I

General perspectives

1
Introducing the God of Israel

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A God alone

Gods other than YHWH were worshipped in ancient Israel, and the Old Testament itself is the principal witness to this pluriformity within pre-exilic Israelite religion.[1] At the same time, YHWH is rightly described as the God of Israel: he is the national God. Scarcely ever is he described as the God of Jerusalem or of any other of the holy places of Israelite religion: he is pre-eminently the God of the people of Israel.[2] The Old Testament is, in a manner of speaking, his biography, and in it he is anthropomorphized and his character is limned to an extent true of no other god in the ancient Near East. It is YHWH, too, who answers the quest, not now pursued as it was a few decades ago, for a 'theological centre' to the diverse writings that make up the 'Hebrew Bible' or 'Old Testament'.[3] None of the various unifying themes and concepts proposed can so adequately fulfil this integrating role as that of 'YHWH God of Israel' – a term more particular in its theological implications than it may at first appear.

Since, however, it is a point much emphasized nowadays that the religion of Israel and the theology of the Old Testament are distinct entities, representing different worlds of reality, it is important to note that there is evidence from outside the Old Testament, as well as incidental evidence from within it, to show that YHWH was acknowledged as God of Israel throughout the period of the monarchy as well as thereafter. The onomastics of the pre-exilic period, whether biblical or epigraphic, confirm the primacy of YHWH in the national religion.[4]

This is not to say, however, that the Old Testament claims YHWH as the name by which the 'God of the fathers' was originally known and worshipped. The natural sense of Exod. 6:3 is that God was not known by the name YHWH to

[1] See J. Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan* (SJSOT 265; London, 2000/2002), p. 226.
[2] On this see R. P. Gordon, *Holy Land, Holy City: Sacred Geography and the Interpretation of the Bible* (Didsbury Lectures 2001; Carlisle, 2004), pp. 27–9.
[3] See, for example, G. F. Hasel, *Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate* (rev. edn; Grand Rapids, 1975), pp. 77–103; H. G. Reventlow, *Problems of Old Testament Theology in the Twentieth Century* (London, 1985), pp. 125–33 (ET of *Hauptprobleme der alttestamentlichen Theologie im 20. Jahrhundert* (Darmstadt, 1982)).
[4] On the epigraphic evidence see J. H. Tigay, *You Shall Have No Other Gods: Israelite Religion in the Light of Hebrew Inscriptions* (Harvard Semitic Studies 31; Atlanta, 1986).

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.[5] It is by names such as El Elyon and El Shaddai that the God of the patriarchs is worshipped in Genesis.[6] That the Israelites' God was originally known by the name El – the name of the Canaanite high god in the second millennium – is also suggested by its apparent presence in the national name Isra-el/Isra-El, implying some relationship between the people and God as 'El' (cf. Gen. 32:28).

The onomastics of Genesis are quite striking in this regard, for there is no instance there of a personal name incorporating any form of the Divine Name as a theophoric element. From Exodus onwards, however, names comprising such elements are commonplace, and the new practice is even flagged in an explanatory note in Numbers 13, at the end of the list of spies sent to reconnoitre Canaan: 'Moses gave Hoshea the son of Nun the name of Joshua' (v. 16). The prefixing of a short version of the Divine Name to produce 'Joshua' underlies the change and presumably reflects the tradition of the revelation of YHWH to Moses, as in Exod. 6:3. The Divine Name is, of course, used freely in narrative references to God throughout much of Genesis, and this is commonly explained in terms of underlying sources and their stance on the timing of the self-revelation of God under the name YHWH. It is in any case reasonable that, once the identification of YHWH with El (or El Shaddai, as Exod. 6:3) was made, the distinctive Israelite name for God should be retrojected into the pre-Mosaic traditions of Genesis.[7]

The functional, not to say ontological, identity of El and YHWH in the Old Testament is reflected in the interchangeability of the names, this sometimes also involving the El epithet 'Elyon', often translated 'Most High' (see Gen. 14:18–20, 22; 2 Sam. 22:14; Pss. 7:18; 21:8; 77:11–12; 83:19; 87:5–6; 91:9; 92:2). This also helps to explain the absence of rivalry between El and YHWH in the Old Testament: the relationship between YHWH and Baal illustrates the opposite alternative where deities and what they stand for are truly in conflict. The appellative (or 'common noun') function of *el* and its cognates in Hebrew, Ugaritic and the Semitic languages generally, alongside its proper noun usage, made the transition from El to YHWH still more easy, since references to God as El could be accommodated without calling up unacceptable aspects of the Canaanite El.

Gods other than YHWH were indeed worshipped in ancient Israel. The Deuteronomic–prophetic stance on this polytheistic tendency is that it was a deviation from the pure worship of YHWH which nascent Israel learned at Sinai and pursued, by and large, in the wilderness of wandering. The gods after whom the Israelites strayed are described in the 'Song of Moses' as 'new ones lately come' (Deut. 32:17) and in the 'Song of Deborah' as 'new gods' (Judg. 5:8). Both poems

[5] There is little to be said for the footnoted translation in NIV: 'and by my name the LORD did I not let myself be known to them?'

[6] Note especially the name 'El, God of Israel' given to the altar erected by Jacob in the vicinity of Shechem (Gen. 33:20). Other El occurrences include 'El Roi' (Gen. 16:13) and 'El Bethel' (Gen. 35:7).

[7] There is a particular issue where the Divine Name features in a place name as in Gen. 22:14 ('YHWH Provides'). In this case the importance of the location in the developing tradition may be a factor in the Yahwistic naming of it.

have often been classed among the earliest compositions in the Old Testament, which makes their perspective on the non-Yahwistic gods specially interesting. Modern archaeological discovery, and in particular the evidence of the Ras Shamra mythological (and other) texts, has revealed the high degree of similarity between Canaanite religion and culture, insofar as it may be represented by the finds at this Syrian site, and Israelite religious belief and practice as described in the Old Testament and reflected in the archaeology of the biblical period. Since the comparisons, in respect of both terminology and characterization, that may be made between the Canaanite high god El and the Israelite YHWH are extensive, they have inclined a number of scholars to abandon the older model of a 'Yahwistic revolution', born in reaction to the perceived faults of 'Canaanite' religion, in favour of a more gradualist explanation of the development of Yahwism, which is then reckoned to have accommodated so-called 'Canaanite' features during its earlier stages and only later to have sought to slough these off, now on the ground that they were foreign and subversive of the original religion of YHWH.[8] There are indeed terminological and conceptual overlaps between Yahwism and the polytheistic religion of Canaan, though it remains a question how much of this should be put down to simple assimilation and how much resulted from a more active form of Israelite cultic imperialism.

In point of fact, there is a cultic aloofness about YHWH that does not come across as merely a secondary development in the Old Testament or, as it appears, in the history of Israelite religion. In this connection it is important to distinguish between the worship of deities such as El, Baal and Asherah simultaneously with the worship of YHWH and an original YHWH cultus to which these other gods belonged, as in a pantheon. It is the first of these options that tends to be supported by the biblical and extra-biblical evidence.[9] The Old Testament itself speaks of YHWH coming from regions to the south of Judah – like his devotees in the biblical tradition, he too is non-autochthonous – and already this distances him from the religion and the deities of Canaan.

> The Lord came from Sinai, from Seir he dawned on us, from Mount Paran he shone forth. (Deut. 33:2)
>
> When you set out from Seir, when you marched from the field of Edom . . . (Judg. 5:4)
>
> God comes from Teman, and the Holy One from Mount Paran. (Hab. 3:3)

[8] See, for example, M. S. Smith, *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel* (2nd edn; Grand Rapids, 2002), p. 9.

[9] There clearly were attempts to link YHWH with the goddess Asherah or at least with her cult object, to judge from the texts from Kuntillet 'Ajrud and Khirbet el-Qom, but clear evidence for Asherah's fulfilling the role of consort to YHWH in the official religion of Israel, not to speak of Yahwism in its earliest manifestations, appears not to be forthcoming. On Asherah and YHWH see J. A. Emerton, 'New Light on Israelite Religion: the Implications of the Inscriptions from Kuntillet 'Ajrud', *ZAW* 94 (1982), 2–20; and '"Yahweh and his Asherah": the Goddess or her Symbol?', *VT* 49 (1999), 315–37; J. M. Hadley, *The Cult of Asherah in Ancient Israel and Judah: Evidence for a Hebrew Goddess* (University of Cambridge Oriental Publications 57; Cambridge, 2000); M. S. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel's Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts* (Oxford, 2001), pp. 72–4; Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses*, pp. 59–61.

Congruently with this, there is no mention of YHWH in the Ras Shamra texts, most of which predate the period of corporate Israelite identity, according to the usually favoured chronology for early Israel. Nor is this god who happily assumes epithets and attributes belonging to El and Baal integrated into any Near Eastern family of gods or pantheon. Glimpses of an earlier version of Israelite religion, in which YHWH took his place among the nation deities under the presidency of El/Elyon, have been claimed for Deut. 32:8–9 ('When the Most High [*Elyon*] gave the nations their inheritance', v. 8) and Psalm 82 ('God takes his stand in the assembly of El [or "divine assembly"]', v. 1), but if such is the case the biblical authors have sufficiently obscured the underlying myth as to make the interpretation of the texts moot. In Psalm 82, for example, the gods whom God – probably YHWH, since the psalm belongs to the 'Elohistic Psalter' – sentences to death are described as 'sons of Elyon' (v. 6), which may imply God's (i.e. YHWH's) own independence of the term and what it signifies. It is often noted in this connection that the Old Testament never refers to 'sons of YHWH' when presenting its version of the Near Eastern 'Divine Council'. Instead, the terms 'sons of Elohim' (Gen. 6:2, 4; Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7) and 'Sons of Elim' (Pss. 29:1; 89:7(6)), with their Canaanite antecedent, are used for the angel-type attendants who represent the nearest that the Old Testament comes to creating a 'Divine Council' around the figure of YHWH. From the beginning, then, the concept of YHWH as the 'jealous God', eschewing the bonhomie of the pantheon and refusing to share his prestige or his functions with other gods, finds support in and out of the Old Testament. This is, to be sure, more evidently the religion of the biblical texts than that of 'historical Israel'; but it is the religion of the texts, and of those who maintained the traditions enshrined in them, that is important for the history of Jewish and Christian faith: Judaism and Christianity are, from their respective standpoints, committed to belief in one only God. A form of Yahwism that was polytheistic and undifferentiated from other pluriform systems of worship would have been an improbable matrix for the world's monotheistic faiths.

As well as this focussing on the origins of Yahwism, biblical scholarship has in the past couple of decades also renewed its interest in the somewhat broader issue of the origins of Old Testament monotheism.[10] The interest may be considered timely now that there is much talk of the monotheistic faiths and their effect upon international politics and the course of world events. The toleration of other gods besides YHWH in the Old Testament period and the claim that earliest Yahwism itself was in some sense pluralistic are seen to conflict with the traditional view

[10] Other recent studies not mentioned elsewhere in this chapter include: O. Keel (ed.), *Monotheismus im Alten Israel unter seiner Umwelt* (Biblische Beiträge 14; Fribourg, 1980); B. Lang (ed.), *Der einzige Gott: die Geburt des biblischen Monotheismus* (Munich, 1981); B. Lang, *The Hebrew God: Portrait of an Ancient Deity* (New Haven, 2002); C. Dohmen, *Das Bilderverbot: seine Entstehung und seine Entwicklung im Alten Testament* (BBB 62; Frankfurt, 1985/1987); W. Dietrich and M. Klopfenstein (eds.), *Ein Gott Allein?* JHWH-*Verehrung und biblischer Monotheismus im Kontext der israelitischen und altorientalischen Religionsgeschichte* (OBO 139; Göttingen, 1994); M. Oeming and K. Schmid (eds.), *Der eine Gott und die Götter: Polytheismus und Monotheismus im antiken Israel* (AThANT 82; Zurich, 2003).

that monotheism, no less, came to birth in the time of Moses – the view expounded most influentially in the modern period by W. F. Albright.[11] There has been support for the traditional view from outside the 'Albrightian school', notably from J. C. de Moor, who develops the idea of a 'crisis of polytheism' in the Near East in the Late Bronze period as the background to a Yahwistic revolution in Israel.[12]

More often it is asserted that only in the sixth century, with the prophecies of the so-called 'Deutero-Isaiah', the prophet of the late exilic period, is the monotheistic idea unequivocally expressed in the Old Testament. And unquestionably it is here that the rhetoric and the 'theology' of monotheism come decisively together. The Judaeans' experience of the Babylonian exile is often credited with having provoked this reformulation of belief. Deprived of statehood and even of the opportunity to live in their ancestral land, and confronted by the apparent might of the Babylonian gods, they began to respond by asserting the incomparability of YHWH and the non-existence of his rivals.

Although 'Deutero-Isaiah' is the great spokesman for monotheistic faith within the Old Testament, the question revolves to some extent on how we define 'monotheism', and many scholars are inclined to think that monotheism, at least 'in bas-relief', had manifested itself before 'Deutero-Isaiah' and the exile.[13] It is, moreover, easy to find staging posts along the way to the theology of 'Deutero-Isaiah', if the biblical tradition is given some credence. The clash with Baalistic religion in the time of Elijah and the reforms of Hezekiah and Josiah – to say nothing of 'school' developments such as are represented by the Deuteronomistic phenomenon – offer themselves as potentially significant moments in the fashioning of what in other contexts might be called the Israelite 'doctrine of God'. To give plausibility to this idea of arrhythmic progress by means of occasional 'bursts', Robert Gnuse has borrowed from the biological and palaeontological sciences the analogy of 'punctuated equilibria'.[14]

Gnuse contends that, as in biology so also in history, it is not necessarily by gradual, evolutionary process that change comes about. He starts his discussion with some consideration of the differing perspectives on Israelite origins currently

[11] See his *From the Stone Age to Christianity: Monotheism and the Historical Process* (2nd edn; Baltimore, 1946), pp. 150–207 (207); and *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan: a Historical Analysis of Two Contrasting Faiths* (London, 1968), pp. 29, 144, etc. While Albright does not class Moses as a monotheist in the same sense as Philo, Akiva, Paul or Calvin, the defining features of 'monotheism' include 'one who teaches the existence of only one God'.

[12] See his *The Rise of Yahwism: the Roots of Israelite Monotheism* (BETL 91; Leuven, 1990), esp. pp. 42–100 (2nd edn 1997, pp. 41–102). De Moor's postulate of a 'crisis of polytheism' insofar as it relates to the Ras Shamra texts has been questioned by Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism*, pp. 12, 79–80, 87. What de Moor is proposing does not differ *toto caelo* from the broad-brush and widely favoured kind of argument represented in Karl Jaspers' appeal to an 'axial age' in explanation of certain key developments in religious thought in the first millennium BC, and noted elsewhere in this chapter.

[13] For a very stringent definition of monotheism and the claim that Jewish beliefs about God are 'monarchistic' rather than monotheistic see A. P. Hayman, 'Monotheism – a Misused Word in Jewish Studies', *JJS* 42 (1991), 1–15.

[14] Robert K. Gnuse, *No Other Gods: Emergent Monotheism in Israel* (SJSOT 241; Sheffield, 1997).

being advocated. If the conquest model, involving large-scale invasion by Israelites from outside Canaan, is replaced by a version in which the Israelites emerge from within the Canaanite population, then, as already noted, there would be implications for the understanding of the development of Israelite religion, which would have originated not in a climactic breach with the neighbouring cultures but as a result of a more punctuated disengagement from what were also ancestral beliefs and practices for the Israelites. Like some others, Gnuse draws on Karl Jaspers' idea of an 'axial age' in the first millennium, and follows Max Weber in crediting Israel, as a 'peripheral' society, with a greater capacity for major societal and religious change than was possible for some of its more powerful neighbours. The idea of monotheistic *development* is paramount for Gnuse. He thinks that the monotheistic tendency was at work among the earlier Israelites, even if it came to term only much later. He finds 'Process Theology' a useful ally for his understanding of God in relation to the world, for, in his view, monotheistic faith is capable of further development as the implications of the original scriptural texts are worked out in an 'on-going evolutionary process' (p. 354).

Rainer Albertz is another recent contributor on monotheism who acknowledges the evidence for the polytheistic tendency in pre-exilic Israel yet finds the potential for monotheism also present.[15] If pre-exilic Israel was 'polytheistic', its polytheism was unlike any other. Albertz comments on two factors that predisposed Israel towards monotheism: the solitariness of YHWH, whose 'council' scarce develops beyond the anonymous 'hosts' of YHWH, and the unique relationship between YHWH and the people of Israel, represented in the title 'God of Israel' already found in the 'old' Song of Deborah in Judg. 5:3, 5. Outside Israel gods tended to be linked with small groups or dynasties and were essentially territorial deities. In illustration, Albertz cites Chemosh's anger against his land of Moab in the Mesha Stela in contrast with YHWH's anger directed against his *people* in a text such as Num. 11:1, 11. YHWH, Albertz claims, relates first to his people, and then only secondarily to the land of Israel. The claim is large and perhaps vulnerable to contradiction; however, if the issue is refined to include the concept of national covenant, then the bond between YHWH and his people is indeed conceived and developed in the Old Testament in a way that applies nowhere else.[16]

A multifaceted contribution

This volume offers a multifaceted contribution to the current discussion of the God of Israel, in which the interests of history, theology, literary criticism, cultural context, narratology and history of interpretation are all represented. The choice of

[15] The essay in question is entitled 'Jahwe allein! Israels Weg zum Monotheismus und dessen theologische Bedeutung' and is included in Albertz's *Geschichte und Theologie: Studien zur Exegese des Alten Testaments und zur Religionsgeschichte Israels* (BZAW 326; Berlin, 2003), pp. 359–82 (368).

[16] For some nuancing of this see the author in '"Comparativism" and the God of Israel', in R. P. Gordon and J. C. de Moor (eds.), *The Old Testament in its World* (OTS 52; Leiden, 2004), pp. 49–51.

topics does not aim to be representative of the full range of possible approaches to the subject, or to cover every department of the Old Testament canon, but rather to examine aspects and areas that appear capable of being further developed or that have been little discussed in academic writing to date. The chapters are divided into two groups, the first consisting of studies that deal with generic aspects of the subject or that raise issues of principle, and the second dealing with points of both general and particular interest, but in connection with a specific text or larger unit within the canon. The ordering of the chapters in this second section is therefore determined by the unit under discussion and its place within the canon. In what follows, the main points of the individual studies are summarized.

General perspectives

By reputation, one of the distinctive features of Israelite religion and worship as portrayed in the Old Testament is its strong, and apparently countercultural, aniconic tendency. Something of the essence of Yahwism has been thought to reside in this conception of a God-without-images. To aid his discussion of the topic, Nathan MacDonald begins by constructing a typology of the explanations that have so far been proposed. These are grouped according as they attempt to explain Israelite aniconism from the character of YHWH, or the nature of images, or the social context in which Israel existed. Each of these approaches has its limitations, each of them failing to uncover the origins of aniconism and therefore unable to suggest a satisfactory rationale for it. Accepting T. N. D. Mettinger's distinction between *de facto* and programmatic aniconism, MacDonald suggests that the exegetical approach, though tending to be discarded in favour of social-scientific explanations, can still shed light on programmatic aniconism. He, therefore, selects three biblical texts – Ezekiel, Isaiah 40–8 and Deuteronomy 4 – for discussion. It is concluded that Ezekiel associates the divine presence with the exilic community, whether or not this implies a thoroughgoing doctrine of humans as the *imago dei*. Isaiah 40–8 makes a contrast not so much between YHWH and idols as between YHWH and idol-makers, and, derivatively, between Israel, as the creation of YHWH, and idols. Thus these two texts represent in their different ways the idea of human surrogacy for the divine, and they become relevant in any discussion of the rationale for aniconism. In the case of Deuteronomy 4, MacDonald argues that there is explanation, and not just historical substantiation, of aniconism (*pace* G. von Rad). Here YHWH cannot be represented by a 'form', since he is present in both heaven and earth, and an image cannot do justice to such bilocation. Israel, however, by its obedience to the revelation of YHWH can represent both the earthly and the heavenly aspects of his being: 'in Israel the nations see YHWH's earthly aspect, and hear the heavenly words'.

The idea that humans can imitate the divine through ethically correct behaviour is represented by the term *imitatio dei*. The question whether this concept appears, and if so to what extent, in the Old Testament has attracted the attention of a number of writers in the past century, with Lev. 19:2 ('You shall be holy, for I the

Lord your God am holy') a focal text. But this is a narrow beam upon which to construct a serious doctrine of *imitatio*, and John Barton has previously attempted to extend the Old Testament repertoire of supporting texts, paying special attention to the book of Deuteronomy. These texts imply that God is bound by the same moral requirements as human beings, and that in responding to them humans are acting as God himself acts. Moreover, in his transcending of his anger against Israel (cf. Hos. 11:1–9), God sets an example for humans to emulate. Cyril Rodd, on the other hand, has contended that *imitatio dei* is rarely glimpsed in the Old Testament: humans are required to obey God, not to imitate him. Indeed, Rodd argues that the Old Testament has God conforming to an *imitatio hominis*, rather than the reverse. Barton responds that Rodd overlooks the presumption on the part of biblical writers that goodness resides first in God, and the question should therefore be examined from the standpoint of order of being rather than order of knowing. Rodd assumes that the discovery of *imitatio dei* in the Old Testament results from wish fulfilment on the part of modern scholars, but this is firmly rejected by Barton. It never was claimed (*pace* Rudolf Otto) that *imitatio dei* was central to the Old Testament, and it is debatable whether Rodd has been able to deprive it of the minor status that had been granted it. Because it is indeed a minor place that is claimed for *imitatio dei*, Barton proceeds to a discussion of Old Testament writers who clearly believed that God is beyond *imitatio*. He agrees with Andrew Davies that the God of the book of Isaiah deals out disproportionate punishment for wrong and is therefore not for emulating. Barton thinks that Deuteronomy also depicts God in ways incompatible with the moral instructions that he delivers to Israel. There is therefore much in the Old Testament that illustrates the Isaianic dictum, 'my thoughts are not your thoughts' (55:8): the incomparability of God also implies his inimitability. Barton concludes that parts of the Old Testament promote the idea of *imitatio dei*, but that in others God in his inscrutability requires obedience, instils awe and is not bound by the laws that he imposes on his human subjects.

The monotheistic concept has acquired a status within the Judaeo-Christian tradition as an expression of the highest form of thinking about God. At the same time, as Ronald Clements observes, the monotheism of the Old Testament raises a number of important issues. Clements recognizes two opposing emphases within the Old Testament: a truly comprehensive monotheism and a line of tradition that is exclusive of other religions and their deities. He is concerned to place in context, and thereby counter, the charge that the Old Testament commends an 'intolerant' version of monotheism. He takes as his starting point and as paradigm the merging of various perceptions and namings of God in the recognition by the ancestors of biblical Israel of one God over all. The revelation of the Divine Name at Sinai has much to do with the unifying of early Israelite traditions. 'The deity, previously known by a variety of names and titles, now has one mysterious and supreme name.' At the same time, in strict terminology the Exodus passage is monolatric rather than monotheistic, and not fully and explicitly monolatric. Monotheism came late in the day, and the development was partly provided by the military challenges of external powers to the sovereign claims of Israel's God. 'Intolerant

monolatry', says Clements, finds its voice in the Deuteronomistic writings, being enunciated in Deuteronomy and functioning as a *regula fidei* across the national history recounted in the 'Deuteronomistic History'. For a time the hopes attaching to the Davidic dynasty fostered confidence in YHWH as the national god, but the defeats of 598 BC and 587 BC showed that ideas of YHWH's sovereignty over the nations could survive only if seen in a new light. At this point the full commitment to monotheism occurred: 'YHWH ruled over the nations, not in the manner of popular belief, but as the hidden divine Ruler who shaped the destiny of all nations.' YHWH even permitted gentile rulers to exercise authority over his own people. So there grew in the scattered communities of Judahites the recognition that YHWH could be with them wherever they were. Earlier nationalistic limitations were shed, and the God of Israel was seen as universal creator and sustainer of all humanity.

It is God as creator, and the place of creation theology in the Old Testament, that Katharine Dell addresses in her essay. Following the rise of biblical criticism in the nineteenth century, new prominence was given to the historically related themes of Israel's election and covenant, with consequent loss of status for the creation theme. In Genesis the creation narrative could be read simply as preface to the account of salvation-history that begins with the call of Abraham. The search for distinctive features in Israelite religion as compared with other Near Eastern religions also contributed to the sidelining of creation, since this is a topic on which Near Eastern traditions are fairly voluble. It also became a standard view that the enhanced understanding of God's universality that came during the Babylonian exile saw the forging of the link between the creation and salvation history themes in 'Deutero-Isaiah'. However, already in the 1960s and 1970s H. H. Schmid and others were arguing that creation enjoyed a more central position in pre-exilic Israelite thought. In this respect Israel actually had more in common with its neighbours than the old dichotomy of creation and salvation-history allowed. Dell follows her account of these developments by noting attempts by representative writers to create space within Old Testament theology for world-views less tied to history and more participant in the wider culture of the ancient Near East. The wisdom writings are one area where the importance of creation has been recognized in more recent study: Dell cites L. G. Perdue, who sees creation as 'the overarching principle in wisdom'. With this comes the further recognition that God as creator is integral to the wisdom tradition and is therefore not to be regarded as having been introduced secondarily into it. Finally, in an inversion of its previous fortunes, creation theology is nominated by Dell as having exerted a formative influence on the religion and theology of the Old Testament more generally.

The recognition of God as both creator and lord of history comports easily with the conceptualizing of him as 'king' (cf. Isa. 43:15; Pss. 24; 74:12–17). However, as Diana Lipton notes, the metaphor of God as king offers a challenge to the ideas of intercession and divine persuadability that are important for the Old Testament understanding of how the human and the divine relate to each other. Indeed, Lipton claims that God's kingship has negative as well as positive connotations in the Old