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## MONOTHEISM AND WISDOM IN THE HEBREW BIBLE

*An Uneasy Pair?*

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# Monotheism and Wisdom in the Hebrew Bible

## An Uneasy Pair?

Elements in Religion and Monotheism

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**Abstract:** Monotheism, belief in only one God, and wisdom, learning to cope by reason alone and teaching others to do so, faced resistance in the polytheistic world of ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, and lesser states including Israel. Paradoxically, in early biblical wisdom (Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes) the deity was thought to be both human-like, with disturbing attributes, and increasingly transcendent – silent, disembodied, and inactive. Like Egyptian Ma’at, God the creator established the universe by decree, a law rewarding goodness and punishing evil, the flaw in creation, never satisfactorily resolved. Satan, a semidivine rival, bore responsibility for bad things, while Wisdom, a personified female, communicated God’s will to the discerning. Combining biblical revelation and Hellenism, Sirach and Wisdom of Solomon chose piety over Job’s realism and the vanity literature of Ecclesiastes. Over millennia, the concept of God evolved, continuing a process begun in Paleolithic times.

**Keywords:** wisdom, dualism, act/consequence, personification, monotheism

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