Resheph (cf. Münnich (2013:223).

200 The thesis in favor of the post-exilic period as being the time for the development of monotheism has been supported by several scholars as we noted in chapter four of the present study, and might not have to be repeated here. For additional insights, see Münnich (2013:237).

the appearance of the pagan deity's name in the genealogy of Ephraim. While there might be some truth to Rudolph's claim, Münnich (2013:223) for his part challenges the idea of it having been a scribal error, arguing that most likely any ommission would have left out the term 'benei' (son) and not the repetition of the name *Repah*. Regarding the case of a possible ommission on the part of the recording scribe raised by Münnich, it is evident that the designation "son" with reference to Resheph is missing from the Hebrew text unlike the other names mentioned in the passage—וְרֶפַח בְּנוֹ וְרֶשֶׁף וְתֶלַח בְּנוֹ וְתַחַן בְּנוֹ. This observation just adds to the anomalies that further complicate the status of Resheph in the passage.

Determining the date for the compilation of the book(s) of Chronicles at this time would be essential in the sense that if the date be pre-exilic for example, then it may be argued that naming a descendant of Ephraim after a pagan deity should not be surprising considering that Israel back then was syncretistic, accommodating other gods alongside Yahweh. However, when it is resolved that Chronicles is a post-exilic book, then the naming of Ephraim's descendant after a pagan deity becomes problematic owing to the fact that monotheism is believed to have become fully developed at that time. On dating Chronicles, the general concensus has been in favour of the mid-fourth century BCE.[201] Why then would the name of a pagan deity, Resheph, be mantained in an extensively redacted text of the Hebrew Bible? This is probably one of those questions without a staight forward answer warranting further research.

However, in light of the material we have thus far reviewed which convincingly stated that early Israelite religion was syncretistic, one wonders if we should not view the mention of Resheph (1 Chr 7:25) as a vestige or remant of such syncretism! Even with the intensive textual redaction associated with the books compiled in the post-exilic period including Chronicles, we surely would expect traces of the original religion practised by the ancient Israelites. Some scholars have argued that even with the development of monotheism, the Canaanite gods formerly revered in early Israelite

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201 For example, see Harrison (1969:1154); Williamson (2010:15-16); Hill and Walton (2010:217).

religion had left some kind of an "afterglow."[202] Thus it is to be expected that though no longer in practise, traces of syncretism could not altogether be obliterated. Putting all the foregoing into perspective, two facts deserve to be reiterated. First, it is a convincing thesis that the gods of foreign nations were both recognized and possibly worshiped in early Israelite religion such as we have seen thus far in the case of the deity Resheph. Secondly, such gods were demoted to the status of demons (semi-gods) or angels in post-exilic Israelite religion in the wake of the development of monotheism.[203]

5.3.5 Synthesis

As we saw in 5.2.3 above, it is beyond question that Resheph was adopted into Israelite religion from mythology in which his name referenced a Canaanite god. As was earlier noted, Resheph (plague) is clearly personified in (Hab 3) making a case in all likelihood that he was as much venerated in Israelite religion as he was in Canaan. As Szeles (1987:48) observes, "This personification refers back to the demonic forces in the ancient Canaanite religion, to the power of those horrible divinities that oppressed mortal human beings with epidemics or with destructive droughts (perhaps meaning burning fevers)." Even more importantly, it is further observed that in light of the Hebrew Bible theological understanding, such demons have no independent sphere of influence but are inferior beings who stand to serve Yahweh (Szeles (1987:48). In light of these observations, Resheph in the Hebrew Bible clearly traces his origin to his Canaanite mythological origins. To the question on how the presence of the deity Resheph would have been compatible with Yahweh, the only legitimate God of Israel, Szeles' explanation above that Resheph and all other lesser divinities were viewed as inferior demonic beings who had no independent sphere of influence and merely stood to serve Yahweh is enlightening. This

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202 See Day (2002:232). In this reference, Day notes that the Canaanite gods though no longer worshiped in Israelite religion, nevertheless had left a prominent vestige through the imagery of the 'seventy sons of God' reminiscing the gods under El's pantheon who were demoted to the status of angels in the wake of monotheism.
203 It is worth noting even as Day has elaborated above that the doctrine of angels which we have categorically assigned to the post-exilic period may have only become fully developed by the 3rd C. BCE, when the book of Enoch was written.

observation continues to make the case being made throughout the present study that while these divinities were earlier venerated in Israel, they were subsequently demythologized and reduced to the status of messengers or angels whose sole mission is to serve Yahweh.[204]

5.4 Characteristics of Resheph and the named angels in Israelite religion

5.4.1 Introduction

As the present chapter has noted, of all the divinities we evaluated, it became clear that Resheph is better attested than all others. Not only was he a legitimate god in ancient Near Eastern traditions but so was he in early Israelite religion. In our attempt to authenticate the hypothesis that angels were former gods prior to their present status, one way to make such an argument is to track some of the characteristics exhibited by such gods as Resheph in the named angelic beings in Israelite religion. Any shared characteristic features might speak to their common identification. In what follows therefore, we will endeavor to draw some parallels between the characteristics evinced by Resheph and how they might have been reproduced in Israel's angelic beings. In order to accomplish that, we will have to rely on both Egyptian and Ugaritic mythology where such characteristics are better attested.

5.4.2 The characteristics of Resheph in ancient Near East

Right from the outset, it is evident that one of the characteristics of Resheph, is that he was a warrior god. In Egyptian mythology for example, he was believed to be a 'militant deity of uncontrollable temperament' and that he could easily be provoked (see Münnich's 2013: 111). He was endeared by the young pharoah Amenhotep II so much that he made him the guardian deity of his military campaigns (Münnich's 2013:111). According to a New Kingdom Egyptian text, known as "Mortuary Temple Ramses III" the soldiers of Ramses III are compared to Resheph with the words, "The chariot warriors are as mighty as Res'eps."[205] Thus with this characterization, Ramses III may have proudly considered

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204 On the demythologization of foreign gods in Israelite religion, see Blair (2008:49-56).
205 For a more detailed study of the militaristic nature of the deity Resheph and his adaptation into different ANE

his soldiers to be as strong in battle as the deity Resheph. Over time, the name Resheph had actually become an epithet of a god of war without even having to refer to any particualr deity.[206]

Other than being a warrior-deity, Resheph was also identified as a god of the netherworld. For example at Beth-Shean he was identified with Mekal, the god of the netherworld (Michalak 2012:52). Likewise, Resheph was also identified with Nergal, the god of the underworld at Ugarit, who was also known as the god of war and plague (cf. Michalak 2012:52). Resheph has also been characterized as a protective deity whose mission was to guarantee the the health of the people. Thus among other testimonies to that effect, we find some well wishers saying, "May he [Resheph] give you all life and health every day."[207] Resheph has further been recorded as having the power to protect worshipers against some form of poison that might otherwise put their lives at risk.[208] In the Leiden margical papyrus (*Egypt 27, 28*) Resheph has also been particularly attested to have cured a specific odd illness known as *Samana* (Münnich 2013:115). In all likelihood, the deity Resheph seems to have had some kind of divine healing power with which he healed those that were afflicted by disease. Furthermore, Resheph was granted an important title at Ugarit which was particularly borne by the most important deities, that is, *zbl* (prince) (cf. Münnich (2013:147).

5.4.3 Shared characteristics between Resheph and angels in the Hebrew Bible

The above warriorlike characteristics of Resheph may equally be traceable in some angelic beings of the Hebrew Bible as well as those evinced in Judaism at large. Like Resheph, the principal angels including Michael and Gabriel, the only two named in the Hebrew Bible are associated with warlike roles on behalf of God's people.[209] In a block of texts including (Exod. 12:23; 2 Kgs 19:35; Isa 37:36; 2

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traditions, see Fulco 1986:68; Smith (2001:68); Pritchard (1969:250), n. 27; cf. Michalak (2012:52).

206 See Schulman (1979:83), n. 50. As Resheph had become an emblem of a war god, it is to be expected that the mention of his name would invariably include other gods associated with war such as the Egyptian god Montu (cf. Münnich (2013:1111).

207 This is recorded in the Egyptian stela from Athribis (Egypt 33); cf. Münnich (2013:115).

208 This is recorded on the Chester Beatty Papyrus (Egypt 22); cf. Münnich (2013:115).

209 See Arnold (1995:42); cf. Michalak (2012:66).

Chr 32:21) it is clear that references are made to angelic beings with warrior or destructive characteristics. Thus presenting these passages in order we read:

> For the LORD will pass through to strike down the Egyptians; when he sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the LORD will pass over that door and will not allow the destroyer to enter your houses to strike you down (Exod. 12:23; *NRSV*).

> That very night the angel of the LORD set out and struck down one hundred eighty-five thousand in the camp of the Assyrians; when morning dawned, they were all dead bodies (2 Kgs 19:35; *NRSV*).

> Then the angel of the LORD set out and struck down one hundred eighty-five thousand in the camp of the Assyrians; when morning dawned, they were all dead bodies (Isa 37:36; *NRSV*).

> And the LORD sent an angel who cut off all the mighty warriors and commanders and officers in the camp of the king of Assyria. So he returned in disgrace to his own land. When he came into the house of his god, some of his own sons struck him down there with the sword 2 Chr 32:21; *NRSV*).

In reading these passages, two observations may be made. First, that angels would have characteristics (e.g. warrior-like) that were evinced by recognized deities both in ancient Near East and the Hebrew Bible such as Resheph, argues in favor of the thesis that angels may have originally been deities in early Israelite religion.[210] Secondly, whether it is the destroyer in Exodus, or the specific reference to angels in the rest of the passages above, one gets the sense that unlike Resheph who in ANE seems to have exercised some autonomy to some extent, it is Yahweh who is behind the warrior missions carried out by the angels in the Hebrew Bible.[211] The passage (2 Chr 32:21) in particular emphasizes that it was Yahweh who sent the angel on its warrior errands.[212] In light of what we have learnt thus far both in the present chapter and the previous one, this goes to argue that while angels may be divinities, they are considered to be subordinate to Yahweh under whom they serve as messengers and servants.

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210 Cf. Michalak 2012: 52) who observes that in his appearance in Habakuk 3:5, Resheph "seems to be a lesser deity who appears in the host of the superior God."

211 While the passage (Exod. 12:23) does not specifically identify the 'destroyer' to have been an angel, we get a clue to that effect from the Jewish translations (e.g. Targum Hab 3:5) which describes the destructive Resheph as an angel of death (see Fulco 1986:58, n. 308; cf. Michalak 2012:53). Again, all this continues to make a case that the once recognized deities in Israelite religion including Resheph subsequently became angels subordinate to Yahweh.

212 Knowing what we now know, that the deity Resheph and all others were demythologized and reduced to the status of subordinate messengers and servants, Fulco (1986:59) notes that the Deber and Resheph ultimately came to be identified as "malevolent spirits accompanying God in his destructive work." This means that Yahweh was the initiator of such destructive errands which were to be carried out by his subordinates under his command.

Furthermore, the title *zbl* (prince) which characterized Resheph is equally characteristic of the angel Michael in the Hebrew Bible. Thus we read in Daniel 12:1, "At that time Michael, the great prince, the protector of your people, shall arise. . . ." Again, this brings a close identification between Resheph and the angels of the Hebrew Bible. Earlier on, we saw that Resheph was associated with the power to heal diseases of various kinds. Likewise, angel Michael is attested as being the recipient of requests for protection against evil powers, including diseases (see Hipoltstein 2007:615).[213] It has been observed for example that Michael, along with other angels including Gabriel, Uriel and Raphael are often invoked to help provide cure to an eye disease.[214] Moreover, just like Resheph was a god who presided over the netherworld at Ugarit, the same has also been attested of angels in Jewish traditions.[215]

5.5 Deber in the ancient Near East

5.5.1 Deber at Ebla

Deber has not been as well attested in ancient Near Eastern sources as the other deities such as Resheph for example. However, it has been argued that in as much as Resheph was a recognized deity in ancient mythology, so was Deber. Thus arguing in favour of this observation, Day (2002:199) following in the footsteps of Pettinato (1981:247; 296) has noted that Deber is the name of the patron god at Ebla (*Dir-bi-ir dingir ib-la*). The Eblaite text most referenced in this identification about Deber is tablet TM. 75.G.1464 v. XI 12-18.[216] As far as the meaning of the name is concerned, it has been suggested that *Deber* denotes 'plague' or 'pestilence.'[217] Tromp (1969:40) n. 10 points out that Deber

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213 In the same vein Mach (1999:572) observes that angel Michael is often associated with trees and medicines.
214 See Hipoltstein (2007:620); cf. Magical Papyri I 32.
215 See Bautch (2007:467-471). In this reference names of angels such as Uriel and Raphael associated with the netherworld are not discussed in the present chapter as they are not mentioned in the Hebrew Bible. It is therefore our intention that their detailed presentation be reserved for the next chapter which shall discuss angels in the Jewish translations.
216 See Blair (2008:34-35) for a more detailed presentation of this.
217 With this observation, Del Olmo Lete (1999:231) conjectures that this meaning may have been a Hebrew development with scarce support from other Semitic languages. However, this meaning has also been associated with the Ugaritic *dbr* which some have thought to be the equivalent of 'pestilence.' In Arabic, some have associated

was one of Mot's (god of death) servants or messengers. It seems to have been a common practise back then that [major] gods often had a pair of servant deities. This practise was equally reflected in the Hebrew Bible; for example Yahweh had *deber* and *resheph* in his service (see Hab 3:5 and Deut 32:23); as well as *deber* and *qeteb* (Ps 91:6 and Hos 13:14).[218] From the foregoing observations it may be argued that Deber was a legitimate god in the truest sense of the word in the context of some ancient Near Eastern traditions. However, as is always the case in critical religious studies, there are those that have been opposed to this characterization of Deber.[219] As was earlier stated that Deber is not well attested in ancient Near Eastern sources, it seems that much of what we know about this deity is based on the testimony of some select Hebrew Bible passages.

5.5.2 Deber in Mesopotamian mythology

It has been supposed that in the Summerian language, Deber probably meant 'calamity' while in Akkadian, the equivalent of Deber, *dibiru* has been associated with misfortune (see Del Olmo Lete 1999:231). As Del Olmo Lete (1999:232) further observes, the representation of diseases as demons was common in Mesopotamia. Further to this observaion, Blair (2008:37) conjectures that the fact that diseases were either often personified as demons in ancient Mesopotamian mythology might have influenced the association of deber with the Mesopotamian deity named Namtar. Namtar was believed to be an under world deity often associated with death and probably disease as well (cf. Blair 2008:37, n. 106). In all, some have felt that all the different meanings associated with Deber in Mesopotamia may well be expressed in the designation, 'pestilence.'[220]

Deber with *dabr* which carries the meaning of death.
218 For this extended explanation, see Tromp (1969:163), n. 16; cf. Blair (2008:33).
219 For different views on the identity of Deber, see Pettinato (1981:245, 247).
220 See Del Olmo Lete (1999:232); cf. De Moor 1971:186 for the different interpretations of Deber.

5.5.3 Synthesis

From the foregoing hints about Deber both at Ebla and Mesopotamia as well as the ancient Near East at large, it seems plausible to make a case that Deber was as much a deity as Resheph was. This argument has already been substantiated by the observation that Deber was actually the name of the patron god at Ebla. Likewise, the association of Deber with Namtar, the god of disease and death equally speaks to his divine status. Moreover, perhaps of even greater interest in the context of the present study is Tromp's (1969:40, n. 10) observation that Deber was one of the god, Mot's servants or messengers. In light of this, two observations may be drawn. First, that Deber was a servant to Mot, a high ranking god in Ugaritic mythology meant that he was a deity himself.[221] Secondly, as the present study continues to argue, that Deber was Mot's servant or messenger may have influenced the identity of all 'minor' deities in the Hebrew Bible as Yahweh's messengers and servants in the wake of the development of monotheism.

5.6 Deber in the Hebrew Bible

5.6.1 Introduction

In all, it has been ascertained that Deber appears about 48 times in the Hebrew Bible.[222] In all its occurences, of interest to our study are those references that specifically allude to Deber as a demon or deity. As expected, such passages would drive the conversation in view of how other deities could be accommodated alongside Yahweh in a monotheistic faith. We will therefore critically discuss three passages that make reference to the deity Deber including: Habakkuk 3:5; Psalms 91:5-6; as well as Hosea 13:14.

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221 This fact was well noted in our review of the Ugaritic pantheon in chapter two in which we noted that the beings designated as messengers were themselves deities serving the high ranking gods. For a detailed study on the nature of Mot, see Healey (1999:598-602).

222 A comprehensive bibliography on this has been provided by Blair (2008:104, n.1).

5.6.2 Deber in Habakkuk 3:5

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5לְפָנָיו יֵלֶךְ דָּבֶר וְיֵצֵא רֶשֶׁף לְרַגְלָיו

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"Before him went pestilence, and plague followed close behind." (*NRSV*).

We already came across the name Deber in (Hab 3:5) when we discussed Reshef, the other deity who is referenced along with him. Deber's divinity in some sense has been argued based on his appearance with Resheph, whose divine status by all accounts has been well established in (Hab 3:5). The deity Deber, just like Resheph has been associated with counterparts in ancient Near Eastern mythology, particularly Dabir, the patron deity of Ebla. A clear observation about Deber is that like Resheph, he has equally been personified as a feature of Yahweh's destructive power, albeit under the name "pestilence" (see Blair 2008:116). In other words the activities performed by Deber are described such as we would expect the acts of a living being. Thus in Habakkuk 3:5 we read about Deber, " . . . pestilence followed his (Yahweh's) steps" (NIV). While the divinity of Deber has not been clearly established as much as that of Resheph, Olmo Lete (1999:231-32) observes that his personification can be identified with that of a demon (cf. Hab 3:5; Ps 91:3, 6; Hos 13:14). Again, going by Olmo Lete's observation and in light of what we have thus far discovered about the connotation of the term 'demon,' it could be argued that Deber could have earlier been a legitimate deity both in mythology and early Israelite religion. The original source of the characterization of this deity as "pestilence" has not been well documented. However, Olmo Lete (1999:231) conjectures that it was simply a Hebrew development. If indeed the characterization of this deity as "pestilence" was a Hebrew development as Olmo Lete observes, then it would not be a far fetched idea to argue that such a development could have likely emerged in the wake of the development of monotheism in Israelite religion. This would have been during the time when Israelite scholars frantically endeavored to remove any competing deities alongside Yahweh from the Hebrew Bible through textual redaction which we have repeatedly referenced in the present study. Again, like we saw in the case of Resheph, Deber in all likelihood

should have equally been a member of Yahweh's divine retinue. Further, the parallelism drawn between Habakkuk 3:5 and Deuteronomy 33:2-3 seems to make a case that Deber, just like Resheph would have been a member of "Yahweh's myriads of *qedosim;*" that is, one of the many divinities in the pantheon of the Israelite God (see Blair 2008:117). This process of textual redaction would also include Münnich's (2013:218) observation who writes about why the Septuagint omits the name 'Deber' saying, "The aim of this correction was most probably to demythologise the text, which could result in a theologically correct monotheistic version." However, it is not clear why the final compilers of the text succeeded in their attempt to conceal the true identity of the deity Deber and not that of Resheph. In all, these observations authenticate the hypothesis that angels were originally gods both in mythology and ancient Israeite religion.

5.6.3 Deber in Psalms 91:5-6

In what has been observed as a case in which Deber is considered to be a demon, Psalm 91:1-6 is one such passages believed to carry such a connotation. We shall first quote it in Hebrew and then provide the translation.

1 יֹשֵׁב בְּסֵתֶר עֶלְיוֹן בְּצֵל שַׁדַּי יִתְלוֹנָן:

2 אֹמַר לַיהוה מַחְסִי וּמְצוּדָתִי אֱלֹהַי אֶבְטַח־בּוֹ:

3 כִּי הוּא יַצִּילְךָ מִפַּח יָקוּשׁ מִדֶּבֶר הַוּוֹת:

4 בְּאֶבְרָתוֹ יָסֶךְ לָךְ וְתַחַת־כְּנָפָיו תֶּחְסֶה צִנָּה וְסֹחֵרָה אֲמִתּוֹ:

5 לֹא־תִירָא מִפַּחַד לָיְלָה מֵחֵץ יָעוּף יוֹמָם:

6 מִדֶּבֶר בָּאֹפֶל יַהֲלֹךְ מִקֶּטֶב יָשׁוּד צָהֳרָיִם

[1] "You who live in the shelter of the Most High,
  who abide in the shadow of the Almighty,
[2] will say to the LORD, "My refuge and my fortress;
  my God, in whom I trust."
[3] For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler
  and from the deadly pestilence;
[4] he will cover you with his pinions,
  and under his wings you will find refuge;
  his faithfulness is a shield and buckler.

⁵ You will not fear the terror of the night,
   or the arrow that flies by day,
⁶ or the pestilence that stalks in darkness,
   or the destruction that wastes at noonday." (*NRSV*)

As we seek to understand the true character of Deber in the passage under question, we first need to note that there are divergent views regarding his identity particularly in verse 3 above. For example, while דבר (pestilence) is personified in some translations, the Septuagint (LXX) to the contrary treats the term or designation with a diferent connotation. For example it translates דבר as word (λόγος) which therefore tends to eliminate the divine aspect otherwise associated with דבר. Likewise, some scholars and authors alike have also translated verse 3 in ways that quite frankly either minimize or completely disregard the alleged divine nature of דבר. Thus Oesterly (1947:409) translates דבר as 'destructive word;' while Dahood (1958:328) has it as 'venomous substance;' cf. Tate (1990:348), n. 3c. A sample of some Bible translations, for example *NAU, NIV,* and *RSV* render it as 'deadly pestilence.' Moreover, of interest the *CJB* renders it as 'noisesome pestilence.'[223] Again, in each of these cases, one gets the sense that there is no divine connotation associated with Deber.

5.6.4 Deber in Hosea 13:14

מִיַּד שְׁאוֹל אֶפְדֵּם מִמָּוֶת אֶגְאָלֵם אֱהִי דְבָרֶיךָ מָוֶת אֱהִי קָטָבְךָ שְׁאוֹל נֹחַם יִסָּתֵר מֵעֵינָי:

"Shall I ransom them from the power of Sheol?
Shall I redeem them from Death?
O Death, where are your plagues?
O Sheol, where is your destruction?
Compassion is hidden from my eyes" (*NRSV*).

Earlier in verses 1-3, Yahweh is described as having been angry against Israel because of the sin of idol worship (cf. Blair 2008:109-110). Thus through the sin of Ephraim representative of that of Israel, the passage reads, וַיֶּאְשַׁם בַּבַּעַל וַיָּמֹת , that is, he (Ephraim) sinned through indulgence with Baal and died (v-

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223 In all these matters on the translation of דבר, Blair (2008:106) n. 9 has provided an extensive bibliography.

1). As Blair (2008:110) observes, their sin may be summarized into three categories:

— making of idols (of silver) — מַסֵּכָה
— human sacrifice — זֹבְחֵי֙ אָדָם
— kissing of (calf) idols — עֲגָלִים יִשָּׁקוּן

In verse 14, under whose subsection the present presentation belongs, the powers from which Yahweh is the only one that can redeem Israel have been personified including: שְׁאוֹל (sheol) and מָוֶת (death). Likewise, דבר (plague) and קֶטֶב (destruction) have also been personified.[224] As Block (1997:215) observes, "Outside of Israel, Deber was the name of the demon of pestilence echoes of which some have heard in Hab 3:5, . . ., as well as in Hos 13:14, Ps 91:5-6, and 78:48.[225] However, these may be nothing more than poetic allusions. In normative monotheistic Yahwism, Yahweh's powers are comprehensive. He assumes the functions that others ascribed to rival gods.[226] Again, as Blair (2008:112) analyzes, while Deber and Qeteb appear here as agaents of mot and Sheol, in the context of monotheistic Israel, they all ultimately serve as Yahweh's agents of punishment.

In view of the foregoing, we shall attempt to restate some of our findings. First, it is important to note that there is a fair amount of data on Deber both in the ancient Near Eastern sources as well as the Hebrew Bible too much for consideration in a subsection of a chapter. However, for purposes of the present chapter, it became compelling to believe that Deber may have originally been a legitimate deity in early Israelite religion as much as he was in other ancient Near Eastern cultures. As was already pointed out by Block above, Deber was a demon (semi-god) of pestilence in cultures outside of Israel. We already reviewed some data in the previous chapters particularly chapter two, in which we discovered that early Israelite religion was not quite different from that of her polytheistic neighbours That being said, it is not being off the mark in view of the material we have reviewed to deduce that Deber was originally revered in Israelite religion. However, in the wake of the development of

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224 קֶטֶב (Qeteb) is another deity who was acknowledged both in ancient Near Eastern mythology as well as the Hebrew Bible whom we shall discuss in the next sub-section.
225 See Tromp (1969:163); cf. Olmo Lete (1999:438-39).
226 See Andersen and Freedman (1980:639).

monotheism in which there was to be only one legitimate God in Israelite religion, all other deities including Deber were demoted to the status of angels—messengers and servants. Furthermore, as Andersen and Freedman (1980:639) have rightly stated, in the course of demoting such deities, the redactors of the text of the Hebrew Bible essentially transferred the important features associated with such deities to Yahweh, the God of Israel.

5.6.5 Synthesis

In light of what we just reviewed, it goes without saying that the characters at play in all these verses (Ps 91:5-6) are personified as some kind of forces that have power to destroy. Since Deber is closely associated with Resheph who himself was a deity, such association tends to argue in favor of Deber's divinity as well. The present chapter is exploring the thesis that the beings we have come to know as angels in the Hebrew Bible were deities that were once worshiped in ancient Israel along with Yahweh, and that they were demoted to the status of angels (messengers) in the wake of the development of monotheism. An analytical review of Deber tends to authenticate such a thesis. First, the fact that the translators of the LXX opted to render דבר as λόγος (word) suggests that it was done in an effort to demythologize the text or eliminate the divine nature of this being. This would be part of the textual redaction we discussed in chapter four. Secondly, the fact that the personified forces elaborated in these verses (Ps 91:5-6) are identified in verse 11 as God's angels equally favors the proposition that while these beings (Deber, Resheph, etc) were earlier identified as deities in ancient Israelite religion, their status was subsequently reduced to that of angels (messengers) subservient to Yahweh the only legitimate God.[227]

Roberts (1991:154) acknowledges that Resheph as well as Deber (Hab 3:5) are characterized as members of Yahweh's military entourage, and that they both precede and follow him in his march

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227 On the identity of Deber and the other beings discussed in Psalms 91:5-11 as angels, see Blair (2008:108).

against his enemies. Putting this into perspective, it has to be understood against the background that in the religious traditions of the ancient Near East, great gods were often associated with military retinues. It has also been well attested that almost always the militaristic aides to the great gods were often assigned in pairs (Roberts cf Hieber HSM 38:93). As Roberts (1991:154) further observes, in the context of the Hebrew Bible Resheph (plague) is often characterized as a weapon that Yahweh uses against his enemies (e.g. Exod 5:3; 9:15; Lev 26:25; Num 14:12). In the context of the present study, of even greater interest is Roberts' exegetical analysis of 2 Sam 24:16 which he views as identifying Resheph with the *malak hammashit, "*the destroying angel" (cf. Exod 12:23; 2 Kings 19:35; Isa 37:36). These observations become interesting to our study on two counts. First, that Resheph who was a legitimate deity in the ancient Near East could become Yahweh's aide or weapon he used against his enemies unequivocally supports the thesis that in the wake of the development of monotheism all deities other than Yahweh were demoted to the status of messengers or servants. Secondly, that Resheph could be identified with the *malak hammashit, "*the destroying angel" as we saw above, clearly favors the argument that angels in the Hebrew Bible are former gods that were excluded from such a status in order to promote the monotheistic faith.[228]

5.7 Qeteb in the ancient Near East

5.7.1 Introduction

The term Qeteb, just like the ones we discussed before it, contains some overtones of a divine name (Wyatt 1999:673). As in the case of the deity Deber, even if we fail to authenticate the divinity of Qeteb, his association with both deities Deber and Resheph continues to make a case in favour of such a proposition (see Langton 1949:49-50). It has generally been construed that Qeteb is name of an

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228 In bringing all these views to the reader's attention, the study seeks to track any evidence that proves that the gods worshiped in ancient mythology could have been venerated in early Israelite religion as well. However, at some point in time, arguably in the post-exilic era during which monotheism had become a fully developed theme, such gods were demythologized and demoted to the status of angels and servants.

anthropomorphic demon.[229] Etymologically, some have observed that the name Qeteb means "gatherer" probably deriving from the Arabic "Qataba" (gatherer) (see Ford (2012:189).

5.7.2 Qeteb in Assyria

Qeteb has not been well attested in ancient Near Eastern sources as compared to other deities such as Resheph and Deber. However, based on the ancient tradition in which treaties were often entered upon in the presence of deities who served as witnesses, who would also curse transgressors of the treaties if called for, the presence of Qeteb at one of such treaties has been used as evidence for his divinity. This is a case in which a treaty was established between Kings Esarhaddon of Assyria and Baal of Tyre in 680 BCE. In the listing of the Assyrian deities who witnessed this treaty is the deity Qatiba [Qeteb?] thus proving that Qeteb was considered to be a legitimate deity among these ancient traditions (see Wyatt 1999:673; Ford 2012:189; Blair 2008:40, 41).[230]

5.7.3 Qeteb at Ugarit

The Ugaritic text KTU 1.5 ii 24 does make reference to a character who might be an equivalent of Qeteb. The text mentions *qzb* who is believed to be a demon with a characteristic feature of 'stinging.'[231] Because of the lack of substantial data on *qzb* in the ancient Near Eastern sources, scholars have often relied on the characterization of this deity in the Hebrew Bible. Thus De Moor (1987:73) n. 343, has argued for *qzb*'s divinity based on biblical passages that essentially consider him to be [an evil] demon.[232] It seems that the thesis to prove the divinity of *qzb* in Ugaritic mythology has not been accepted with unanimity among the specialists in these topics. Like most ancient texts, the Ugaritic text

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229 See Oesterley and Robinson (1947:117, 120)
230 While the identification between Qatiba and Qeteb has not been ascertained outrightly, what tends to cement this identifiction is the fact that later in Israelite religion (Deut 32:24) the deity Qeteb is listed as one of Yahweh's agents of cursing apostate Israel. Through the use of such association therefore, the Qeteb refereced in Deuteronomy may be the same being listed among the witnessing deities in the treaty between Esarhaddon and Baal. This would therefore authenticate the divinity of Qeteb (cf. Ford 2012:189).
231 See De Moor (1987:73), n. 343; cf. Blair (2008:41).
232 This includes some of the passages we have already reviewed: Deut 32:24; Ps 91:6; and Hos 13;14.

(KTU 1.5 ii 24) which mentions *qzb* is incomplete or broken, which has led some to argue that such a sole text cannot be used as evidence to support the existence of the demon in question in Ugaritic mythology (see Wyatt (2002:119-20); cf. Blair (2008:42). However, while proving the divinity of *qzb* at Ugarit remains an open question, ruling it out of ancient Near Eastern traditions at large would equally be doing injustice to scholarship. This is because as we saw earlier in the case of Assyria, Qatiba who in all likelihood is the equivalent of the Hebrew Qeteb, was a recognized deity in that tradition. Thus it is plausible to argue that *qzb* was equally a recognized deity at Ugarit in spite of some texts being damaged, which possibly attested such a fact. Moreover, it is also possible that the translators of the text of the Hebrew Bible, may have had some reliable sources at the time of writing for them to arrive at the conclusion that Qeteb was a demon.

5.7.4 Synthesis

In all these discussions about the demonic beings that characterized religion in the ancient Near Eastern world, our main interest is to discover how they were received into Israelite religious thought along with the concept of monotheism. Before doing so, it is important that we first establish their demonic or divine status in these ancient mythological cultures. As we have seen, in spite of the scanty nature of the sources, it seems plausible to conclude that they considered him to be either demonic, semi-divine or whatever related designation which embodies these attributes.[233] Even more compelling about the divine nature of Qeteb is the evidence drawn from the treaty between Esarhaddon and Baal which we discussed earlier in which Qeteb was listed among the deities who served as witnesses to the treaty. Based on conclusions drawn from this treaty, we would have to find an otherwise convincing reason to the contrary in order for us to be able to exclude Qeteb from the list of other divine beings.

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233 For example as Blair (2008:40) has noted, Qeteb had subsequently become the name of a demon in Jewish tradition. Thus making the case that based on the original sources from which the trasnlators of the canon drew their information, Qeteb was unequivocally construed to a divine being of sorts.

5.8 Qeteb in the Hebrew Bible

5.8.1 Introduction

The name Qeteb is attested in four different places in the Hebrew Bible and in three of those he is associated with demonic or divine attributes. This for the most part is so because of his association with those beings whose divinity is beyond question particularly Resheph, but also Deber, as well as Mot and Sheol.[234] Thus Deuteronomy 32:24 associates Qeteb with Resheph, (Ps 91:5-6; Hos 13:14) with Deber, (Hos 13:14) with Mot and Sheol, leaving (Isa 28:2) as the only one which mentions Qeteb with no parallel (see Blair 2008:195 n. 1). For his part while writing on the association between Qeteb and the afore mentioned divine beings, Ford (2012:189) notes, "the term [Qeteb] itself indicates it is not just a 'lower' demon but also a divinity which was associated with the darkest aspects of nature and humanity; namely pestilence and plague." Again, all these stand to argue that Qeteb was a recognized deity in the Hebrew Bible. In what follows, we shall analyze the status of Qeteb in the four passages that reference his name.

5.8.2 Qeteb in Psalm 91:5-6

> 5. "You will not fear the terror of the night, or the arrow that flies by day; 6. or the pestilence that stalks in darkness, or the destruction that wastes at noonday" (*NRSV*).

Thus far, all we can say about Qeteb is that he is an embodiment of some force that threatens to cause destruction; in this case against the people of God. As with the other beings we have already reviewed, the true identity of Qeteb tends to differ between the traditions of the Hebrew Bible and Judaism at large. For example, as Goldingay (2008:44-45) observes, these forces of destruction including Qeteb were generally believed to be demons in Judaism. He further notes that going by the way Qeteb's activities in this psalm (Ps 91:6) are described, it tends to correspond with ways in which hostile gods

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234 On this, see Ford (2012:189) and Blair (2008:43). Blair has provided a brief bibliography of specialist scholars for those interested in further studies on not only Qeteb but all other demonic beings recognized but the authors and redactors of the hebrew Bible.

and demons were generally described in middle Eastern thought. In the context of the Hebrew Bible however, the redactors of the text seem to have avoided the characterization of such forces neither as demons nor gods. Also, any time the term 'god' is mentioned, often it is in reference to the pagan gods of Canaan and other ancient Near Eastern deities. Thus as Goldingay (2008:45) further notes, "It [the Hebrew Bible] rather applies the language of vv 5-6 to Yhwh as one capable of sending epidemics or shooting arrows (e.g., Ps 38:2[3]; Exod 11:5; 2 Sam. 24:16)" (Keel 1978:84-85). Moreover, despite the fact that the term 'demon' is not employed in the Hebrew Bible, the LXX to the contrary renders Psalms 91:6 thus, "nor calamity nor demon at noon" (cf. Declaisse-Walford, et al 2014:698). This therefore suggests that the forces that threaten destruction against Israel were themselves divinities of sorts.

5.8.3 Qeteb in Hosea 13:14

"Shall I ransom them from the power of Sheol?
Shall I redeem them from Death?
O Death, where are your plagues?
O Sheol, where is your destruction?
Compassion is hidden from my eyes" (*NRSV*).

In the passage above, Qeteb once again is associated with other beings including Deber, Mot and Sheol which is why as we saw earlier, it has been argued that in as much divine as Resheph was, so were all the others appearing with him in these verses including Qeteb. As in the other case above, here Qeteb along with the other beings listed with him are not only personified, but they are presented as Yahweh's agents with whom he punishes apostate Israel (see Nogalski 2011:185; cf. Blair 2008:196). Again, following the hypothesis being articulated in the present study, that these beings serve as Yahweh's agents in the Hebrew Bible argues in favour of their conception as angels in post-exilic period. As a way of authenticating the divinity of Qeteb, of interest is the observation that the Babylonian god Nergal as attested in late Palestine of the Hellenistic period, had assimilated the deities Mot and Resheph (see Ford 2012:189). That being said, according to Job 18:13 we read that Qeteb was the first

born of the god, Mot. In this case it might be argued that since Qeteb was the deity Mot's son, Qeteb himself would equally have been a deity.[235]

5.8.4 Synthesis

In all this, once again we are led to the same argument we have made repeatedly in the present study, that in early Israelite religion gods other than Yahweh were recognized and possibly even worshiped in a syncretistic manner. Thus Psalms 91:6 among other texts in the Hebrew Bible would have been redacted by Israel's monotheistic theologians in order to demythologize it from the remnants of pagan polytheism so as to present Yahweh as the only legitimate God, leaving the rest as his messengers and and servants (Goldingay 2008:45). Therefore, as the hypothesis being articulated by the present study stands, all personified divine beings referenced in association with Yahweh subsequently came to be identified as angels (messengers) in the wake of the development of monotheism (cf. Ps 91:11; and Blair 2008:106).

5.9 Azazel in the ancient Near East

5.9.1 Introduction

The scholarship of the foreign gods that are believed to have been imported into early Israelite religion tends to recognize three characters as gods proper, that is, *Resheph*, *Deber*, and *Qeteb* to the exclusion of all others that evinced divinity including *Azazel* (cf. Blair 2008:12). However, some scholars have strongly felt that the list of beings identified as foreign gods in the Hebrew Bible could also include characters like *Azazel,* which is why we have included him in the present study.[236] Like it was the case with some of the beings we have reviewed thus far, *Azazel* tends to be better attested in the Hebrew

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235 In chapter two of the present study we discovered that the sons of the gods in the Ugaritic pantheon for example, were themselves gods though at a different level from that of the parent god. Therefore, Qeteb would have been a deity but probably at a different level from the one occupied by his father, Mot.

236 For those that have argued that Azazel and Lilith also be included in the list of foreign gods that came to be venerated in early Israelite religion, see Oesterley and Robinson (1947:114); Langdon (1931:9-13); and Langton (1949:46).

Bible than in ancient Near Eastern traditions.

5.9.2 Azazel in Ugaritic Mythology

From the few attestations about him at Ugarit, *Azazel* who may be defined as a "lesser divinity" could be the equivalent of the Ugaritic *zbl* 'prince' (see *KTU* 1.102:27; cf. Janowski 1999:129;).[237] *Azazel* was associated with a ritual to do with an elimination rite. In the ancient traditions of Syria and Mesopotamia the pollution of the community was symbolically eliminated by means of a living substitute which often included cattle, goats, donkeys and mice.[238] Through the ritual in which the impurity of the nation was eliminated via the sending away of the scapegoat to a distant, remote and desolate (desert) place, such scapegoats came to be known as 'desert demons (see Janowski 1999:130). It may be deduced from this characterization of *Azazel* as a demon (Gr. δαίμων) that he was in some sense considered to be a divine being, considering as we saw earlier that a demon may be defined as a "divinity" with reference to either a god or goddess; or in some sense simply a "lesser deity" (cf. Riley 1999:235). While for his part Cheyne (1895:153-56); cf Blair (2008:20, n. 18) considered *Azazel* to be a demon, of interest is the view by others that Azazel may have originally been a deity (a god of the flocks) who subsequently became a demon.[239] In spite of the divergent views with which *Azazel* was characterized in ancient Near East, the bottom line seems to be that he was mostly associated with divine beings. For example, Langdon (1931:9-13) for his part associated Azazel with the Sumerian *Ninamaskug;* Wyatt (1976:429) associated him with *Attar;* while Tawil (1980:59) identified him with

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237 While the epithet *Zbl* would literally be translated "prince," it was specifically borne by Baal in Ugaritic mythology. This may therefore suggest that it was associated with divinity. For the usage of the epithet with Baal, see Rahmouni (2008:159); cf. *KTU* 1.2; 1.9.

238 On how the elimination ritual was performed in Syria and Mesopotamia, see Janowski (1999:130); cf. Wright (1987:31-74). For more on the 'scapegoat motif' and how it was practised in these early traditions, see Janowski (1999:130).

239 See for example, Osterley and Robinson (1947:114); Langdon (1931:9-13); Langton (1949:46); cf. Blair (2008:20). In the context of the Hebrew Bible which we shall discuss later, it is observations such as the latter that continue to make the case that the beings we have come to know as demons or angels—messengers and servants of Yahweh the Hebrew God, might have originally been deities who were demoted to the status of angels in the wake of the development of monotheism, in which the final compilers of the text were bent on promoting the exclusivity of Yahweh.

Mot. (cf. Blair 2008:20).

5.9.3 Synthesis

In view of these various identifications of *Azazel,* one gets the sense that he was unequivocally conceived to be a divine being. We would arrive at such a conclusion not just because he was characterized by some as a demon, which in turn translates into a divine being, but also because he was closely identified with such prominent mythological deities as *Mot* as we just saw. Further, that some have etymologically analyzed the Hebrew עֲזָאזֵל (Azazel) to mean either "El is strong" or "the mighty one of El," continues to speak to this character's divinity.[240] Any being identified with El, the head of the Canaanite pantheon, would definitely be someone who was highly esteemed in the traditions of the ancient Near East to the point that his divinity would be beyond question. Whether we would want to argue that עֲזָאזֵל was just some kind of a hypostasis of El, as modern scholarship would put it is probably irrelevant in this case because the bottom line is that his status was conceived of as belonging to the class of the esteemed deities of the day.

5.10 Azazel in the Hebrew Bible

5.10.1 Introduction

It has long been established that the term עֲזָאזֵל is only referenced four times in the Hebrew Bible, and all are found in Leviticus 16:8, 10, 26. Admittedly, the actual meaning of עֲזָאזֵל has never been determined with certainty even by those that have done some in-depth study on this character (cf. Janowski 1999:131). Three popular views have been suggested regarding the identity of עֲזָאזֵל: First, it is believed that עֲזָאזֵל could be an epithet of a demon; Secondly, others have postulated that it could be a geographical designation with a possible meaning of 'rugged cliff'; while others have seen the term to

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240 For the analysis of עֲזָאזֵל as implying "El is strong" see Blair (2008:20); for the view that it might mean "the mighty one of El," see for example, Tawil (1980:57-59); Wright (1987:22).

be a combination of the terms *ez* (goat) and *ozel* (to go away or disappear) which therefore implies a goat that circumstantially goes away and likely never to be found again.[241] In what follows, first, we shall evaluate the Hebrew Bible textual attestations of Azazel; and then we shall attempt to review how Azazel himself or anything associated with his cult might have featured in the Hebrew Bible.

5.10.2 Azazel in Leviticus 16: 8-10; 26

8:וְנָתַן אַהֲרֹן עַל־שְׁנֵי הַשְּׂעִירִם גּוֹרָלוֹת גּוֹרָל אֶחָד לַיהוה וְגוֹרָל אֶחָד לַעֲזָאזֵל
וְהִקְרִיב אַהֲרֹן אֶת־הַשָּׂעִיר אֲשֶׁר עָלָה עָלָיו הַגּוֹרָל לַיהוה וְעָשָׂהוּ חַטָּאת:
וְהַשָּׂעִיר אֲשֶׁר עָלָה עָלָיו הַגּוֹרָל לַעֲזָאזֵל יָעֳמַד־חַי לִפְנֵי יהוה לְכַפֵּר עָלָיו לְשַׁלַּח אֹתוֹ לַעֲזָאזֵל
26:וְהַמְשַׁלֵּחַ אֶת־הַשָּׂעִיר לַעֲזָאזֵל יְכַבֵּס בְּגָדָיו וְרָחַץ אֶת־בְּשָׂרוֹ בַּמָּיִם וְאַחֲרֵי־כֵן יָבוֹא אֶל־הַמַּחֲנֶה

8. "And Aaron shall cast lots on the two goats, one lot for the Lᴏʀᴅ and the other lot for Azazel.
9. Aaron shall present the goat on which the lot fell for the Lᴏʀᴅ, and offer it as a sin offering;
10. but the goat on which the lot fell for Azazel shall be presented alive before the Lᴏʀᴅ to make atonement over it, that it may be sent away into the wilderness to Azazel; 26. The one who sets the goat free for Azazel shall wash his clothes and bathe his body in water, and afterward may come into the camp" (*NRSV*).

In the context of the present study, of interest would be any characterization that tends to associate Azazel with divinity, for after all, our main objective is to establish just that, in order for us to further discover how such a deity ended up being demoted to the status of messenger (angel) in post-exilic Yehud. In keeping up with such an objective, of interest therefore is the view which suggests that Azazel could be an epithet of a demon. Further to this view, it has been observed that since לַעֲזָאזֵל in verse 10 tends to correspond with לַיהוה (which is with reference to the deity Yahweh) in verse 8, "'Azazel' could also be understood as a personal name, behind which could be posited a 'supernatural being' or a 'demonic personality.'"[242]

The understanding has been that the goat that was sent away (scapegoat, Lev 16:10) was actually sent to a demon named Azazel that dwelt in the desert (cf. Janowski 1999:128). The details of

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241 On these views, see Janowski (1999:128); and also cf. Driver (1956:97-98) especially on the suggestion that Azazel could be a reference to a geographical place.
242 See Janowski (1999:128) who notes that while this view is a possibility, it must be taken with caution.

how the lots were cast in determining the distribution of the two goats between Yahweh and Azazel have been discussed variously by scholars. For his part, Gerstenberger (1993:219; cf. Rooker 2000:216) conjectures that the levitical team involved in casting the lots most probably would begin by asking the question whether or not a particular goat belonged to the Lord or to Azazel. Then they would place a *yes-stone* and a *no-stone* into a container. Whichever stone came out first would provide an answer to such a question. For Stuart (1987:459-60), the lots were determined with some dice that had light and dark sides. In this case when two light sides pointed up, it meant that the answer to the question raised was a yes answer; and when two dark sides pointed up it meant a no answer. Moreover, whenever both a dark and light side pointed up, it meant that they would have to roll the dice again, thus recasting the lots.

While the actual identity of Azazel in the Hebrew Bible continues to be an open question, his identification with deities in ancient Near East for example through the use of the title, *zbl* (prince) as we saw earlier, and his earlier association with the elimination ritual which was reproduced in Leviticus 16 tends to authenticate his divinity. Making such a conclusion certainly should not be considered as overstretching the point in light of some observable hints. For one thing, that two goats could be offered, one to Yahweh and the other one to a demon named Azazel, tends to identify the divine status of the two beings with each other. This point is probably best elaborated by Bailey (2005:192-94) who writes:

> Presumably, then, this is a very ancient revamped ceremony, possibly preserving the name of the demon (Azazel, [Lev] vv. 8, 10, 26) to whom the 'scapegoat' was once sent. However, by the time of the priestly writers, the demonic had been banished (i.e., denied existence in orthodoxy Yahwistic thought) but the traditional ritual itself remained in practise. The goat simply becomes the vehicle that symbolically caries away the residual impurities to the mythical realm of Azazel.

In light of the above, it certainly makes a case that while Yahweh and Azazel may not have commanded the same kind of authority, the two were characteristically identified with each other in some sense. As Bailey has pointed out above, it seems that Azazel who may have been an authentic

deity in ancient Near East might have continued to be so in early Israelite religion. However, orthodoxy Judaism which promoted exclusive monotheism, not only denied the possible divinity of Azazel, but probably even attempted to altogether deny his existence. In spite of such a maneuver, the ritual of Azazel in the Hebrew Bible continues to remind the reader of the mythological background behind his name.

5.10.3 Synthesis

In spite of the divergent views on the identity of Azazel in the Hebrew Bible, it probably remains indisputable in light of his characterization in the ancient traditions of Syria and Mesopotamia that he was a divine being. We discovered earlier that in these ancient traditions, he was considered to be a deity and that he was often believed to be a god of flocks. As the present study has observed, there seems to be a strong likelihood that the gods of the ancient Near Eastern traditions including Azazel may have been venerated in early Israelite religion. Among other notions, this observation seems to be authenticated by the fact that the Hebrew Bible is replete with names associated with such mythological deities. Therefore as we noted above (cf. Bailey 2005:192-94), these mythological divinities only came to be demoted to the status of either demons or messengers in the wake of monotheism, a development which we have assigned to the post-exilic era during which the exclusivity of Yahweh was promoted.[243]

5.11 From Gods to angels—the case for Resheph

The purpose of our study on the status of the deity Resheph in Israelite religion would not be complete until we discuss how he was reduced to the status of angel in the wake of monotheism. Of great interest to our study on how gods once recognized in both Ugaritic and Israelite religions came to be identified

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[243] On this point, cf. Trotter (2001:139) who notes in the case of Baal for example, that due to the difficulty of having him co-exist with Yahweh, the apologists of monotheism endeavored to eradicate his cult by usurping his character and functions for Yahweh.

as angels in the Hebrew Bible is the elaborate observation by Day (1979:354) on the text *UT* 1001.1-3 which he says underlies Habakkuk 3:5. He writes, "In this Ugaritic text we have an allusion to the Canaanite mythology which was to be taken up perhaps some seven hundred years later by the Psalm of Habakkuk, in which latter, however, Resheph is demoted to the role of a sort of demon in the heavenly escort not of Baal, but of Yahweh, as he sets forth to do battle with the turbulent sea."

In the statement above, first, Day acknowledges unequivocally that ancient Israelite religion shared some religious features with Canaanite mythology, in this case the incorporation of the god Resheph into its cult. Secondly, Day equally underscores the fact that Resheph was subsequently reduced to the status of a demon, that is, a lesser divinity who was subservient to Yahweh.[244] In light of this observation, it stands to argue in favour of the hypothesis that the beings we have come to know as angels, were originally gods both in Ugaritic and Israelite religions. Thus the treatment of the god Resheph clearly authenticates such a hypothesis. The reader will notice that in the quotation above, Day uses the term 'demon' and not angel to describe the new status to which Resheph was assigned. This is to be understood against the background that in the pre-exilic era, the designation 'demon' did not bear the negativity with which it is presently associated. As Riley (1999:335) observes, it was until the post-exilic times when the doctrine of dualism and the idea of the 'devil' was fully developed, that the word 'demon' (Greek δαίμονας) took on a negative (evil) connotation in correspondence with the Devil himself, the embodiment of evil. As Riley (1999:235) further observes, the word demon "commonly designated the class of lesser divinities arranged below the Olympian gods, the *daimones*." Earlier in ancient religions, demons could either bring good or ill to an individual human being depending on one's piety to God (Riley 1999:335). Perhaps of even more interest in light of our study at this juncture is the view that demons later came to be conceived of as "a class of lower divine beings

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244 On the usage of the term 'demon' in reference to Resheph, some have opted to use angel instead, which likely suggests that the two terms interchangeably denoted lesser divinities who served under Yahweh (see Blair 2008:194-95).

'between gods and mortals' who mediated between the human and divine spheres (cf. Plato, Sym. 202e)." As we have argued before, therefore, the move to strip Resheph of his godly status to that of angel, or demon as Day characterizes him, was all aimed at making Yahweh to be the only legitimate God while the rest were subservient to him. The move by the translators of the Septuagint (LXX) to completely avoid the mention of the name Resheph in their translation of the Hebrew Bible and in particular (Hab 3:5) confirms the fact.

Once again, all this is to be understood against the background that there was a time when syncretism was tolerated in early Israelite religion albeit through the subordination of all other deities to Yahweh. As a religion in transition however, subsequent translations of the Hebrew Bible canon opted to altogether replace some terminologies that seemed to perpetuate tendencies of syncretism. This is well elaborated by Münnich (2013:220) who writes, "For the biblical author, it was enough to subordinate the world of gods and demons to Yahweh, but for the translators of the LXX it was necessary to erase the existence of such beings completely." Putting these observations into perspective, we need to restate some of the facts that drive the main thesis of the present study. First, it goes to show once again that the destroying characters in Deuteronomy 32:24 are deities including Resheph, that worked alongside Yahweh in early Israelite religion prior to the establishment of exclusive monotheism. Secondly, in the wake of the development of monotheism, such deities were subsequently reduced to the status of demons or angels in which they assumed subservient roles under Yahweh the only legitimate God. Thus as Choi (2004:20) observes, "In short, the OT's image of Resheph is heavily subjected to the demythologization and subjugation of the deity's power to the sovereignty of Yahweh."

5.12 Conclusion

In light of the data reviewed in the present chapter, once again even as we saw in chapter two, it became evident that pre-exilic Israelite religion was either syncretistic or polytheistic much the same as that of Israel's neighbours in the ancient Near East (cf. Niehr 1995:71-72). The journey to exclusive monotheism was long and eventful. It was characterized by Israel's changing conceptions of her God with the passing of time. In the pre-exilic era, it has thus far become clear that Israelite religion was founded on the idea of a divine council in which Yahweh, the head God of Israel, was worshiped alongside other gods. Based on the characterization of pre-exilic Israelite religion by Handy (1995:27-43) and Smith (2004:105-115) it is likely to have once looked like the following:

Fig. 4 Pre-exilic Israelite Pantheon

Level 1	*Yahweh and his Asherah*
Level 2	*gods/children of the gods*
Level 3	*other lower ranking gods (e.g. Kothar)*
Level 4	*angels*

As the present chapter has elaborated, some of the deities that were venerated along with Yahweh, included *Resheph, Deber, Qeteb* and *Azazel*.[245] Both Resheph and Deber, who belonged to the second tier of the Ugaritic pantheon are believed to have equally belonged to the second level of Israelite pantheon (see Smith 2004:106). The fact that these two beings would belong to the second level of the pantheon which was traditionally reserved for the children of the gods who were themselves gods, argues in favour of the view that they were once legitimate gods in Israelite religion. However, due to the shifting trends in Israel's conception of her god, through the journey to exclusive monotheism, these deities subsequently belonged to the fourth tier of the Israelite pantheon (cf. Smith 2004:110). Putting

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245 The divinities that comprised pre-exilic Israelite pantheon may not be limited to the four discussed in the present chapter. These four were selected because at the time of writing, the author had access to elaborate material on their presentation.

all the above into perspective it may be argued that in as much as Resheph was a legitimate deity in Canaanite mythology, so was he in early Israelite religion in which he was viewed as a lesser deity (see 5.3.2 above). With regard to Qeteb for example, while his divinity has not been as well attested as that of say Resheph or Deber, still, his close associations with beings whose divinity was well established leads us to conclude that he was equally a recognized divine being.

In the post-exilic period, a time during which exclusive monotheism was promoted by Israel's theologians, the idea of a divine council was maintained, but with significant changes that only left Yahweh and the angels. How then did all the divinities that comprised Yahweh's retinue disappear for there to be a monotheistic faith in Yehudite religion? In answering such a question, we will have to restate some of the findings we have already presented. First, there was a decided effort to reject all gods foreign to Israel and probably treat them as if they were non-existent (cf. Smith 2004:116, 154; cf Stark 2011:74).[246] Second, all the deities that were venerated along with Yahweh were 'demoted' to the status of angels and servants subordinate to Yahweh, the only legitimate God of Israel (Tuschling 2007:14). In this sense, the angels served to safeguard monotheism as their status changed from being deities who otherwise would have been competitors against Yahweh (cf. Tuschling 2007:14). Third, as a way of ensuring that the roles once played by such demoted deities are maintained, Yahweh the exclusive monotheistic God absorbed all such functions and they became attributed to him (see Thompson 1970:151; and 5.3.3 above). This third   point has been further elaborated by Handy (1994:153) who writes:

> In this theory, belief in "angels" provided a theological position that allowed for nondivine yet supranatural beings to carry on the responsibilities previously understood to have been the duties of various Syro-Palestinian deities. When the belief in several gods was no longer recognized and only the one god, Yahweh, was believed to control all things, angels were perceived as obedient to, and extensions of the one true god.

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246 On the treatment of foreign gods as if they never existed, the best evidence is probably the decision by the translators of the Septuagint (LXX) who completely erased the existence of all deities other than Yahweh from the text they produced (cf. Münnich 2013:220). In the present reference, Stark notes that some of the gods whose existence was denied after the exile included among others, Kemosh, Baal, and Asherah.

Fourth, textual redaction, a topic we discussed in previous chapters, equally played a major role in promoting monotheism in Yehudite religion after the exile. The strategy by the final editors of the biblical text in this case was to either replace or completely do away with any terminologies that made reference to gods other than Yahweh (cf. Edelman 1996:16-17). Traces of textual redaction and how it contributed to the demotion of gods to angels is evident in how the translators of the Septuagint (LXX) altered the phrase *benei haelohim* (sons of the god/s) to *angelon theou* (messengers of god).[247] The fact that the original text does not read *malakey haelohim* but rather *baney haelohim* itself proves that the post-exilic theologians charged with te responsibility of composing the text were themselves monotheists whose ultimate goal was to promote the exclusivity of Yahweh while subjecting all other deities under his sovereignty (cf. Stark 2011:74). After all the changes that occurred in Israel's view of their God, the divine council structure was reduced to Yahweh at the top with only the angels who serve as his messengers and servants at the bottom as sketched in fig. 5 below. This seems to have been the only feasible way in which Yahweh could be considered a monotheistic God while co-existing with other divinities without conflict.

Fig. 5 Post-exilic Yehudite structure

Level 1	Yahweh
Level 2	Messengers (angels) and servants

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247 See Stark (2011:74).

CHAPTER 6
FROM GODS TO ANGELS: NON-CANONICAL EVIDENCE

6.1 Introduction

In chapter five above, we discussed a number of divine beings that were revered both in the ancient Near Eastern traditions as well as the Hebrew Bible. However, we discovered that in the wake of the development of monotheism, the final redactors or compilers of the biblical text had reduced these deities to the status of semi-divinities, messengers or servants subordinate to Yahweh the only legitimate God of Israel (cf. Grabbe 2000:34; Stark 2011:74). As the present study has contended, the redaction of the Hebrew Bible which resulted into the development of monotheism through the collaboration with angelology was accomplished in Persian period Yehud.[248] The present chapter will continue to explore how some deities were reduced to the status of angels with specific focus on the non-canonical post-exilic Jewish writings which essentially included translations of earlier traditions. In order to accomplish such an undertaking in a more detailed manner, we shall limit our investigation to two post-exilic sources, that is, the Septuagint (hereafter LXX), and the Dead Sea Scrolls (hereafter DSS).

We shall explore how some deities like Resheph and Deber that were formerly recognized both in Ancient Near Eastern mythology and pre-exilic Israelite religion were treated by the translators of the LXX. Thus some select Hebrew Bible passages that reference the deity Resheph shall be evaluated in light of their LXX renderings. Since the study builds on the hypothesis that these translators were monotheists, any tendency to suppress the legitimacy of these deities shall be viewed as a calculated move to promote monotheism. Furthermore, some designations that tend to evince forms of syncretism in the Hebrew Bible such as בְּנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים shall also be evaluated in light of their post-exilic renderings both in the LXX and the DSS. The second half of the chapter will discuss the status of angels in the

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248 Cf. Davies (1992:90-91).

DSS. Special attention shall be paid on how angels were conceived of in the minds of the Qumran community in relation to Yahweh. We shall discuss the different designations by which angels were known and how such designations positioned them in relation to Yahweh.

6.2 Non-canonical literature in context

Before we track the doctrine of angels in post-exilic Jewish translations, a statement that puts these literary documents into perspective at this time is worthwhile. It is important to understand that through the translations, the post-exilic Jews attempted to contextualize the written traditions they inherited into their own situation. In a book that was recently published, Ulrich (2014:83), while recognizing the fact that these late Second Temple translations were composed using the Scriptures as their basis, elaborately writes:

> The latter [translations] had a double function: (a) to acknowledge and implicitly proclaim that a certain book recognized as Scriptural was an important fundamental work to use as a basis for, and to lend authority to, updated interpretation, and (b) to steer current and future interpretive views in a certain direction. That is, there were books clearly considered authoritative Sacred Scripture (though their text could still develop), and there were new compositions based on the scriptural text but understood by the author (and presumably at least originally by the community) as a new non-scriptural work, a work we could categorize as Scripture-based religious literature.

In light of the above, it is beyond question that the post-exilic translations were non-scriptural, that is, they were not considered to be part of the canonical text of the Hebrew Bible. However, as it has been stated, these translations were considered to be expansions or updated interpretations of the canonical text (cf. Ulrich 2014:100-101). It is not crystal clear as to how the authors or the community at large arrived at certain re-interpretation or expansion of the texts they re-worked. However, we would imagine that while endeavoring to preserve the content of the canonical material they inherited, they might have as well ensured that it remains relevant to their time and situation in light of their contemporary theological understanding. This point has been elaborated in detail by Petersen (2014:14) who writes, ". . . rewritten Scripture do not attempt to replace their scriptural antecedents, but, on the

contrary, strive to make the authority and content of their scriptural predecessors present in new contexts as a form of applied hermeneutics."[249]

One cited example on how the views of the Jewish community influenced the translations they composed is that of the patriarch Abraham who is said to have married Sarah his sister (Gen 12:13) or half sister (Gen 20:12). While the biblical canon states in no uncertain terms that Sarah was Abraham's sister, save for the variation of having been his half sister, one Jewish translation, Pseudo-Jonathan Targum, to the contrary states that Sarah was Abraham's niece, a daughter to his brother whom he could legally marry (cf. Vermes 2014:5). Obviously, one wonders what might have motivated the authors of this Targum to make such a major shift in their translation of the biblical text! However, further to the views presented by Ulrich above, Vermes (2014:5) conjectures this was in part, "in order to avoid the suspicion that the Jewish people originated from an incestuous marriage, [and therefore that] the re-writers of the Bible inserted into the text a gloss, which diluted in advance the meaning of the term 'sister.'" It is with these observations in mind that we have decided to conclude our study with an analytical review of some post-exilic translations for clues on Jewish conception of God. Of interest therefore shall be the changes introduced to the conception of gods once recognized both in ANE mythology and the Hebrew Bible, and how their status was reduced to angels in the wake of the development of monotheism.

6.3 About the original manuscript of the Hebrew Bible

While the present chapter is dedicated to exploring the doctrine of angels and their role in the development of monotheism in post-exilic Jewish literature, it is important that we make a statement on how the authors of such literature acquired their source material. In other words, what material was available to them in their great undertaking of translating, preserving, and we might add,

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249 For a bibliography, see: Alexander (1988:116); Najman (2003:46-50); Himmelfarb Himmelfarb (2006:54); and Brooke (2010:52).

contextualizing the biblical message? The challenge with which the translators of the biblical text have often been faced with is their inability to track the original reading of the text. The problem in part being that probably no one alive today has really been able to access the original complete manuscript of the Hebrew Bible (cf. Price 2007:45). Two factors tend to have contributed to the disappearance of the original manuscript. First, it has been observed that most of these manuscripts may have been lost as a result of the religious wars especially those that led to the destruction of the First and Second Temples (cf. Price 2007:45-50). In this case as the temple buildings were destroyed, so were the religious documents along with them. Secondly, the lapse of time between that of the original manuscripts and that of the surviving copies for example, may have equally led to the disappearance of the manuscripts through tear and wear (Price 2007:45-50). That being said, it is to be expected therefore, that the translators or authors of post-exilic documents such as the LXX which we shall discuss hereafter had to use their own innovation to fill in the gaps, which they often did with a theological bias (cf. Davies 1992:91). Again, it goes to show that post-exilic Jewish literature underwent a redacted process which by all accounts represented the faith of its authors.

6.4. From Gods to angels : Septuagint (LXX)

6.4.1 Role of the Septuagint

The dating of the LXX has never been resolved with certainty. Speculations range between the end of the 3rd and 2nd century BCE (Price 2007:45-50). Nevertheless, it seems beyond dispute that while the actual date remains an open question, the LXX was composed in the post-exilic period. It is also worth noting that the original LXX was a translation of only the Torah (Pentateuch), the five books of the Hebrew Bible attributed to the authorship of Moses (see Natalio 2009:67). This means therefore that the rest of the books of the Hebrew Bible only came to be translated into the Greek LXX at a latter

date.[250] The Septuagint is a very important contribution to Hebrew Bible studies. First of all because it is the earliest translation of the Hebrew scriptures into Greek (cf. Natalio 2009:18).[251] It is to be expected presumably therefore that it is a translation of the original copy of the Hebrew Bible, although as we have seen there is probably no extant copy of the original manuscript. Secondly, it has also been noted that since the Jewish community in diaspora had abandoned the language of their fathers, the translation of the LXX was the only way for them to preserve the religious legacy of their ancestors (Natalio 2009:19). Most importantly and in relation to the topic of the present study, the LXX also provides us with a window through which we can look into the religiosity of its post-exilic authors as well as the Jewish community at large. Thus as we go through the text of the LXX we do so with some questions in mind. The most important question being how they dealt with those problematic passages in the Hebrew Bible that tend to evince some form of syncretism.

6.4.2 Septuagint, translation or interpretation?

The question of whether the LXX be viewed as a translation or interpretational document is a relevant one and worth our attention. Even if we have thus far been referring to the LXX as a translation of the Hebrew Bible, strictly speaking the two terms *translation* and *Interpretation* need to be discussed each on its own terms. The question is whether or not to view the LXX as a document that faithfully renders all terms in its Hebrew vorlage as would typically be expected of a translation.[252] Put another way, can we say with certainty that the authors of the LXX replicated the source material they had in front of them with precision? Whether or not they did, there still remains the challenge of how to account for terms incorporated into the LXX which lack a Hebrew vorlage (cf. Kraus and Wooden 2006:2). In keeping up with our desire to understand what characterized the belief system of the LXX translators,

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250 Natalio (2009:67) conjectures that the rest of the Hebrew Bible books may have been translated into Greek between the 3 rd century BCE and the 1 st century CE.
251 The number of those that were involved in the task of translating the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek (LXX) has been rendered variously with views ranging between five, seventy, and seventy-two (see Natalio 2009:67).
252 On questions of this kind, see Kraus and Wooden (2006:2).

first, there is no doubt that these translators tried as much as they could to preserve the presumed meaning of the Hebrew words they dealt with, which as Joosten (2010:7) observes, makes the text of the LXX "notoriously full of Hebraisms."[253] Another challenge within this reality is the fact that language is dynamic, as it changes in meaning and usage over time, meaning that the Hebrew of the original biblical writers may not have been the same as that of the LXX translators even if the latter were as much Hebrew speakers as the former.[254] Thus much as the translators would have tried to stick to the Hebrew text in front of them, it is to be expected that the word meanings were understood within the context of their own culture (see Joosten 2010:8). This point has been further elaborated by Joosten (2010:59) as follows:

> When one translates a piece of discourse, one changes it. On a purely linguistic level, the words and the grammar of one language are never precisely equivalent to those of another language: meaning cannot be expressed in exactly the same way in two different languages. And on a more general communicative level, the transposition of a text from one language into another cuts it off from its original situational context and puts it into an entirely new situation. Since meaning is essentially determined by pragmatic context, this cutting-off is bound to affect the text profoundly.

Observations such as the foregoing have led Boyd-Taylor (2006:16-17) to argue that a translation never fully represents its vorlage in the target language. He further notes that translations often have the tendency of deviating from the source material for linguistic and cultural factors (Boyd-Taylor (2006:16-17). Furthermore, and while acknowledging the challenge surrounding the characterization of the LXX be it as a translational or interpretational document, Boyd-Taylor (2006:34-35) supports the idea that it be viewed as an exegetical document. Following Boyd-Taylor's observation, it is no doubt that as an exegetical document, the LXX would have included some modifications to its vorlage mostly for theological reasons. Thus the LXX as we presently have it is a

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253 The influence of the Hebrew on the target language, in this case Greek, can be seen in how the Hebrew word ברית (covenant) is translated into the Greek διαθήκη. It is generally argued that διαθήκη does not ordinarily mean treaty or covenant as we have often translated ברית . Consequently, the meaning of this word in Hebrew has been superimposed upon that of the Greek (see Joosten 2010:7).

254 On this point, whether or not the translators were all called from Palestine or both Palestine and Egypt is not relevant at this time as both would have likely been well conversant with Hebrew. For a discussion on this subject, see Joosten (2010:6).

document that has been reworked to reflect the faith of its authors. It is all these observations put together, that the LXX becomes an important source of information about the religion of the post-exilic Jewish community. Moreover, the changes introduced by the LXX over against its vorlage regarding the translators' conception of God will be of great benefit to our overall understanding of their religion.

6.5 Ancient Near Eastern deities in the Septuagint

6.5.1 Resheph in Septuagint Habakkuk 3:5 (LXXHab 3:5)

In chapter 5, we established that Resheph was a legitimate god in ancient Near Eastern mythology and that he may have continued to be so in early Israelite religion as evinced by several passages in the Hebrew Bible. In the wake of the development of monotheism, the redactors of the Hebrew Bible text attempted to suppress or altogether do away with the idea of having other divinities alongside Yahweh (cf. Münnich 2013:218). While they may have somewhat accomplished their objective in promoting the exclusivity of Yahweh, still, the relics of a syncretistic faith continued to be evinced in the Hebrew Bible (Tuschling 2007:13). The persistence of syncretism in the Hebrew Bible tends to have warranted the aggressive move by the monotheistic translators of the LXX in the post-exilic period to go so far as to avoid even mentioning the name of the deity Resheph (Münnich's 2013:218). In what follows therefore, it is incumbent upon us that we critically analyze how the translators of the Septuagint dealt with those particular texts in the Hebrew Bible which reference the deities we discussed in Chapter 5. Being the one who is most elaborately presented, we shall begin with an investigation of how the deity Resheph was translated in the Septuagint.

It has long been observed that LXXHabakkuk 3:5 altogether omits the name of Resheph in its translation rendering. Whereas Habakkuk 3:5 in the Hebrew Bible is rendered as, "Before him went pestilence, and plague followed close behind" (*NRSV*), the LXX instead renders it as, πρὸ προσώπου αὐτοῦ πορεύσεται λόγος καὶ ἐξελεύσεται ἐν πεδίλοις οἱ πόδες αὐτοῦ. Going by the New English

Translation of the Septuagint (NETS), Habakkuk 3:5 has two alternate translations. The first renders it as, "A report shall proceed before him, and he shall go forth, his feet in sandals." The second one reads as, "A fall shall go forward before him, and the greatest of winged creatures will follow at his feet" (cf. Pietersma and Wright 2007:809, 810). As the reader may have noticed, both of these translations altogether avoid even just the mention of the name Resheph. Understandably, the status of Resheph in early Israelite religion did not pose a threat to the exclusivity of Yahweh, as he was considered to be some kind of a demonic figure subordinate to him (see Bar 2017:122; cf. Olmo Lete 1999:232). This would explain why the composers of the Hebrew Bible did not have any problem presenting Resheph in the company of Yahweh. Choosing to label any divinty alongside Yahweh as a demon was no doubt a continuing strategy to promote the exclusivity of Yahweh. In light of this kind of characterization, whatever power was associated with Resheph was believed to derive from Yahweh. The drive to suppress the authenticity of Resheph is also evident in Jerome's Vulgate translation of Hab 3:5 which renders Resheph as *diabulos,* that is, a pagan deity or demon. As a way of making a case in favour of the hypothesis pursued by the present study, Blair (2009:195) for her part, does not hesitate to refer to the divinities referenced in the Hebrew Bible including Resheph, as Yahweh's angels.[255]

While different strategies may have been employed to suppress the legitimacy of the deity Resheph in early Israelite religion, for the LXX however, it was inconceivable just how a pagan deity or demonic figure could belong to Yahweh's retinue, which is why this deity's name is altogether omitted from the translated text of the LXX. The move to altogether omit Resheph from the LXX, due to his incompatibility with the developing monotheism is further supported by another early manuscript, Codex Barberini, which for its part sought to replace the name of Resheph with the expression, "the biggest of the flying creatures" (See Good 1959:13). Like this manuscript, other texts

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[255] The observations to characterize divinities other than Yahweh as either demons or angels according to Blair (2008:194-95), both serve to underscore the fact that the final composers of the Hebrew Bible text were monotheists who sought to promote the exclusive status of Yahweh above all other gods.

including that of Aquila, and Symmachus while avoiding the mention of Resheph have (πτηνόν="bird") and (ὄρνεον="bird") respectively in its place. The reason for identifying the deity Resheph as "the biggest of the flying creatures in Codex Barberini continues to be an open question. However, Thackeray's (1921:53) suggestion is enlightening. He suggests that the "flying creatures" designation in reference to Resheph may possibly derive from the same background as the four creatures in Ezekiel's vision which are described as having had the face of an eagle (Ezek 1; 10). Since Resheph has been identified with the four creatures in Ezekiel, it is important that we understand their charaterization in Ezekiel in oder for us to understand the essence of the identification. First, it has been observed that these beings as referenced in Ezekiel 10 have been identified with the Cherubim (Eichrodt (2003:55) .[256] These Cherubim, as Duguin (2011:58-59) observes, were designated with the task of bearing the throne of God. It has also been noted that these Cherubim in some sense were considered to be minor guardian deities (Senior and Collins 2011:1162). The observation that the Cherubim were conceived of as minor guardian deities, with whom Resheph was identified, confirms the fact that Resheph was once a legitmate deity in ANE.

6.5.2 The deity Deber in Septuagint of Habakkuk 3:5 (LXXHabakkuk 3:5)

Like Resheph, the deity Deber was equally recognized in ANE pantheons which influenced and shaped early Israelite religiosity (see Pss 78:48; 91:5-6; and Deut 28:21 cf. Nogolaski 2011:684). With regard to the deity Deber, while the recorded changes to his name in LXXHabakkuk 3:5 have not been as many and dramatic as those concerning Resheph, still, they are significant in relation to the overall theme of the present study and thus worth our attention. Instead of rendering the Greek equivalent for Deber (pestilence), the LXX translators instead opted to read it as *dāḇār* (word), which effectively results into the translation, "Logos [dāḇār = word] strives before Yahweh" (cf. Thackeray (1921: 53)[257]

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256 The present chapter will have a section reserved exclusively for a more detailed delineation of the Cherubim.
257 For a more detailed elaboration on this, see Tobin (1992:349); cf. Runia (1999:527) and Münnich (2013:218).

It must be noted that this change in the presentation of the deity Deber in the LXX is deliberate and nothing to do with a mistaken translation. In his analysis of the treatment of Deber in the LXX, Münnich (2013:218) writes, "Certainly, we are not dealing here with a mistake to read the Hebrew text but with a conscious intervention to correct the text. The aim of this correction was most probably to demythologize the text, which could result in a theologically correct monotheistic version." Again, it is to be noted that the monotheistic drive that characterized the translators of the LXX effectively impacted the text they produced.

By avoiding to properly translate the name of this mythological deity, the translators decided to attribute all his powerful destructive characteristics to Yahweh the God of Israel. By changing Deber from being a deity to a mere word of Yahweh, they were essentially implying that his works were nothing in themselves but the will of Yahweh through his word.[258] This is evident from the way the relationship between the two (Yahweh and Logos) is often described, such as "word of God" (logos tou theou), and "word of the Lord" (*logos tou kyriou*).[259] It is one of a possessive nature in which Yahweh is presented as owning or possessing Logos All this continues to make a case that the translators of the LXX intedend to make the text which they reworked to reflect their theological view of Yahweh whom they believed to be the only legitimate God while the rest either did not exist or were his servants and messengers (angels). It is also important to mention that in Greek mythology, which might have influenced the translators of the LXX in their characterization of Logos (*Dabar)*, he was never personified as an independent deity (Runia 1999:527). This must have enabled the translators to make their case in which Yahweh was the only legitimate God. Further, it has also been noted that the *logos* was never an object of cultic worship in any form, be it through statues or altars (Tunia 1999:527).

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258 This is to be derived from the view that the translators of the LXX, while holding that Logos was asociated with divinity, did not in any way view Logos (Dabar) as an independent entity from God himself. In this regard, Logos could be seen as some kind of Yahweh's hypostasis, that is, his aspect or representative (cf. Runia 1999:527-30).

259 Cf. Runia (1999:527). In this reference, Runia cites some passages in which Yahweh's possessiveness of logos is mentioned including: Isa 2:3 "And the Word of the Lord shall go forth from Jerusalem.....); Ps 32:4-6 [MT 33:4-6]: "For the logos of the Lord is straight, and all his works are done in faithfulness..."

6.5.3 Summary

Putting all this into perspective, it may be postulated, and rightfully so, that the subtle changes to the texts in question in the Septuagint's treatment of both Resheph and Deber were intended to promote the monotheistic exclusivity of Yahweh. In the case of Resheph as we just saw, the LXX altogether avoided to even mention his name.[260] For Deber, they deliberately decided to change his name so that it might not mean anything associated with a deity. It seems that it was a well known fact in the minds of the translators that Resheph and Deber were recognized deities in ancient mythology of such cultures as Mesopotamia and Canaan, including ancient Israel. In the post-exilic era in which monotheism was being promoted however, it became imperative that the statuses of these deities be reduced to that of demons, or angels as we have argued through the course of the present study[261] Again, it might be argued that the post-exilic Jewish community who produced the text of the LXX were undergoing a transformation of religious faith, in which they were suppressing all forms of syncretism in favour of exclusive monotheism (Münnich 2013:218). These observations can be stated and re-stated with different words by different authors, yet the conclusion remains the same, which is that, the developing monotheistic faith in post-exilic Yehud was designed to replace all forms of syncretism still prevalent in the traditions which the Jews inherited from their pre-exilic Israelite ancestors. Some of the circumstances under which a people group's religious faith might change, in this case that of post-exilic Israel have been well presented by Armstrong (1994:xix) who writes:

> The idea of god is formed by each generation or culture with a meaning connected to that society; and the meanings of different cultures may be incomprehensible, contradictory or even mutually exclusive of one another. For example, within the same culture, conceptions of god change over time. Every idea of god has a history. In every culture god is known by different names and worshiped in different ways.

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260 For a comment on what necessitated the differences between the reading of the Masoretic Text and that of the Septuagint, see Pietersma and Wright (2007:779) who write, "Occasionally it appears that the Greek differs from the MT because of a changed historical or theological perspective on the part of the translator."

261 For more on this, see Blair (2008:9-10).

As Armstrong has rightly stated, and further to what we have already noted regarding the developing monotheism after the exile, the Israelites who had gone into exile and were now back home, and those who had remained at home during the exile were essentially the same people, with common ancestry, and faith. However, it is to be expected that the developing monotheism in Yehud, may not have been the faith of all Israelites from the outset. It might have begun with the authors of the traditions including the LXX, and the same faith would have eventually become the faith of all Israelites. The difference between the faith of the authors and that of the society of Israel at large may be a topic on its own, too large for consideration at his time. However, what has been argued persuasively is that the post-exilic Israelite faith which included monotheism was originally the faith of the authors in the Persian period, which ultimately became the identifying faith of all Israel as a religious people group (cf. Davies 1992:90-107).

Again, all this continues to make the case that the Jewish translators of the Canon in the post-exilic period were monotheists whose goal was to rid the traditions they adopted of their polytheistic or syncretistic remnants.

6.6 בְּנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים and the ἀγγέλων θεού in post-exilic Yehud

6.6.1 בְּנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים in Septuagint Deuteronomy 32:8 (LXXDeut 32:8)

In our continued investigation into the hypothesis that some beings that were viewed to be divine in pre-exilic Israel came to be identified as angels in post-exilic Yehud, one text that has attracted some intense exegetical debate is Deuteronomy 32:8.[262] Below is its rendering both in Hebrew (MT) and the translations according to the *NRSV*, *NASB*, *RSV* Bible versions:

(MT) בְּהַנְחֵל עֶלְיוֹן גּוֹיִם בְּהַפְרִידוֹ בְּנֵי אָדָם יַצֵּב גְּבֻלֹת עַמִּים לְמִסְפַּר בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל

"When the Most High apportioned the nations,
when he divided humankind,
he fixed the boundaries of the peoples

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262 For a review of the literature on the exegesis of Deuteronomy 32, see for example Albright (1959:339-46)

according to the number of the gods" (*NRSV*).

"When the Most High gave the nations their inheritance,
When He separated the sons of man,
He set the boundaries of the peoples
According to the number of the sons of Israel" (*NASB*).

"When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance,
when he separated the sons of men,
he fixed the bounds of the peoples
according to the number of the sons of God" (*RSV*).

First of all, the fact that we can have several translations of the same text means that there is reason for an exegetical analysis of the passage in question. From the outset, what makes this text to be of exegetical interest is how the last phrase has been variously translated. The Hebrew text (Deut 32:8) quoted above which has the reading בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, that is, "sons of Israel" is a reflection of the Masoretic text (MT) (see Heiser 2001:52). The בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל reading has also been adopted by later revisions or witnesses to the LXX such as the manuscript of Aquila (Codex X), the Symmachus (also Codex X), and Theodotion (cf. Heiser 2001:52). It has to be understood however, that, just because some LXX witnesses adopted the reading does not justify it to be the correct reading. There is a lot that can be said about this reading but which would be too much for exhaustion in a section of a chapter. For example, it is generally conjectured that the בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל reading of the Masoretic text may have been influenced by two passages both of which suggest that there were seventy members of Jacob's family who had originally gone into Egypt in the days of Joseph, that is, Genesis 46:27 and Exodus 1:5 (cf. Heiser 2001:53-54). This hypothethis is however, difficult to substantiate in light of some compelling arguments to the contrary. First of all, on the point of how many people had originally gone into Egypt with Jacob, it is evident that the MT reading on the matter is disputed by the LXX and the Qumran literature both of which suppose the number Seventy-five as opposed to Seventy.[263] One of the

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263 See Heiser (2001:54), n.9. In this reference, Heiser goes on to elaborate that the five additional people who
supposedly had god into Egypt with Jacob were likely descendants of Ephraim and Manasseh.

arguments against the interpretation of the בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל reading to imply the sons of jacob who had originally gone with him into Egypt is the fact that contextually, Israel as a nation did not even exist when El Elyon apportioned the earth among the pagan nations at the time (cf. Heiser 2001:54).

That being said, in light of what we know thus far, the referenced sons (Deut 32:8) and even more so with the numbers Seventy or Seventy-five associated with them, could only parallel the sons of El in the Ugaritic divine council structure.[264] Based on the parallels we drew between Ugaritic and Israelite religions in chapter two, with particular attention to the similarities in divine council structures and the characterizations of their head gods, El and El Elyon respectively, there can be no better place to trace the origin of the father-son terminology other than the Ugaritic mythology itself.[265] In our studies on the Ugaritic divine council, we discovered that before there were humans, El headed a pantheon of gods some of whom were his sons, particularly those of the second tier. When the Ugaritic divine council structure was subsequently adopted by the Israelites who made Yahweh their presiding god, the father-son language became part of the whole. These Ugaritic features were probably clearly elaborated in the earliest manuscripts from which the translations including that of the LXX and the MT were drawn from. However, as we have repeatedly pointed out, in the wake of monotheism and the attempts to implement it through textual redaction that followed, efforts to purge the text of its syncretistic origins would undoubtedly be expected. This would therefore explain why the LXX would have divergent readings of Deuteronomy 32:8, one version reading υιων θεού "sons of God" (cf. Parker 1999:794), while another one reads ἀγγέλων θεοῦ "angels of God" (Cockerill 1999:54). It would seem that the υιων θεού was probably a direct translation from the original source text under the influence of the Ugaritic mythology, while the ἀγγέλων θεοῦ may have been a post-exilic effort in which the translators sought to 'demote' all divinities to the status of angelic beings who serve Yahweh, the exclusive monotheistic God of Israel. Likewise, the MT translation בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, may have equally been a

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264 This topic has been discussed in more detail in chapter two of the present study.
265 See for example, Manfried Dietrich, Oswald Loretz, and Joaquin Sanmartín (1995:18).

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strategic move of drawing attention from the idea of the Israelite God surrounded by other divine beings typical of a polytheistic setting such as was the case in Ugaritic mythology. In spite of such an attempt however, the sonship (בְּנֵי) terminology would still trace its origin back to Ugaritic influence. Putting all this into perspective, both the sonship terminology and the numbers associated with it, be it the Seventy as in the MT (cf. Gen 46:27 and Exod 1:5), or the Seventy-five as in LXX and Qumran literature, the truth is that they are all under Ugaritic influence in which El is recorded to have had Seventy divine sons. Thus the reading υἱων θεού may have been the original one while the rest came through orthodoxy textual redaction.

While some witnesses to the LXX have adopted the בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל reading of the MT as we noted earlier, it is generally observed that most witnesses to LXXDeut 32:8 tend to translate the text in question as αγγέλων θεού (angels of God) (See Wevers 1995:513; cf. Heiser 2001:52). Here again, it has to be stated in no uncertain terms that no text-critical method can substantively translate the phrase under discussion (Deut 32:8) as αγγέλων θεού. There is no reference to angels whatsoever in the passage. How then did the translators of the LXX come up with this translation? Again, there is probably no better explanation behind this than to restate the fact that the translators of the LXX were monotheists whose objective was to make the texts they reworked to reflect their exclusive monotheistic conception of God (cf. Wevers 1995:513). This view is implied by Parker (1999:797) who writes, "In Deut 32:8-9 the divine beings appeared originally as Yahweh's peers, but the text is reread and eventually rewritten to make Yahweh the supreme, and then the only, deity." Likewise, as Wevers (1995:513) notes, the αγγέλων θεού translation of the text by the LXX translators may possibly have been a deliberate way of shifting attention from the lesser deities that populated the text of the Hebrew Bible which evinced some form of polytheism to identifying them instead as mere angels (messengers) of Yahweh the only legitimate God. Commenting on this shift, Wevers (1995:513) writes, "[it is] clearly a later attempt to avoid any notion of lesser deities in favour of God's messengers."

With regard to the reading υἱῶν θεού (sons of God), the understanding behind this LXX translation has been that the translators may have worked with Hebrew manuscripts that read either *banei elohim* or *banei elim* (see Heiser 2001: 53 n.5, 6). This is what probably influenced the translations of such versions as the New American Standard Bible (*NASB*) which we earlier quoted above. As evident from the versions cited above, the *NRSV* interestingly has it as "the number of the gods." Going by this translation, the beings referred to as "sons of Israel" in the MT are actually gods, divine beings. This obviously raises the question as to how many gods existed alongside the God of Israel when he apportioned the earth to the nations.[266] The Revised Standard Version (*RSV*) translation, "sons of God" is equally interesting. In the ancient Near Eastern divine councils we reviewed earlier in chapter two, we noted that the *banei elohim* (sons of god(s) were themselves divine beings or gods (cf. van der Toorn 1999: 352-53). Likewise, the *banei-ha-elohim* of Deuteronomy 32:8 have equally been identified as gods (see Hendel 1987: 16, n. 16). They have been identified as the lesser gods in the assembly of Yahweh (Hendel 1987: 16, n. 16).[267] The *banei-ha elohim* were with Yahweh at the dawn of creation (Job 38:7) and they were apportioned among the nations as in Deuteronomy 32:8 (see Hendel 1987:16, n. 16).

6.6.2 Highlights on בני הֵאלֹהים in Septuagint (LXXDeut 32:8)

Our review of Deuteronomy 32:8 and in particular the text-critical phrase we spent time analysing both in the LXX and the MT has shown that there is much work needed in the area of textual exegesis. The debate about which text is more acurate and therefore closer to the original between the LXX and the MT with regard to Deuteronomy 32:8 seems to be an ongoing one. In light of the foregoing discussion however, there are some fundamental conclusions that need to be restated. First, the LXX rendering of the phrase υἱῶν θεού (sons of God) is in all likelihood the more accurate one over the MT's בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל

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266 Translations such as this one, evinces remnants of the polytheistic background of the Hebrew Bible.
267 Cf. Job 1:6; 2:1; Ps 29:1; Ps 89:7).

(sons of Israel). Due to the parallels drawn between Ugaritic and Israelite religions as related to the divine council structure and the context under which (Deut 32:8) falls, the LXX's υἰων θεού reading makes more sense (cf. Cockerill 1999:54). Before the earth and humanity including Israel were created, it was some divine beings comparable to the sons of El in the Ugaritic divine council that co-existed with Yahweh, the god of Israel (cf. Parker (1999:797). Thus, as Heiser (2001:70) has argued, the בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל readings falls short because back then when El Elyon apportioned the earth, there was not even an entity called Israel in existence. Secondly, the fact that the LXX's υἰων θεού reading is supported by such early literature as the Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS) argues in its favour as being closer to the original reading (cf. Heiser 2001:70-72). Thirdly, with regard to the αγγέλων θεού (angels of God) variant reading of the LXX, this can only be seen as the work of orthodoxy textual redaction in which all divine beings other than Yahweh were designated as angels (messengers). Perhaps no one is more elaborate on this point than Parker (1999:798) who writes:

> By the last centuries BCE the dominant view of divine beings among Jews was that they were angels, a lesser order of heavenly beings at the one God's beck and call. It was no longer necessary to assert God's superiority over them or difference from them, for they no longer partook of divinity. When Jews of this period read the passages commented on above they now understood them to refer, not to divine beings, but to angels. Thus beside the more literal *huioi theou* "sons of God," the LXX uses the word angeloi; "angels."

A variant reading such as the αγγέλων θεού (Deut 32:8) substantiates the hypothesis that the gods that were once venerated in pre-exilic Israelite religion came to be identified as angels in post-exilic Yehud. Logically, the reading αγγέλων θεού takes away the deity aspect of beings who could have otherewise been identified as gods by reducing them to either messengers or servants of the one legitimate God, Yahweh. Again, this is to be viewed in the context that the translators of the LXX probably understood the fact that the "sons of God" in both Ugaritic and Israelite pantheons were themselves gods. Thus, as a way of suppressing traces of syncretism or polytheism in the text they produced through redaction, we would understand why they replaced "sons of God" with "angels of God." Moreover, the argument

that *banei yisrael* in the MT be favoured because *banei el* simply missed the first part cannot be sustained (See Heiser 2001:57-59). That the "sons of God" reading which differs from the MT's "sons of Yisrael" was just an error both among the Qumran community and the LXX translators cannot be substantiated either.

6.6.3 Deuteronomy 32:43 in light of LXX, DSS, and the MT

Deuteronomy 32:43 is another interesting text that makes a case in support of the view that the post-exilic translators of the Hebrew Bible text promoted monotheism by reducing all divinities other than Yahweh to the status of Angels. A text-critical analysis of Deuteronomy 32:43 no doubt evinces the role of textual redaction which we earlier tracked in Deuteronomy 32:8. While reading this passage, one gets the sense that both the LXX and the MT tranlators were bent on avoiding references to deities other than Yahweh, the god of Israel. This observation equally applies to the literature of the Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS) in 4QDeutJ (Cf. Heiser 2001:58-59). In what follows, we will tabulate the rendering of Deuteronomy 32:43 in three sources after which we will discuss the possible underlying factors behind the variations. In this undertaking, we shall accommodate Cockerill's (1999:53-55) detailed analysis of the differences and similarities in the translations of the three sources—the Qumran literature, the LXX and the MT as prsented in the diagram below:[268]

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268 This diagram is just a portion of Cockerill's (1999:54) detailed analysis of (Deut 32:43) as it is presented in the LXX, the Qumran literature and the Masoretic Text.

Fig. 6 Comparing Deuteronomy 32:43 in three sources

LXX	Translation/Brenton	4QDeut 32:43	Masoretic Text
εὐφράνθητε οὐρανοί ἅμα αὐτῷ	"Rejoice, ye heavens, with him	הרנינו שמים עמו Praise, o heavens, his people	הַרְנִינוּ גוֹיִם עַמּוֹ Rejoice, o nations, with his people
καὶ προσκυνησάτωσαν αὐτῷ πάντες υἱοὶ θεοῦ (ἄγγελοι θεοῦ)	and let all the sons of God worship him (Brenton reads angels of God)	והשתחוו לו כל אלהים worship him, all (you) gods	???????????? The MT lacks this portion

6.6.4 The υἱοὶ θεοῦ and the αγγέλων θεού in LXX Deuteronomy 32:43

Like it was the case with Deuteronomy 32:8, the phrase that is of text-critical interest in 32:43 is the LXX υἱοὶ θεοῦ "sons of God" and its variant ἄγγελοι θεοῦ "angels of God."[269] Again, this already challenges us to figure out which translation not only makes more sense than the other but which one in all likelihood is closer to the original reading of the text. Before we join the debate on this point, it is also worth pointing out that the Qumran literature for its part has a different reading for the phrase in question. Interestingly 4QDeut32:43 characterizes the beings referenced in the passage in question simply as אֱלֹהִים (gods) (cf. Cockerill 1999:54). In other words, it is neither the sons of God nor the angels of God as in the LXX that are called upon to worship God but it is gods other than Yahweh who are called to worship him. Cockerill (1999:53-60) believes that the LXX's ἄγγελοι θεοῦ (angels of God) should be the most accurate and probably closet to the original text, in this case the Qumran literature.[270] Cockerill's argument is mostly based on several noted similarities between the LXX reading and that of the Qumran text which is considered to be the oldest and thus most original of our

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269 The translation "angels of God" is usually associated with Brenton's translation of the Septuagint Cockerill (1999:54).

270 One of the proponents of the view that the Qumran text is the closest to the original is Cairns (1992:289).

sources as opposed to that of the MT (Cockerill 1999:53-60; cf. Cairns 1992:289). The conventional wisdom in this case would be that the oldest text is closer to the original source text. He notes for example that the οὐρανοί (heavens) referenced in the first line of LXXDeut32:43 is equivalent to שָׁמַיִם in 4QDeuteronomy32:43, but different from the MT's גוים 'nations' (Cockerill 1999:53). So, this goes to show that the LXX is closer to the Qumran text than it is to the MT. He also notes that the LXX's rendering of ἅμα αὐτῷ (with him) in the first line matches that of 4QDeuteronomy32:43's עמו (with him). Also, it is noteworthy that the LXX's προσκυνέω is the equivalent of Qumran שׁחה, while LXX αὐτῷ πάντες matches Qumran לו בל. Also, the Qumran אֱלֹהִים) is represented by either υἱοὶ θεοῦ or ἄγγελοι θεοῦ in the LXX (See Cockerill 1999:55). Furthermore, τῶν υἱῶν in the LXX perfectly matches Qumran 4QDeut32:43 (בניו) more than it does with the MT's עבדיו.[271]

Moreover, there is no doubt that the LXXDeuteronomy32:43 reading, τὴν γῆν τοῦ λαοῦ αὐτοῦ "the land of his people" is a more accurate translation of 4QDeut32:43—אדמת עמו than it is of the MT's אדמתו עמו, "His land and his people" (Cockerill (1999:55). Again, all this goes to show that the LXX translation of the biblical text is closer to that of Qumran than it is to that of the MT. The argument in all this is that while Jewish orthodoxy tends to favour the MT as being somewhat more reliable and accurate in its translations as compared to the LXX for example, the truth is that the latter has often been found to be closer to the original reading than the former. That being said, the cases in which the LXX has variant readings such as we saw in the case of LXXDeut 32:8 and 43 above, simply means that the translators were attempting to change the text in order to suit their theological convictions. In light of the above, the Qumran (4QDeut32:43) reading, "all (you) gods" as compared to the LXX "angels of God" makes a strong case in favor of the hypothethis that the beings we have come to know as angels (messengers) in post-exilic Yehud were former gods in ancient Israelite religion (cf. Parker (1999:798). Thus the only explanation for how such gods ended up becoming angels as presented in the

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271 For more on this elaborate comparison between the LXX and the text of 4QDeut32:43 as apposed to the MT's renderings, see Cockerill (1999:53-55); cf. Cairns (1992:289-90).

LXX is through textual redaction. This is in agreement with the argument we have made repeatedly in the present study, which is that the Jewish translators of the traditions in the post-exilic era were bent on promoting the monotheistic exclusivity of Yahweh while deigrating all other divinities to the status of angels.

6.6.5 Summary

In light of the material we have reviewed on Deuteronomy 32:43, one observation that is central is that the divine council theme that characterized both the ancient Near Eastern and early Israelite religions was still prevalent in post-exilic writings including the LXX.[272] This observation was also evident in the case of Deuteronomy 32:8. The LXX's translation of the text (Deut 32:43) with two variants, υἱοὶ θεοῦ· and ἄγγελοι θεοῦ· makes a case in favor of an underlying divine council theme in the text. As the present study has observed in a number of places, the designation υἱοὶ θεοῦ (sons of God) in spite of whatever exegetical technique one might come up with, is clearly reminiscent of the gods (divine children) who accupied the second level of the Ugaritic pantheon (see Smith 2004:106). Even with the textual redaction that characterized post-exilic Jewish literature, still, the syncretistic nature of pre-exilic Israelite religion could not be completely eradicated.[273]

In keeping up with the view that textual redaction played a major role in promoting monotheism in the LXX, the option by the translators to use two designations almost interchangeably in reference to the divinities in Deuteronomy 32:43 (υἱοὶ θεοῦ· and ἄγγελοι θεοῦ·) speaks to what was at play in their minds. It is plausible that on the one hand, they tried as much as they could to stick to the source material they worked with, in this case the Hebrew Bible manuscript in whatever state it was, which

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272 On the view that pre-exilic Israelite religion was as polytheistic as that of Ugaritic mythology, see Niehr (1995:71-72); cf. Handy (1995:27-43) and Smith (2004:105-115).

273 Regarding the nature of post-exilic writings including the LXX, in which one does not expect to find remnants of syncretism or even polytheism, as the text was subjected to an extensive editorial work, an open research question is why such remnants have never been emended from the text. This is a question which any daring researcher may wish to explore.

probably read υἱοὶ θεοῦ. On the other hand however, considering that the υἱοὶ θεοῦ designation carried with it a polytheistic connotation, it is no wonder that they opted for the reading ἄγγελοι θεοῦ which was intended to promote the monotheistic exclusivity of Yahweh, while reducing all other deities to the status of angels (cf. Stark 2011:74). That υἱοὶ θεοῦ may have been the original reading of the source material which the monotheistic translators changed to ἄγγελοι θεοῦ·, is supported by the fact that the Qumran literature, which is older than the LXX renders it simply as "gods"[274]

6.7 Angels in the Dead Sea Scrolls

Among the Qumran community, angels were generally believed to be God's assistants in the work of governing the universe and executing judgment (Wassen 2007:519). The sectarian literature in particualr hints that angels were associated with an apocalyptic world view in which they would serve as God's agents in punishing evil (cf 1QS 3:13-4:26). Of interest is the observation that while angels were believed to be "eternal spirits" among the Qumran community, they were believed to be limited in knowledge when compared with God.[275] One way in which such limitedness was noted was in their inability to fully comprehend the wonders of God (1QHa 20:29-30).[276] In view of these observations, it goes to argue that while angels may formerly have been divinities or gods as the present study has repeatedly observed, they were no longer conceived as such by the time of the Qumran community, as they had become messengers and servants of Yahweh, the monotheistic God. Even more important regarding the nature of angels at Qumran, is the observation that such designations as בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים (sons of the God(s) and קְדוֹשִׁים (the holy ones) which were angelic titles in the Hebrew Bible, were no longer

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274 As we have seen, 4QDeuteronomy 32:43 which is an older text, describes the beings variantly referenced in LXX as υἱοὶ θεοῦ and ἄγγελοι θεοῦ· as gods (see Cockerill 1999:54). The Qumran reading in a sense is in agreement with the characterization of the deities of the second level in the divine council paradigm who themselves were gods even if they were characteristically referred to as sons of God. This confirms the proposition that the LXX's reading of ἄγγελοι θεοῦ· was really nothing but an attempt on the part of the translators to make the text sound theologically correct.

275 For their conception as "eternal spirits," see 1QH 9:11; and for their incomparability with God, see 11Q5 [11QPsa 26:12).

276 See Weinfield (1995:154); and Wassen (2007:502).

in use among the Qumran community as they rather opted for titles like בְּנֵי־הַשָּׁמַיִם (sons of 'the' heavens).[277] Obviously the question is why the authors of the Qumran literature found it more fitting to use the designation *banei ha shamayim* in place of *banei elohim* or *kadoshim* in reference to angels? We shall briefly discuss the two designations שָׁמַיִם and קְדוֹשִׁים in what follows in order to determine what might have made these two terms more preferable than others.

6.7.1 The בני השמים in post-exilic context

It is not crystal clear why the Qumranites preferred the use of בְּנֵי־הַשָּׁמַיִם over בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים. In our quest for answers, we track the usage of שָׁמַיִם in the Hebrew Bible to see if we can get some clues. Right from the outset, it is important to note that the designation שָׁמַיִם in all its 420 occurences in the Hebrew Bible, only a limited number of those refer to heaven as a divine entity (cf. Hutter 1999:388). One example of a situation in which שָׁמַיִם carries the divine element is that of Sumerians whose god *An* is at the same time the personification of heaven. Thus for the Sumerians, one could use the same designation, with reference to both heaven and their god (Hutter 1999:388). There is also the case in the Ugaritic texts (KTU 1.47:12; I.118:11; and 1.148:5.24) in which not only heaven but also the earth is deified and in position to receive offerings as would be expected of a deity (Cf. Hutter 1999:388). Other than these cited examples, heaven is generally considered to be an abode for the deities, that is, the home of the gods. As far as the Hebrew Bible is concerned, heaven was created by God (see Isa 42:5; 45:18; Neh 9:6) which in itself means that it rules out any divine aspect (Hutter 1999:389). From these observations, two facts stand out and thus deserve to be highlighted. First, the fact that שָׁמַיִם almost always did not carry a divine connotation means that the post-exilic composers of the Qumran literature may have found it non-contradictory of their developing monotheistic faith in contrast to בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים.. Further, the emphasize on the fact that God is the creator of שָׁמַיִם would have equally made the

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277 See 1QS 4:22, 11:8; 1QHa 11:22; cf. Wassen (2007:500).

authors of Qumran literature to opt for בני שמים over בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים which was explicitly polytheistic. In other words, since the בני שמים were created by God, they were in no way to be viewed as his competitors but rather his subordinates.

It is evident from these observations, even as we have stated before, that the post-exilic communities, be it the Qumranites or those enganed in the translation of the LXX, were bent on promoting monotheism while attempting to eradicate traces of polytheism. As we have already pointed out, such designations as banei ha elomim had polytheistic connotations which is why the Qumran community replaced them with banei ha shamayim. As Wassen (2007:500) observes, by the use of בְּנֵי־ הַשָּׁמַיִם instead of בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים., the scrolls "emphasize the divine nature of the angels rather than a father-son relationship with God." Again, the father-son relationship between the angels and God would be reminscent of the divine council theme in which El-Yahweh was envisioned in the company of other gods in a polytheistic setting.

6.7.2 The קְדוֹשִׁים (holy ones) in historical perspective

The root from which *kadoshim* (holy ones) derives has several meanings including 'sacred object,' 'sacred place,' or 'holiness,' and is mostly associated with a god (Van Koppen and Van der Toorn 1999:415). The adjective of the root, 'the holy one' is rendered in the MT as the name of Yahweh, the Hebrew God and it has also been further noted that the root equally referenced a deity in the Ugaritic texts (Van Koppen and Van der Toorn 1999:415). In the Ugaritic texts, while such meanings as 'consecrated gift' and 'cultic personnel' are associated with the root, it has often been observed that the most frequently held meanings include 'holy place' or chapel.[278] In the literary texts from Ugarit, *kadosh* was often held to be a divine epithet, and it was not uncommon for the gods to be referred to as 'sons of kadosh' (Van Koppen and Van der Toorn 1999:415). In light of the revelations above, in which

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278 On the root's reference to 'consecrated gift' and 'cultic personnel' see Xella (1982:10) and Xella (1982:12-13) respectively.

legitimate gods both at Ugarit and early Israelite religion bore the title *kadoshim,* it would not be surprising why a monotheistic driven community such as the Qumranites would have chosen to avoid or minimize the use of the designation קְדוֹשִׁים in reference to angels in their cultic terminologies. As a people that were bent on promoting the exclusivity of Yahweh, the use of terms that recognized angels as deities would have essentially made them his competitors as opposed to being his subordinates.[279]

6.7.3 Angels in the *Hodayot* (הוֹדָיוֹת) at Qumran
6.7.3.1 Defining the *Hodayot*

From what we know about the הוֹדָיוֹת (hereafter *Hodayot)*, it is the Hebrew word for 'thanks" or "thanksgiving" and it is believed that the hymns characterized as such got their name from the recurring use of the phrase "I thank you" found in most of its poems (see Davidson 1992:187). The groups of hymns that belong to this category are believed to have been among the first seven scrolls discovered at Qumran in 1947.[280] It has been said that one of the scrolls found in cave 1 and later purchased for the Hebrew University by Eleazar Sukenik had a total of about thirty poems similar to the biblical psalms.[281] The care with which these scrolls were preserved, such as the manner in which they were stored in jars, certainly tells the reader about how much they were valued by the community, which explains how seriously they took their religious commitment to God (Schuller and Newsom 2012:1). Even more so, and in the context of the present chapter, it is what these psalms tell us about the community's conception of angels that makes a significant overall contribution to our study.

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279 Among the Qumranites, Yahweh was considered to be a sovereign God while angels were subservient to him (cf. Davidson 1992:221). It is no wonder therefore, that designations such as קְדוֹשִׁים which carried a divine element would have characterized their vocabulary in reference to angels for the same reasons already given above.

280 For more on the thanksgiving hymns at Qumran (*Hodayot*), see Wise, et. al. (1995:84; cf Puech 1988:35-55).

281 See Schuller and Newsom (2012:1). In this same reference, it is stated that Sukenik had designated the scroll containing the poems as "Thanksgiving Scroll" while the poems themselves were referred to in Hebrew as Hodayot, meaning "Thanksgiving Psalms" or "Thanksgiving Hymns."

6.7.3.2 Angels in the *Hodayot*

In some manuscripts of the Hodayot such as 1QH 11.13, angels are characterized as everlasting hosts of heaven and that they reside in the very presence of God. If true, such characterization could suggest that angels coexisted with God for as long as he has been in existence. However, the Hodayot in several places as we shall discover in what follows sees it altogether differently. A cloud of uncertainty remains as to how the *Hodayot* were used in the Qumran community. However, as one goes through these hymns, it is undeniable that they were liturgical in nature, edifying the community spiritually particularly through meditation upon the character and goodness of God. As Davidson (1992:188) observes, this can be deduced from ". . . the author's praise of God ((1QH 10.8-11; 12.3-9), his thankfulness for God's deliverance from wicked people (1QH 2.31-36; 5.5-13); his sense of personal unworthiness (1QH 1.21-25); 3:23-24); his joy in knowing God's truth (1QH 7.26-27) and the like."

One fact that seems to be clear about the conception of angels in the Hodayot is that they were generally considered to be God's servants (1QH 5.21). This was so even with their description with such titles as (גבורים), mighty ones. To put it in perspective as Davidson (1992:197) notes, "The angels here are clearly thought of as more powerful and wonderful than mere human beings. On the other hand they are less than God, for they serve him." Thus it goes to show that in light of this observation, the mighty nature of angels is exclusively with reference to man and and nothing to do with God whom they serve as his servants (1QH 8.4-9.36).[282] A passage in the *Hodayot* (1QH 7.28), reminiscent of the the song of Moses (Exodus 15:11) raises a rhetorical question, "Who among the gods(אלים) is like thee, O Adonai?" The true identity of the אלים in the Qumran passages remains an open question whether or not it entails gods as in an ancient Near Eastern polytheistic sense.[283] However, the views promulgated

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282 Two hymns in particular stress the fact that God is by far more superior to the angels, that is, 1QH 7.26-33; and 9.37-10.12. This clearly demonstrates that in spite of the titles borne by angels such as (Heb. gubrayim, and . . . which tends to elevate their status to some degree of greatness, the Qumran community in no way saw them as Yahweh's equals or competitors but rather as subservient beings.

283 Among others who attempted the question, see Holm-Nielsen (1960:174), n. 17. For more on the Ugaritic gods who seem to have influenced the biblical writers' concept of God which stressed all the way to the Qumran era, see Miller (1973:12-23)

by Davidson (1992:202) to the contrary are persuasive. He writes:

> Such an idea, that God is one among many, is never contemplated elsewhere in Qumran thought. Moreover, the use of the term in Qumran literature argues strongly against such an interpretation. For example, in 1QM 17.7, Michael is to be exalted among the אלים. This idea is in parallel with Israel's exaltation among the peoples. The likely meaning is that the angel Michael is to be honoured among those of his own kind, as Israel is to be honoured among other human beings. We have already noted the use of the term in parallel with 'sons of heaven' in 1QH frg. 2 10.

6.7.3.3 Identity of the אלים in the *Hodayot*

It has been observed that, אלימ, (hereafter *'elim*) in the Qumran literature and in particular the Hodayot almost always refers to angels.[284] Of interest is the fact that in some manuscripts such as 1QH frg. 2 10 *'elim* is used in parallel with "sons of heaven," a designation which itself refers to angelic beings in 1QH 3.22 (cf. Coxon 1999:619). Furthermore, '*elim* in the *War Scroll* is often used in an attempt to contrast between the heavenly host (army) and the earthly one (1QM 1.10-11; 15.14). Furthermore, it is important to note that while '*elim* has often been translated as 'gods', angelic beings are usually referenced in the Qumran literature.[285] Obviously the question then is whether or not in some sense the Qumran community did conceive of the *'elim* as gods in an ancient polytheistic sense.[286] And if not, did they strictly consider the elim as nothing but angelic beings with no 'godly' associations whatsoever? In light of Davidson's analysis which we reviewed in the last paragraph, it is plausible to deduce that angel Michael could only be exalted among those of his kind (*'elim*) just as Israel could equally only be exalted among those of her kind (human beings). This, therefore argues in favour of the identification of the *'elim* not as gods that would otherwise be Yahweh's competitors, but rather as angelic beings comparable to Michael. Likewise, and in agreement with Davidson, Smith (2008:211) in his characterization of the *'elim* in the Qumran Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifices, writes, "[they] are minor 'divinities,' actually angels, but hardly gods in the modern, conventional sense."

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284 See for example 1QH 7.28; 10.8; 19.3. This compares with the Sabbath Shirot (4Q403 1 i 26, 33, 38) which contains more than thirty such references, cf. Davidson (1992:202).

285 See the contributions of Dupont-Sommer (1961:234); and Vermes (1975:183).

286 For more in responding to such questioning, see Holm-Nielsen (1960:174), n. 17; cf. Davidson (1992:202).

Several hymns in the *Hodayot* reflect the view that Yahweh was an exclusive God, incomparable with any other being, angelic or human. For example, in 1QH 7.28, it is clear that God has neither rival nor competitor. God is also described as an everlasting God who at the same time exerts his sovereignty over all beings, angelic or human (1QH 10.8-10). Similarly, God is described as being the prince of all the *elim,* lord of every spirit, and ruler of every created thing. In all this, it is to noted that while angels occupied a special status in the Qumran community, as evident from some of their designations such as נכבדים "honoured ones," they were in no way considered to be Yahweh's equals. Again, this all argues in support of the hypothesis that the non-canonical literature of the post-exilic period including that from the Qumran community represented a monotheistic faith over against the syncretism of the pre-exilic era.

6.7.3.4. God's superiority over the angels in the *Hodayot*

In light of what has been said thus far about the relationship between God and the angels, there still remains the question of how much power God had over the angels particularly those that cause affliction upon his people such as Belial. This can be addressed in the question of God's sovereignty not only upon the inhabitants of the earth but even more so the angels and especially those that are evil. Along with this line of questioning comes that of God's creation of the angels. Did God create all angels including the evil ones based on what is attested in the Qumran literature? In several Qumran documents, it is attested that angels are created beings (Davidson 1992:291). By the statement in the Hodayot that God created all things, it is to be assumed that it includes the creation of angels.[287] It is in the Hodayot text (1QH 7.28) that a rhetorical question which is aimed at distinguishing God over all divinities (angelic beings) is raised: 'Who among the gods (אלים) is like you, O Adonai . . .' It has been observed that this question calls for attention not so much upon the comparison between God and the

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287 For Qumran texts referencing God's creation of all things which would likely include angelic beings, see for example, 1QH 13.8; 1QH 18. 23-24

angels, but rather God's superiority over the angels (Davidson 1992:201). God is therefore superior to angels and in no way his competitors.

6.8 Angels in the War Scroll

6.8.1 Defining the War Scroll

In the *War Scroll* בליעל "Belial" is characterized as the angel who is the enemy of both God and his people (Davidson 1992:217). In spite of such characterization, the question that tends to remain open is whether to treat Belial as a personal being or just as an abstract existing force. Evidently, the Qumran texts that evince this enigma include 1QS and 1QH. However, some scholars in Qumran literature contend that Belial ought to be viewed as a personal being on the basis of his description in 1QM (cf. Davidson 1992:217, n. 5). Thus we read in 1QM 13.10-12 in support of Belial's personal nature:

> And thou wast the one who made Belial to corrupt, his [dominion] being in darkness and his counsel to render wicked and guilty. All the spirits of his lot, the angels of destruction, walk in the boundaries of darkness. . .

A passage like the above arguably brings the debate of the true character of Belial to rest. As one reads the passage in question, one gets the sense that Belial by all accounts was considered to be a personal being in the Qumran literature and particularly the War Scroll. Among other reasons, the personal pronouns with which he is addressed speaks to that effect.[288] That being said, a critical analysis of the said passage brings out a talking point with regard to the relationship between God and Belial. We discovered earlier that according to the Qumran community, angels were created by God. In keeping with such a belief system, Belial, himself an angel, was also created by God as the passage referenced above attests. The characterization of Belial both in the passage in question as well as the Damascus Covenant (CD 16.5) is that he was an evil angel or an angel of hatred (מלאך משטמה). Belial has also

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288 Along with the personal pronouns with which he is described, he is further described as an angel of hatred (מלאך משטמה) based on how he is characterized in 1QM 13.10-12. This derives from the observation that משטמה is a proper name (see Davidson (1992:217), n. 6.

been identified with the angel of darkness (מלאך הושך).[289]

In light of all this, the obvious talking point comes in form of a question, which is, why did the sovereign God create an evil angel, an angel of hatred and darkness? The magnitude of the question seems to be heightened as one reads the *The Two Spirits Discourse* (1QS 3.15-18) in which it is stated that God created Belial in order to bring corruption among humankind. As Davidson (1992: 218) has rightly observed, when these observations are linked together, they ultimately lead us to the conclusion that God is the originator of sin, considering that he created Belial, who himself was responsible for leading God's people astray.[290] It is important to understand that the belief system that God was somewhat responsible for sin, was strongly adhered to during the war, as such beliefs are recorded in the War Scroll. It is probably true that during calamities, people tend to question God's seeming inactivity considering that he is sovereign and omnipotent. This is particularly true because as soon as the war was over, the Qumranites praised God for serving them from the evil hand of Belial and his associates (cf. 1QM 14.9). Of even more importance is the observation that while God was viewed with mixed feelings during the time when Belial was oppressing his people, the author of the War Scroll and probably other believers in the community knew that God was overall "superior to Belial and his supporters (See 1QM 14.10). Such a realization would have reassured the community that they were safe even during the war times for as long as the sovereign God was on their side.[291] Along with God's sovereignty which is believed to have secured his people during the war, the War Scroll alludes to Belial's equal, but on the other side, that is, the side of God and his people. This angelic figure who is the antithesis of Belial, who fights on behalf of God's people during the war, is none other than Michael who is the Prince of lights and not darkness (see 1QM 17.6). Davidson (1992:314-15) notes that the

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289 For the identification of the two angelic characters, מלאך הושך and מלאך משטמה, see Schubert (1959:63) and Dupont-Sommer (1961:74).
290 On the Qumran view that God was the originator of sin, see 1QS 3.13-4.26.
291 We will discuss how the sovereignty of God was conceived of during the war as presented in the War Scroll in the section that follows hereafter.

Qumran sect believed that they were God's people under the watch care of angel Michael (1QM 13.10) while all other nations were under Belial, whose dominion would soon be terminated by God.

Putting all this in context, one gets the sense that the Qumran community that went through the war, had a comprehensive knowledge of the doctrine of angels. They seem to have understood that angelic beings were powerful divinities of sorts, some on the side of God and others on behalf of Belial, the angel of darkness. While these angelic beings had power that enabled them to do according to their embedded nature, they were all subservient to God. Thus going by the the thesis of the present study, angels in no way threatened God's monotheistic status. The question of what the sovereignty of God meant amidst the role of such powerful evil angelic beings as Belial will be discussed in detail in the next section.

6.8.2 Origin of evil angels

In order to talk about the origin of such evil angels as Belial, it is probably proper at this time that we also discuss how angels in general were conceived of in the period after the exile. We have already articulated in previous chapters that angels were former gods that were striped of their status in post-exilic Yehud in the wake of the development of monotheism (cf. Grabbe 2000:34). That being said, it is still incumbent upon us to discover how it came to be that some angels came to be characterized as evil angels as opposed to those that were righteous. It has been observed by some that while there was a recognition of other supernatural beings (later known as angels) alongside Yahweh in pre-exilic Israel, there was little differentiation between good and bad angels. To that effect, Barton (1918:179) elaborately writes:

> It thus appears that before the exile the Hebrews did not entertain a belief in demons in the ordinary sense of the term. The innumerable spirits who were, they thought, the attendants of Yahweh, were non-ethical in character. They might be sent by him on any sort of a mission. If the task assigned one of them was helpful to men, the spirit was good; if harmful to man, he was evil.

From the above, it seems that no angel was ontologically good or bad in pre-exilic Israel, as such a

status was determined by the angel's assigned mission at any one given time. However, going by our presentation of Belial, the angelic embodiment of evil, it seems that by the time of the Qumran community after the exile, angels had become characterized as being either good or bad, righteous or evil.[292] From what has been noted thus far about the origin of evil angels, scholars have often pointed to the incident in which the "sons of God" had intermarried with human women (see Gen 6:1-8).[293] The first part of this passage reads:

> 1 When people began to multiply on the face of the ground, and daughters were born to them, 2 the sons of God saw that they were fair; and they took wives for themselves of all that they chose (NRSV).

From this unprecedented union, it is believed that is how we ended up having, ". . . offspring of giants of perverse morals and unnatural appetites."[294] The foregoing is the most popular explanation of the origin of evil angels including Belial that the present study has referenced.

6.9 Angels in the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*

6.9.1 About the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*

The Sabbath Songs are an important source of angelic activities at Qumran. They are a collection of thirteen hymns whose related compositions are dated to one of the first thirteen Sabbaths of the solar year (see Newsom 1985:887, cf. Wassen 2007:505). It has been noted that the composition of the Sabbath Songs is sometimes referred to as "Angelic Liturgy" most likely as a description of their character as songs used in celestial worship (Wassen 2007:505). In a well organized fashion, each of the hymns is introduced by a heading which explains the particular Sabbath cycle it belongs to. Thus we find this procedure for example in the song of the seventh Sabbath as follows: "For the sage"

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292 Cf. Kuhn (1948:219) who notes that after the exile, and in particular in the non-canonical writings of the period stretching between 165 BCE and 100 CE, there was no longer a uniform view of the nature and character of angels.

293 The reader will remember based on our earlier discussion that the "sons of God" in Gen 6:1-4 have sometimes been referred to as "sons of heaven" particularly in the post-exilic period (cf. Bautch 2007:462).

294 See Kuhn (1948:220); cf. Gen 6:1-8; Book of Enoch 6:3-6; and Book of Jubilees 5:1-9.

[introduction]. Song of the sacrifice of the seventh Sabbath on the sixteenth of the month (see Newsom 1985:887; and Wassen 2007:505). That is to say they are "largely concerned with invoking and describing the praise of angelic priests in the heavenly temple (Newsom 1985:887). In all, it has been noted that ten fragmentary copies of the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice are extant, with the breakdown of their sources as follows: "eight from cave 4 at Qumran (Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice[a-h] 4Q400-407), one from cave 11 at Qumran (11Q 17), and one from Masada (Mas1K) (see Newsom 1985:887). The characteristic features of angelic beings at Qumran, particularly those that subject them to God's superiority are almost universally attested in all DSS documents including the Hodayot and the War Scroll which we have already presented above. It is thus needless that we present them here in detail again. Among other epithets, it is well attested in the Sabbath Shirot (4Q402 4 12; 1QS 3.15-21; and 1QM 13.10) that angels are created beings (cf. Davidson 1992:291).[295] This means that they were in no way conceived of as being God's equals but rather his subordinates, messengers and servants.

6.9.2 Angelic epithets in the *Sabbath Shirot*

The *Sabbath Shirot* pays a more detailed attention to angelic terminologies which are not found elsewhere in the Qumran literature. It is therefore proper that we evaluate some of these epithets in order to discover how angels were conceived of at Qumran in relation to Yahweh, the only legitimate God of Israel. Overall, it is hoped that such an undertaking will shed light on the role of angels in the development of monotheism at Qumran. While all the angelic epithets presented in the Sabbath Shirot are important and relevant to our study, in the interest of time and space, we shall only evaluate four of them in detail including: *Godlike Beings, Priests, Princes, Cherubim.*

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295 In this table, the first column gives the epithets or terminologies given to angels in the Sabbath Shirot at Qumran, while the second column gives the possible meanings of such epithets. The third column then enables the reader to track the sources of such epithets in the Qumran documents.

Fig. 7 Angelological epithets in the Sabbath Shirot

Epithet	Meaning	Source
אלוהים	godlike beings	4Q400 2 5; 4Q403 1 i 32
אלים	elim (gods)	4Q402 9 2; 4Q404 2 2
אלי עולמים	everlasting	MasShirshabb i 11
כוהן	Priest	4Q401 11 3
משרתים	Ministers	4Q401 15 3
נשיא	Princes	4Q400 3 ii
כרובים	Cherubim	4Q403 1 ii 15
אלוהי לקרובי דעת	... who draw near to knowledge	4Q400 1 i 6
גבורים	mighty ones/strong/insight	4Q402 1 4/4Q403 1 i 21
קדושים	holy ones	403 1 i 31
מלאכי מלך	messengers (angels) of king	4Q403 1 ii 23
רוחת / רוחי	spirits/spirits of	4Q405 19 3
נשיאי משכה	deputy princes	4Q400 3 ii 2
מעשים/מעשיו	creatures/his creatures	4Q403 1 i 35

6.9.2.1 Angels as godlike beings

The designation אלוהים and the challenges involving its translation in the Hebrew Bible has already been discussed in chapter two and therefore shall not be repeated here. It has often been observed that this designation in the Sabbath Shirot is sometimes employed in reference to both angels and God himself (see Newsom 1985:24). Admittedly, determining who is being referenced at any one given time between God and angels has never been as easy as one would expect (cf. Davidson 1992:248). It is thus to be expected that as is often the case in translating Hebrew words, the translator in such cases will have to depend on the context in order to determine the referent. Of interest is the observation that outside of the Sabbath Shirot, אלוהים has sometimes been used to refer to Melchizedek (see 11QMelch 2.8-9). It is also important to note that Melchizedek is not just believed to be an angel in Qumran

literature, but that he is esteemed to be above all the good angels.[296] There seems to be an interplay on the usage of אלוהים between the Hebrew Bible and the Sabbath Shirot, to mean either God or other revered individuals such as Moses (Exod 4:16; 7:1; cf. Ps 82:1) or angels (4Q400 2 5) respectively. However, the deliberate move by the Qumranites to emphasize the identification between אלוהים and angels is worth noting (4Q403 1 i 32, 32-33); 4Q402 4 9). It is not overstretching the point to argue that in all these documents, they were concerned about preserving the exclusivity of their God. Since אלוהים could not only mean God but also gods, including Baal, the Canaanite god (e.g. 1 Kgs 18:24), it is to be expected that the Qumran community would have designated all divinities as angels subservient to their God. This continues to make a case that as a post-exilic community, the Qumranites were bent on promoting monotheism, the belief in one legitimate God, while denying the existence of all others.

6.9.2.2 Angels as priests

The angelic beings that play the role of priests (כוהנים) in the scrolls are often portrayed as serving in a heavenly temple, praising God.[297] It has long been established that there is no better source of information about the priestly angels at Qumran than the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* (Wassen 2007:505). The character of the Sabbath Songs is such that they recognize the transcendency of God, surrounded by the retinue of celestial priestly angels who serve him in the heavenly temple, while allowing the earthly human worshipers to also participate in praising God. The following excerpt from the seventh song (4Q403 1 i 30b-33a) is representative of the fact:

> Praise the God of the exalted heights, O you exalted ones among all the gods of knowledge. Let the holiest of the god-like beings magnify the King of glory who sanctifies by His holiness all His holy ones. O you chiefs of the praises of all the god-like beings, praise the majestically [pr]aiseworthy God. For in the splendour of praise is the glory of his kingship. In it is the praise of the god-like beings together with the splendour of all [His] king[liness] (see Wassen 2007:506).

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296 For more on this, see: Fitzmyer 1967:252-53; and Davidson (1992:257).
297 Wassen (2007:5005). This imagery of praising God in his temple at Qumran has been seen by some as highly influenced by the depiction of the temple in the book of Ezek 40-48 in which Ezek was given a vivid picture of God's heavenly temple and the activities that go on there.

In reading the except above, it is unequivocal that the Qumran songs are rather poetic than prose. Some have conjectured that the use of such poetic language is somewhat meant to imitate the secret language of angels (cf. Elior 2004:169). Since we discuss the excerpt above in the context of angels as priests at Qumran, there are a few observations that deserve our attention. First, the song recognizes angels not only as exalted beings but rather as beings who live in the presence of God and serve him, who are at the same time identified as gods of knowledge. Again, while the Qumran authors of the traditions later came to designate angelic beings as mere messengers and servants of the one and only legitimate God, the fact remains that angels were originally conceived of as gods of sorts (4Q403 1 i 30b-33a). Secondly, this class of angelic beings is equally described as being the holiest of the god-like beings (4Q403 1 i 30b-33a) which suggests some kind of hierarchy among them. The question of hierarchy among the priestly angels in the temple has been discussed by Wassen (2007:507) who writes, "angelic hierarchies are implied throughout the Sabbath Songs." She observes a sevenfold hierarchical division of the angels which she says corresponds to the seven levels of sanctuaries, "complete with seven priesthoods (4Q405 7 7), seven 'chief princes' (4Q403 1 i 23), and deputy princes (Wassen 2007:507). Another major distinction is one that exists between the priestly angels who serve in the holy of holies and the rest. Even more important among the duties of the priestly angelic beings is that of rendering their sacrifies before God, sacrifices which are said to be of a spiritual nature, consisting of blessings and praises (see Newsom 1985:42). The angelic priestly ministry of rendering sacrifices is said to make atonement for human beings who turn from transgressions (4Q400 1 i 16) (cf. Wassen (2007:507).

Through the Sabbath Songs we just reviewed, it became evident first, that the priestly angelic beings, like those of all other classes, exist to praise and worship God in the heavenly temple, a privilege which is equally extended to humans on earth (4Q286 5 a-c). Again, in the overall context of the present study, this goes to show that while angels may have earlier been viewed as gods, they were

treated as God's subservient beings in the Qumran literature. Secondly, while angels are subservient to God, it is also clear from some Qumran writings that the whole cosmos including humankind is subject to the authority of angels (4Q286 3 a-d).

6.9.2.3 Angels as princes

In seeking to understand the usage of princes (נשים) in reference to Angels in the Sabbath Shirot, a little background of its usage in the Hebrew Bible is necessary. First of all, it is important to note that in some biblical passages, נשיא entails human beings (see Num 2:3, 5, 7, 10; cf. Newsom (1985:32). The question is why נשיא refers to angels in the Sabbath Shirot and not in the Hebrew Bible? In order to answer this question, we have to step back into history to the times when every nation was ruled by a prince of sorts. In Daniel 10:13, 20 for example, we read that the nations of Persia and Greece respectively had each a Prince who presided over them. We further note that the nation of Israel equally had her own presiding Prince, Michael, "your prince" (Dan 10:21), the "great Prince, the protector of your people" (Dan 12;1).[298] Furthermore, we also need to consider a passage we dealt with earlier (Deut 32:8-9), in which we noted that every nation in the ancient world was allotted a god, or to use another designation, "sons of God" (Collins 1999:663). In spite of the Jewish orthodoxy Bible (the MT's) attempt to address these sons of God as "sons of Israel" as a way of erasing the polytheistic past associated with them in favor of a monotheistic faith, the evidence from a fragment found in cave 4 at Qumran (4QDeut) which reads בני אלהים supports the view that the beings in question were truly gods under the head god in a divine council setting (see Dietrich and Loretzo 1992:153-57; cf. Collins 1999:663).

In light of the above, first, it is evident that whereas God was originally the ruler of Israel according to the divine council paradigm at the time, such a role came to be designated to Michael in

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298 For more on the references to both the Princes of Persia and Greece as well Michael the great Prince of the nation of Israel, see Collins 1999:662-63).

the Qumran literature (cf. 1 Enoch 89:59). Secondly, it is also noteworthy that the designation "prince" which could denote gods in ANE came to refer strictly to angels in the Qumran literature and the Sabbath Shirot in particular (see Newsom 1985:26-28; cf. Collins 1999:663). Again, there is probably no better explanation for the identification of these former ANE gods as Angels in the Qumran community than to say that in the minds of the authors of these post-exilic traditions, it had become clear that there was only one legitimate God while all others were messengers and servants of the God of Israel. Thus it was through the 'demotion' of the ANE gods (sons of God) to the status of Angels at Qumran that monotheism was promoted and later became the faith of the community.[299]

6.9.2.4 Angels as cherubim

Cherub, Cherubim (כרובים) for plural, is another designation for angels in the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice. It is particularly attested in two of the Sabbath Songs, that is, the seventh including 4Q403 1 ii 15; as well as the eleventh song which includes 4Q405 20-21-22 3, 7, 8.[300] Based on its usage in the Hebrew Bible, Cherubim which occurs 91 times is often associated with the guardianship of the sacred tree, the garden of Eden) and the throne of God.[301] It has been noted that one unique feature borne by the Cherubim, which distinguishes them from all other angels is that they are portrayed as winged beings.[302] While the Cherubim bear the responsibility of guarding the sacred tree as well as the Garden of Eden, it has been observed that their most important function is that of bearing Yahweh's throne (see Mettinger 1999:190). The value of this important function is equally attested in the *Sabbath Shirot* in which the Cherubim are said to continually praise the divine chariot throne of God (cf. Newsom

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299 Cf. the two scholars whom we referenced in chapter five made this observation clearer in their contributions. For his part, Grabbe (2000:34), writes, ". . . they [angels] were simply the old gods demoted to an inferior status." Tuschling (2007:13, 14) likewise writes, "[angels are] "a relic of the pre-monotheistic early Israelite past; they represent a continuing tension within monotheism from the beginning."
300 For references, see Newsom (1985:9, 11) respectively. Cf. Davidson (1992:250-251).
301 Mettinger (1999:189-190); cf. Gen 3:24 for the guardianship of the Garden of Eden. For texts associated with the Cherubim as bearers of God's throne, see 1 Sam 4:4; 2 Sam 6:2; 2 Kgs 19:15 among others.
302 See Landsberger (1947:227-54); cf. 11QShirShabb 5-6 8.

(1985:48).

Since the talking point in all this is to discover the nature of the relationship between God and the angels at Qumran particularly in their capacity as Cherubim, the question then is how this relationship contributes to Yahweh's superiority over the angels? It seems unequivocal that both in the ancient Near East and the Hebrew Bible, the Cherubim are associated with rendering service to a god.[303] Thus what we find is a case in which the Cherubim are either rendering service to El in Ugaritic mythology or Yahweh in the Hebrew Bible (Mettinger 1999:190). Regarding their status in the Hebrew Bible, it has even been observed that while guarding the sacred tree as well as the garden (Eden) was one of their duties, the principal function of the Cherubim was that of bearing Yahweh's throne (Mettinger 1999:190; cf. Ezek 10:20). In light of these observations, it goes without saying that the Qumranites, who by all acounts were promoters of a monotheistic faith would have been comfortable to designate angelic beings as Cherubim which essentially made them messengers and servants of their God.

6.9.3 Summary

We started the present subsection with allusions to the fact that angels were considered to be everlasting beings in some manuscripts from Qumran. However, as we have seen from references in the Hodayot, angels are to the contrary presented as created beings. A question that might be asked is why there were divergent views on the nature of angels in the Qumran community? In light of the argument which we have consistently made in the present study, it would not be presumptous to argue that religion at Qumran, as in the whole of post-exilic Yehud was in transition. The Yehudites were breaking away from pre-exilic polythiesm while embracing monotheism. The remnants of polytheism in Qumran literature would be those that hitherto described angels as eternal Spirits or everlasting

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303 See Mettinger (1999:190). In the same reference, Mettinger notes that the cherubim in the ANE did extend their servitude to kings as well.

beings which essentially recognized them as deities such as those that comprised ancient Near Eastern pantheons including that of ancient Israel (see Smith 2004:101-118). Those that described them as created beings in the Hodayot and other sources including the *Sabbath Shirot* (4Q402 4 12) would have largely been under the influence of the developing monotheism. Commenting on all the sources that describe angels as created beings, and particularly 1QS 3.15-21 and 1QM 13.10-12 which are more explicit, Davidson (1992:291) writes, "Both [these more explicit sources] are strongly dualistic and the need for Jewish monotheism to be asserted no doubt prompts the authors in these two cases to state that angels are created beings." Again, here as elsewhere, we cannot overemphasize the fact that the authors of Israelite traditions after the exile both canonical and non-canonical (thus DSS) were bent on promoting the monotheistic exclusivity of their God. In the case of some canonical texts such as the books of Chronicles which we presented in chapter 5, we saw how the subservient role of angels was often emphasized in comparison to superiority of Yahweh the God of Israel. Likewise, the move to suppresss the otherwise competitiveness for superiority between God and the angels is evident in the Qumran literature as we just saw. The portrayal of angels as created beings as opposed to the view that they were eternal spirits, speaks to such an attempt on the part of the authors of these traditions.

6.9.4 Conclusion

The present chapter was aimed at discovering how some divine beings that were once considered to be legitimate gods in the ancient Near Eastern world including pre-exilic Israel, were treated in the non-canonical Jewish literature of the post-exilic period. In order to accomplish such an undertaking, we first had to identify some of these divine beings by name and characteristics, afterwhich we would then track their status in some select Jewish translations. Since the present study has been building on the hypothesis that exclusive monotheism only came to be realized after the exile, our objective in part was to discover how the referenced divine beings were adopted into the post-exilic monotheistic

environment. Through our review of the two major ANE deities, Resheph and Deber, and their treatment in the LXX (see 6.5.1 and 6.5.2 above) it became clear that while these divine beings were legitimately recognized in most ancient traditions, such a status was demythologized by the authors of the LXX who believed that there was only one legitimate God (Yahweh) while the rest were angels (messengers) subservient to him (Parker (1999:798). The treatment of the these two deities made a case in favor of the argument that angels were former gods that were striped of their divine status both in the canonical and non-canonical literature of the Persian period after the exile (Grabbe 2000:34; Stark 2011:74). As the present chapter has elaborated, the translators of the LXX employed two major strategies in ensuring that the divinity of Resheph and Deber was done away with; that is, by completely omitting the name of Resheph from their translated record and changing the name of Deber as in deity's name, to Dabar as a mere word of God (See 6.5.1 and 6.5.2 above. Again, all this was designed to rid the text they translated of all remnants of syncretism in favor of monotheism.

With regard to the treatment of angels in the Qumran writings, one important aspect that has been emphasized is the fact that angels are created beings as opposed to the earlier view that they were eternal Spirits. The idea behind emphasizing angels as created beings, was to ensure in no uncertain terms that they were subject to Yahweh's superiority over them. It seems to have been a priority in the minds of the Qumran literature authors to make it clear that angels were not Yahweh's equals or competitors but rather his creatures, messengers and servants. It may be said unequivocally therefore, that the sources that described angels as created beings in the Hodayot as well as the *Sabbath Shirot* (4Q402 4 12) were likely under the influence of the developing monotheism which denied the existence of any deity other than Yahweh. Another noteworthy strategic move in the promotion of monotheism in the Qumran literature was the authors' decision to replace a designation that was often associated with mythological deities in ANE. The decision to replace the term בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים (sons of the God(s), which often designated other deities alongside Yahweh, with בְּנֵי־הַשָּׁמַיִם (sons of 'the' heavens)

which had no clear reference to divine beings is a clear attempt on the part of the Qumranites to demythologize the literature they produced in favor of a monotheistic faith (See 1QS 4:22, 11:8; 1QHa 11:22; cf. Wassen (2007:500).

Moreover, it is in light of these observations that a strong case might be made, that while pre-exilic Israelite religion was clearly either polytheistic or syncretistic, Persian period Yehud became exceptional in that the Jewish community was bent on transforming their religion into an exclusive monotheistic faith. Notwithstanding traces of Jewish people who might have continued to venerate some tutelary deities amidst the developing monotheism, it seems arguable that the majority of the Yehudites in the Persian period were either already monotheists or on the way to becoming exclusive monotheists. Again, the foregoing by all accounts authenticates the hypothesis that monotheism was only fully achieved in the Persian period through the 'demotion' of all deities other than Yahweh to the status of מלאכים—messengers (angels).[304]

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304 Cf. Parker (1999:798) who writes: By the last centuries BCE the dominant view of divine beings among Jews was that they were angels, a lesser order of heavenly beings at the one God's beck and call. It was no longer necessary to assert God's superiority over them or difference from them, for they no longer partook of divinity. When Jews of this period read the passages commented on above they now understood them to refer, not to divine beings, but to angels.

CHAPTER 7
SYNTHESIS AND CONCLUSIONS

7.1 Introduction, aims and objectives

The present chapter seeks to reiterate and synthesize the key findings arising from the study as a whole. In other words, it is intended to provide the reader with a comprehensive overview of the developments that characterized Israelite religion from its pre-exilic polytheistic background to a Persian period monotheistic status. In so doing, the major factor that cannot be overemphasized in Israel's route to exclusive monotheism is the development of angelology. Bearing in mind that no single study is exhaustive in itself, the chapter will end with a recommendation of some aspects for further research. As we indicated in chapter 1, the purpose of the present study was two-fold. First, it was designed to prove that exclusive monotheism in Israelite religion was only achieved in Persian period Yehud after the exile. Secondly, the study was also aimed at authenticating the hypothesis that monotheism was achieved through the 'demotion' of all deities formerly recognized in ANE mythology as well as early Israelite religion, to the status of מלאכים—messengers (angels), leaving Yahweh as the only legitimate God (cf. Parker 1999:798).

7.2 Summary of findings and hypothesis

From the outset, as demonstrated in chapter 2, we established that pre-exilic Israelite religion was as syncretistic or polytheistic as that of other traditions in ANE (Handy 1994:157). Under a review of the Ugaritic divine council theme which tends to be reflected in Exodus 6:2-3, it became clear that the ancestors of the Israelites may have earlier worshiped El, like the rest of the then mythological world and only came to worship Yahweh under Moses (see Gerstenberger 1996:67, 68). Such a thesis is backed up by the shared epithets between the two deities, El and Yahweh, including 'bull of Jacob,' *El-Elyon*, *El Olam*, and *El-Roi*, which were traditionally associated with El. What this means is that

ancient Israel may have revered and even worshiped other gods alongside Yahweh.

Furthermore, it is unequivocal that the Ugaritic designation בְּנֵי הָאלֹהִים clearly evinced syncretism in ancient mythological traditions, as the sons of the gods who occupied the second level of the Ugaritic divine council were themselves legitimate gods. As a clear case of syncretism in pre-exilic Israelite religion, these divinities have equally been evinced in such Hebrew Bible passages as Genesis 6:1-4. Just like these lesser deities were members of El's pantheon at Ugarit, so were they in Yahweh's divine assembly which some have noted to be evinced by such passages as (Job 1:6; 2:1; Ps 29:1; Ps 89:7) (cf. Hendel 1987:16). With these observations in mind, it seems plausible to argue unequivocally that pre-exilic Israelite religion was anything but monotheistic, as it was as syncretistic or polytheistic as all other ancient Near Eastern traditions. Thus as the present study has argued, exclusive monotheism seems to have only been realized in the Persian period after the exile.

In our attempt to track the origin of monotheism in early Israelite religion, it became clear that we could not do so without a reference to angels and angelology. The study has shown that the angelic beings of the Hebrew Bible were often known by the same designations as those of the messenger deities in Ugaritic mythology (cf. Parker 1999:794). In light of this observation, it is arguable that angels were gods prior to becoming non-divine messengers in Israelite religion. Again, as we have argued throughout the present study, the 'demotion' of angels from their earlier divine status to mere messengers would have only been an attempt by Israel's theologians to promote Yahweh's exclusive monotheistic status which in all probability only came to fruition in the Persian period. Among other strategies, the final composers of the Hebrew Bible text managed to suppress the angelic divine status through the process of what we have come to know as "textual redaction" (cf. Ben Zvi 2003:36-37). Understandably, these final composers of the text edited the biblical traditions they adopted in such a way that all forms of syncretism were to be excluded from their composition. As the present study has demonstrated, the editorial work of the Hebrew Bible which was bent on ridding the text of its

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mythological remnants likely reached its completion in the Persian period (see Blenkinsopp 1992:1). This explains why the study focussed on the Persian period in our search for the development of monotheism in Israelite religion.

Considering that the traditions adopted by the redactors were esteemed to be authoritative as they comprised God's Word, the redaction process had to be done in a justifiable manner beyond the reproach of the Jewish community at large. As we noted in chapter four, textual redaction was subtley done under the pretext that it was meant to restore that which was supposedly lost, interrupted or abrogated during the years of captivity (cf. Trotter 2001:125).[305] This point has been well elaborated by Trotter (2001:125) who writes, ". . . the concept of restoration was often used as rhetorical camouflage for innovation. The presentation of the new as the restoration of something old and improperly neglected fostered an acceptance of these innovations among the populace by legitimating them as part of their traditional heritage." In view of the foregoing, we cannot overemphasize the role of textual redaction in the promotion and development of monotheism in Persian Yehud. By way of authenticating the role of textual redaction in Yehud, the present study has tracked clear instances in which the redactors re-interpreted old traditions in order to suit their contemporary theological perspectives particularly in the books of Chronicles and Hosea.[306]

The study took cognizance of the fact that the redactors of the book of Chronicles (2 Chr 33:15) for example, subtley avoided referencing divinities such as Asherah, who previously existed in a polytheistic setting. In order to highlight the role of textual redaction in this passage, a textual comparison between 2 Chronicles 33:15 and its parent text (2 Kgs 21:7) is elaborative of the fact (cf. Weinberg 1988:170-89). In so doing, the differences evinced by Chronicles, a book composed in the

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305 This is to be understood against the background that the monotheistic vision may have begun with the redactors or theologians who themselves were monotheists after which most or the rest of the Israelite community followed suit.

306 These two books have particularly been cited as compositions of the Persian period whose authors were likely the promoters of an exclusive monotheistic faith. For arguments in favor of their Persian period authorship, see for example, Bos (2013:28) for the book of Hosea; and Frendo (2011:83) for the book of Chronicles.

Persian period, against that of Kings, would represent the role of textual redaction. Fig. 8 below presents the two textual readings:

Fig. 8 2 Kings 21:7 // 2 Chronicles 33:15

2 Kings 21:7	2 Chronicles 33:15
The carved image of Asherah that he had made he set in the house of which the LORD said to David and to his son Solomon, "In this house, and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, I will put my name forever; (NRSV)	He took away the foreign gods and the idol from the house of the LORD, and all the altars that he had built on the mountain of the house of the LORD and in Jerusalem, and he threw them out of the city (NRSV).

A critical comparison of the two passages shows that, whereas in 2 Kings 21:7 the carved Asherah was placed in God's temple, in 2 Chronicles 33:15 to the contrary, all the foreign gods presumably including Asherah are removed from God's temple. From whichever perspective one looks at it, what we find in the two biblical passages is a clear case of textual redaction. The redactor who composed 2 Chronicles (Chr 33:15), likely under influence of the Persian period developing monotheism did not find the inclusion of the goddess Asherah in his composition to be compatible with his faith. Thus, whereas Asherah is mentioned in the parent text (2 Kgs 21:7), the goddess is altogether not even mentioned in the post-exilic text of 2 Chronicles 33:15. Again, all this goes to show that textual redaction played a major role in the development of monotheism (cf. Weinberg 1988:170-89)

In continuing to prove the argument that the gods worshiped in ANE mythology were equally venerated in pre-exilic Israelite religion, we examined two specific deities that meet such characterization—Resheph and Deber. First, the legitimacy of these deities in Ugaritic mythology cannot be disputed. This is because ANE scholars have often identified both of these deities among the

second level divine children of El in the Ugaritic divine council (see Smith: 2004:101).[307] The study further noted that in as much as these deities were legitimate at Ugarit, so were they in pre-exilic Israelite religion. However, as we have noted repeatedly, because of the developing monotheism in Israelite religion, these deities were reduced to non-divine beings who served as mere messengers not of Baal but Yahweh the God of Israel. Commenting on the Ugaritic text *UT* 1001.1-3 which is believed to underlie Habakkuk 3:5, Day (1979:354) writes, "In this Ugaritic text we have an allusion to the Canaanite mythology which was to be taken up perhaps some seven hundred years later by the Psalm of Habakkuk, in which latter, however, Resheph is demoted to the role of a sort of demon in the heavenly escort not of Baal, but of Yahweh, as he sets forth to do battle with the turbulent sea." As we already noted in chapter five, it is important to reiterate that because demons were conceived of as lesser divinities, the demotion of Resheph to such a status meant that he had essentially become subservient to Yahweh, and that he was in no way to be viewed as his equal or competitor but his messenger and servant.[308] These observations unequivocally authenticate the hypothesis that angels, as we have come to know them, were former gods that were subsequently demoted or striped of their divine status, leaving them as messengers and servants of Yahweh, the only legitimate God of Israel.

Moreover, it became clear from the outset that textual redaction which was tracked in such canonical books as Chronicles, was equally evident in both the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Septuagint. Through the continuing strategy of textual redaction motivated by the desire to promote monotheism, the translators of the LXX would not even mention the name of the deity Resheph in their rendering of LXXHabakkuk 3:5 as we saw in chapter 6 (cf. Münnich's 2013:218). In the case of the deity Deber, the translators of LXXHabakkuk 3:5 deliberately decided to render the deity Deber as dāḇār entailing not a

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307 While Smith only mentions Resheph among the divine children of El at Ugaritic, the present study has noted that almost always Deber is often discussed alongside Resheph as we find in Habakkuk 3:5. It may therefore be argued that both Resheph and Deber were recognized deities in Ugaritic mythology.

308 For the notion that Resheph as a demon was thus considered a lesser deity, see Riley (1999:235); cf. Choi (2004:20) who observes, "In short, the OT's image of Resheph is heavily subjected to the demythologization and subjugation of the deity's power to the sovereignty of Yahweh."

deity but a mere word as in the word of God (Thackeray 1921:53).[309] Again, in all these changes to the biblical text introduced by the translators of the LXX, it is evident that the motivation was really one of promoting the monotheistic exclusivity of Yahweh. It is in light of all the data we presented in the present study that we can make the following conclusions: first, that pre-exilic Israelite religion was either as syncretistic or polytheistic as all other ancient Near Eastern traditions; secondly that monotheism only came to be achieved in Persian period Yehud through textual redaction; and thirdly, that monotheism was also partly achieved through the demotion of all deities to the status of angels (messengers) leaving Yahweh as the only (monotheistic) God of Israel.

7.3 Recommendation for further study

As a way of contributing to the ongoing studies on the development of monotheism in Israelite religion, the present study has innovatively done so through the employment of two approcahes, but which could be expanded in future research undertakings: First, through an analysis of the role of textual redaction in promoting monotheism. This has sufficiently been done through an analysis of some select passages particularly in the Persian period book of Chronicles. Textual redaction as a tool for promoting monotheism in Yehud could be explored in other post-exilic books in future research. Secondly, while previous scholars have identified some gods that were worshiped in ANE mythology and possibly in early Israel as well, the present study has utilized their invaluable data particularly on the two deities, Resheph and Deber, to make a case on how the demythologization of these deities and their resulting exclusion from the status of Yahweh, led to the promotion of a monotheistic faith in Yehud.[310] It is no doubt that such scholars did a commendable job in detailing the nature and essence of these deities. However, future scholars and researchers on these topics would do well to do two things; first, identify and present all the known deities that were possibly worshiped in ANE mythology and early Israel in

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309 For a more detailed elaboration on this, see Tobin (1992:349); Runia (1999:527) and Münnich (2013:218).
310 On the identification of the deities Resheph and Deber, I'm greatly indebted to the works of two scholars, Münnich (2013) and Blair (2008).

more detailed manner like Resheph was presented by Münnich. Secondly, more needs to be done in demonstrating how such deities were 'demoted' from their divine status to that of mere messengers in the employ of Yahweh. Such an undertaking will solidify the hypothesis that exclusive monotheism was ultimately achieved throguh the demotion of former deities to the status of messengers and servants.

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