MONOTHEISM
AND DIVINE AGGRESSION

Collin Cornell
Fuller Theological Seminary
Monotheism and Divine Aggression

Elements in Religion and Monotheism

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Collin Cornell
Fuller Theological Seminary

Author for correspondence: Collin Cornell, collincornell@fuller.edu

Abstract: The aggression of the biblical God is notorious. The phrase “Old Testament God” conjures up images of jealousy and wrath, smiting and judging. But is it only an accident that this god became capital-G God, the unique creator and sustainer of three world religions? Or is there a more substantive connection between monotheism and divine aggression? This Element proposes exactly this causal connection. In three case studies, it showcases ways that literally treating one god alone as god amplifies divine destructiveness. This happens according to two dynamics: God absorbs the destructive power of other divine beings – and God monopolizes divinity such that other beings, even special ones like God’s beloved king or the people of God, are rendered vulnerable to divine aggression. The Element also attends to the literary contexts and counterbalances within which the Hebrew Bible imagines divine aggression.

Keywords: monotheism, biblical theology, Hebrew Bible, ancient Near East, divine wrath

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