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**Divine Covenant Faithfulness in the Face of  
Human Covenant Unfaithfulness:  
Is Yahweh’s Covenant Faithfulness Ultimately  
Contingent upon Human Obedience?”**

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**Introduction**

In comprehending their lives, the ancient Yahwists referenced YHWH (usually, indicated as “the LORD” in modern translations) as their god, explaining the various events and the corresponding effects that impacted their lives. This thorough-going reference to YHWH is expressed by the use of “covenant”—the concept that they employed to explain their relationship to the divine realm, specifically YHWH. According to Biblical Yahwism (i. e., the faith or ideology for living of those who believed YHWH as reflected in the Bible) the

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interpersonal relations between Y<sup>HWH</sup> and the Yahwists (i. e., the tribal, the monarchical, and the colonial components of Israel and Judah) were initiated, established, and maintained by the former. In other words, the proponents of the Bible argued that Y<sup>HWH</sup>'s covenant-faithfulness demanded but was not contingent upon human obedience. An explanation of the concept of covenant and an overview of selected, major events in the history of ancient Israel and Judah demonstrates this point.

### A. “Covenant” **tyrB**.—Its Use and Y<sup>HWH</sup>'s Role

Constitutionally, the ancient Yahwists conceived of themselves, including their god, in terms of a covenant, that is, the ‘suzerainty-vassal’ treaty.<sup>2</sup> Employing the covenant understanding (cf. Exod. 19-

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<sup>2</sup> See Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible: A Socio-literary Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 202, 204-206. “Covenant” (**tyrB**) is a political term, denoting “treaty”, which could be a ‘parity treaty’ or a ‘suzerainty-vassal treaty’. Israel used the latter type as a model for its self-organization (204f). For Israel Y<sup>HWH</sup> was the suzerain, and they were His vassal. According to Israelite usage “covenant” signified: 1. an ordered relationship between God and people that is two-sided, though not necessarily evenhanded in the involvements and obligations of both parties (202); 2. Israel’s way of symbolizing the ground and origin of the proper ordering of its communal life, i. e., a sociopolitical reality; 3. Israel’s formulation of its self-definition as a people and its basic social institutions; and 4. a way of binding together the tribes so that they could effectively subordinate their separate interests to the common project of winning their collective freedom and security from Canaanite city-states that tried to subject them to state domination (204). The structural elements of the suzerainty treaty form are: 1. preamble or title of the author/superior party to the treaty (Exod. 20:2a; Deut. 5:6a; Josh. 24:2a); 2. historical prologue or antecedent history of relations between the treaty partners (Exod. 20:2b; Deut. 1-3; 5:6b; Josh. 24:2b-13); 3. stipulations stating the obligations imposed upon the vassal or inferior party to the treaty (Exod. 20:3-17; Deut. 5:7-21; 12-26; Josh. 24:14); 4. provision for deposit of the treaty text in a temple and periodic public reading (Exod. 25:21; 40:20; Deut. 10:5; 27:2-3; 31:10-11); 5. lists of gods (or elements of nature/people) as witnesses to the treaty (Josh. 24:22, 27; Isa. 1:2; Mic. 6:1-2); 6. curses and blessings invoked for disobedience/obedience to the treaty stipulations (Deut. 27-28; cf. Lev. 26:3-45); 7. oath by which the vassal pledges obedience to the treaty (Exod. 24:3; Josh. 24:24); 8. solemn ceremony for formalizing the treaty (Exod. 24:3-8); and 9. procedure for initiating sanctions against a rebel vassal (Hos. 4:1-10; Isa. 3:13-15) (206). Though the concept of covenant influenced Israelite thinking, the strict monotheistic tendency could have emerged late, and would have been read back into the earlier [Footnote continued on next page ... ]

34; cf. Gen. 12; 15; 17) as constitutional data or an organizing rubric, they claimed that authentic Yahwism is politically consolidated or monotheistic. For them realization of freedom or salvation (i. e., the benefits of YHWH's sovereignty) is only possible through exclusive allegiance to the tenets of Yahwism. In this respect, the most significant or indispensable covenant-standards were: 1. the prioritization of YHWH;<sup>3</sup> 2. the *selective imaging* of YHWH;<sup>4</sup> and 3. the

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traditions. See Diana Vikander Edelman, ed., *The Triumph of Elohim: From Yahwisms to Judaisms* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995); also Niels Peter Lemche, *Ancient Israel: A New History of Israelite Society* (England: Sheffield, 1995), 163-170.

<sup>3</sup> See Lowell K. Handy, "The Appearance of Pantheon in Judah," in *The Triumph of Elohim: From Yahwisms to Judaisms* (ed. Diana Vikander Edelman; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 27-43; Herbert Niehr, "The Rise of YHWH in Judahite and Israelite Religion: Methodological and Religio-Historical Aspects," in *The Triumph of Elohim: From Yahwisms to Judaisms* (ed. Diana Vikander Edelman; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 45-72.

<sup>4</sup> Brian B. Schmidt, "The Aniconic Tradition: On Reading Images and Viewing Texts," in *The Triumph of Elohim: From Yahwisms to Judaisms* (ed. Diana Vikander Edelman; Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 75-105. Schmidt argues that the second commandment (Deut. 5:8-10 = Exod. 20:4-6) assumes the existence of other gods beside YHWH that were worshipped, even along with Him, and that there could have been legitimate images of YHWH, though it does not say (80, 83, 86, 88, 91, 102). This commandment, then, addresses the propensity of the Yahwists to worship other gods above YHWH and condemns their tendency to make illegitimate images of Him (84, 85), disregarding the appropriate symbolisms ([Deut. 4:15-20]; 85f). In this respect, the images that are forbidden are certain groups of theriomorphic forms, that is, those faunal forms that inhabit the sky, earth, and sea (81, 82). On the other hand, YHWH astral imagery was an indigenous Israelite tradition ([Deut. 17:3]; 88). The only biblical evidence that suggests the existence of such images is the ritual animation (Exod. 24:15-18; 33:9; 40:34-38) that is connected with the cloud (𐤀𐤏𐤍, *anan*) and the incense (𐤏𐤓𐤗𐤏, *qetoret*), which accompany Moses's use of the mask ([Exod. 34:29-35; 40:35]; 92-96). He concludes that the appropriate YHWH image is a *Mischwesen*, that is, a composite form that consists of human and animal elements (102ff). Also, see Walter Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology: Essays on Structure, Theme, and Text* (ed. Patrick D. Miller; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992). Brueggemann perceives, then, the main tendencies of Yahwistic faith to be the polarity of tension between "aniconic religion/egalitarian social practice (the combination of which is called "pain-embracing")" and "iconic

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historicity of YHWH's activity,<sup>5</sup> which distinctly emerged in the form of Yahwistic monotheism in the post-exilic period.<sup>6</sup>

This picture of Yahwism is complicated by cultural diversity—all Yahwists were not exactly the same. Depending upon social affiliations, different conceptions of YHWH emerged and were operative. Yahwism as practiced locally by the tribes differed from later developments that were created and enforced by the monarchies, which sought to suppress the popular forms of the tribes for the sake of control.<sup>7</sup> These varying forms (which included their respective

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religion/monopolistic social practice (the combination of which is called “structure legitimation”)) [137; see 118-149].

<sup>5</sup> See Werner H. Schmidt, *The Faith of the Old Testament: A History* (trans. John Sturdy; Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1983) 1-2, 57, 59, 60, 70, 72, 74, 77, 81, 83-84, 86, 87, 93-95, 143, 178-181. Schmidt has argued that the basic commandments fostered the oneness, and the imagelessness, of YHWH, and the historicity of His activity. However, Brian Schmidt refines or qualifies the aniconic understanding of YHWH [“The Aniconic Tradition,” 75-105]. Notice that the historicity of YHWH's activity is categorized or labelled as the “word of YHWH” *hwhy-rbd*, thereby indicating the event in which YHWH is perceived to be acting (cf. Jos. 4:8; 8:8, 27; 11:23; 14:6, 10, 12; 21:45; 23:5, 14, 15; Jgs. 2:15; 1 Sam. 3:1, 7, 9, 21; 15:10, 13, 16, 23, 26; 16:4; 2 Sam. 7:4; 12:9; 24:11; 1 Kgs. 2:27; 5:19; 6:11; 8:20; 12:15, 24; 13:1, 2, 3, 5, 9, 17, 18, 20, 26, 32; 14:18; 15:29; 16:1, 7, 12, 34; 17:2, 5, 8, 16, 24).

<sup>6</sup> See Niehr, “The Rise of YHWH;” Brian B. Schmidt, “The Aniconic Tradition: On Reading Images and Viewing Texts,” in *The Triumph of Elohim: From Yahwisms to Judaisms* (ed. Diana Vikander Edelman; Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 75-105, esp. 81f, 86, 88, 102-105; Thomas L. Thompson, “The Intellectual Matrix of Early Biblical Narrative: Inclusive Monotheism in Persian Period Palestine,” in *The Triumph of Elohim: From Yahwisms to Judaisms* (ed. Diana Vikander Edelman; Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 107-124. Thomas M. Bolin, “The Temple of why at Elephantine and Persian Religious Policy,” in *The Triumph of Elohim: From Yahwisms to Judaisms* (ed. Diana Vikander Edelman; Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 127-142. Thompson argues that Yahwism developed from *inclusive monotheism* under the Persian administration to *exclusive monotheism* under the Hellenistic rule (112-124), while Bolin specifically locates the emergence of *inclusive monotheism* during the reign of Xerxes (128, 137, 139f, 141).

<sup>7</sup> See the following summary of the conclusions of Ziony Zevit (*The Religions of Ancient Israel: A Synthesis of Parallaxic Approaches*. London & New York: Continuum, 2001): “Israelite Religions: A Parallaxic Synthesis.”1. Throughout [Footnote continued on next page ... ]

most of the Iron Age (after 1050 B.C.E. or thereabouts) Israelite religions were practiced by groups of people organized as tribes dwelling on traditional landholdings. Ancient Israelites were self-organized as a settled partially-urbanized tribal society that maintained tribal structures until the destruction of Samaria in 721 B.C.E. and of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E. with their attendant exiles [612]. 2. Tribes ceded certain traditional prerogatives to the monarchy, creating a confederation within which authority not ceded was maintained by the tribes (1 Sam. 8:4, 5, 11-17; 11:14; 2 Sam. 5:1-3) [616f], resulting in a loosely defined quasi-tribal state [617]. 3. The monarchy was accepted as a necessity which had to be supported because of the physical protection that it could guarantee, thereby preserving tribal autonomy. It emerged during a period in which a mix of tribal ethnic, linguistic, and urban units in Transjordan and south Syria were also coalescing into monarchic confederations and unions based on control over large swatches of territory [619]. 4. The monarchy did not foment the development of supra-tribal loyalty [621]. 5. Israelites, as a rule, lived together in communities, even as agriculturalists; they clustered their residences together and did not live isolated in the midst of their holdings [625]. 6. Because cities were governed by *zeqeniym*, each the titular head of a father's house, it may be concluded that many cities were settled by collections of father's houses [626]. 7. Land was considered the trust of the tribe or the clan, expressed through its actual possession but used by specified individual owners [627; cf. 629]. 8. Overlaying tribal jurisdiction was limited authority vested in the elective monarchy to do what was necessary for maintaining the tribes from which it derived power [635]. 9. By the time of the establishment of the monarchy (ca. 1000 B.C.E.), the concept of Israel as an ethos had become fixed [641]. 10. Tribal structures became fluid again in the north only after the dismantling of the Northern Kingdom in the 8<sup>th</sup> century and in Judah after the Babylonian exile in the 6<sup>th</sup>, most likely during the early Persian period [642f]. 11. The social context within which all Israelite cultic activity took place was that of tribalism [643]. In other words, Israelite cultic activity was minority-sensitive, that is, designed to counter(act) the institutional domination of suzerain culture. 12. At every level, at different times, change occurred, for example, a chess game [646]. 13. There is no valid reason to assume that people in any social constellation regularly search for the most advantageous, economic, and efficient choices or courses of actions when confronted with new circumstances. 14. There are ample reasons from attested human responses under such circumstances to posit "wobble" behavior [648]. 15. Israelite tribalism comprised a subcritical system, while that of the monarchy and its institutions comprised an essentially supercritical system, wherein Israelite religions were woven into these complexly organized frameworks, acting on them and being acted on by and through them [648, 652]. 16. The presence of Baal and El names in Israelite toponymy and the general absence of YHWH and Asherah names as indicating that the names of the latter two, as head of the pantheon, were by common and widespread convention not used for such designations. 17. The Deuteronomistic polemic that ran together Baal and Asherah targeted Asherah, the female consort of YHWH who was associated with the first tier and was perceived [Footnote continued on next page ... ]

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cults) competed and often conflicted. In this respect, there were popular forms of Yahwism<sup>8</sup> that circulated in the areas surrounding

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as having influence there but belonged to the second and Baal, the most notable of the deities from the second tier whose consort was most likely Baalat [651]. 18. YHWH in different manifestations was the prime deity of the Israelite tribes, occupying in their pantheon the head/top tier [651]. 19. Different deities were worshipped through similar yet different rites at different types of installations. 20. Under certain circumstances the same deity might be worshipped at different places for different reasons using different types of rituals. 21. Classifications: a. The Israelite pantheon = a subcritical system; b. Yahwism = a critical system; c. Radical YHWH-alone cults = a supercritical system [648, 652]. 22. Jerusalem reflected tribal traditions of northern Judah as they evolved and developed in that city under the patronage of Davidic kings and local levitical polities. In Jerusalem (Judah) the king's tribal politics was his national politics and as such were reflected cultically [658]. 23. Lands of the Cosmos: a. *shamayim*/the heavens = the highest; b. *'ares*/the earth = the middle; c. *tehom*/the depth = the lowest. 24. The deities were conceived in some sort of pecking order: 25. YHWH was absent from the lowest level. 26. Yahwism and its rituals were concerned primarily with the middle level [664]. 27. As a rule Israelite religions in general were characterized by tolerance. 28. Types of Israelite Religions: a. At the non-chthonic level, Yahwism competed with Israelite religions that considered Baal the head of the Israelite pantheon and each produced zealots of the Baal-alone and YHWH-alone stripe. b. A third type was concerned with achieving technical mastery in prognostication. 29. Yahwistic intolerance extended to execution, when it persecuted those who challenged YHWH's sovereignty as head of the pantheon [667]. 30. YHWH was worshipped in some parts of Israel by the 10<sup>th</sup> century and his cult spread and was pan-Israelite by the end of that century [687]. 31. In Israel, the major participants in YHWH cults and the disseminators of its myths may have been groups of mantics and clans of Levites [687f]. 32. There was hardly uniformity in the perceptions of YHWH's history, mythologies, or cults. 33. Although the YHWH cult was one among many, it was the predominant one, characterizing the Israelite ethos [688]. It is safe to contend that the YHWH cult was the dominant form of Israelite religions.

<sup>8</sup> William G. Dever, *What Did the Biblical Writers Know and When Did They Know It? What Archaeology Can Tell Us about the Reality of Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001), 101, 105, 173-175, 176, 183, 187, 193-198, 215, 217. Dever defines popular religion as “an alternate, nonorthodox, nonconformist mode of religious expression” that overlapped and competed with official religion, having the following features: 1. it is largely noncentralized; 2. it is noninstitutional, lying outside state priests or state sponsorship; 3. it is inclusive rather than exclusive; 4. it appeals to the minorities and the disenfranchised (in this case, mostly women); 5. it is eclectic and syncretistic in belief and practice; 6. it is focused more on individual piety and informal practice than on elaborate public ritual and intellectual formulations (i. e., [Footnote continued on next page ... ]

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theology); 7. it is less literate but not less complex or sophisticated; 8. it is inclined to leave behind more material remains than literary records; 9. it probably included: a. frequenting *bamôt* (high places) and other local shrines; b. making of images; c. veneration of *'asherîm* (whether sacred trees or iconographic images) and the worship of Asherah the Great Lady; d. rituals having to do with childbirth and children; e. pilgrimages and saints' festivals; f. numerous kinds of planting and harvest festivals; g. *marzeah* feasts (sacred banquets); h. various funeral rites, such as libations for the dead; i. baking cakes for the "Queen of Heaven" (probably Astarte); j. wailing over Tammuz; k. various aspects of solar and astral worship; l. divination and sorcery; m. perhaps child sacrifice; 10. it is characterized as the religion of "hearth and home" and is considered almost the exclusive province of women. See also Carol Meyers, *Households and Holiness: The Religious Culture of Israelite Women* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005). Rebuking the misconceptions that goddesses are linked mainly to female worshippers, that the female goddesses or symbols were objects of veneration (6), that women played a minor or peripheral role in religious/cultic activity (6, 60f), and that the household is tertiary (58f), Meyers submits that household religious practices, especially the women's religious culture, were arguably more prominent in terms of the day-to-day experience of most people than were extra-household religious activities and cultic events (11, 24, 30f, 59, 62-67, 68, 70-72). These were strategies (akin to preventive and restorative medical procedures of the modern world) to intervene with the divine forces believed to impact the well-being of mother and child and to influence these divine forces in order to assure their benevolent and protective presence or to avert their destructive powers (17, 29, 31, 34, 44). Located or centered in the households (25, 26, 30, 57, 59, 61), these practices employed magic in the sense of consultation and confrontation of deities or divine forces in dealing with life and death issues (20, 21, 22, 29). The causative factor for this prominence is the exclusivity of women's reproductive capacity (16, 31, 35, 50). This understanding suggests several things: 1. that women's religious culture was complex, involving assorted specialists (i. e., midwives, necromancers, sorcerers, diviners) and necessitating guilds and networks (62-67); 2. that women's religious culture in households was regarded as essential for the creation and maintenance of (new) life, immediately and directly addressing the concerns with life and death and focusing upon the welfare of the family (68); and 3. that Israelite society was organized heterarchically, not hierarchically (70-72). Meyers marshals two categories of evidence: archaeological and biblical. The archaeological evidence is: 1. small terra-cotta figurines (27-30); 2. households as the common find-spots for figurines—at least one figurine per household (30-31); 3. small statues as well as other depictions of the Egyptian dwarf god Bes that is used in apotropaic magic (31-33); 4. the wedjat or eye symbol, that is used as to protect or ward off illness and to promote healing (33-34); 5. couch models together with a pillar-figurine and a miniature lamp, the former symbolizing copulation and giving birth and used to ensure fertility, safe childbirth, and successful lactation (34-35) and the latter symbolizing well-being and safety in contrast to the dangers of darkness (42, 44). The biblical evidence is: 1. prayers (Gen. 15:2; 20:17-18; 25:21;

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the cities and countered the monarchical forms that were fostered by a given administration.<sup>9</sup> Though these early institutions were

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1 Sam. 1:10-11) (37); 2. mandrake roots (Gen. 30:14-17); 3. red thread (Gen. 38:28-30) (38); 4. washing the newborns, rubbing the newborn with salt, and/or swaddling the newborn (Ezek. 16:4) (39-41); 5. lamps burning in households (Prov. 6:20-23; 31:15, 18; Job 18:5-6; 29:3; 2 Kgs. 8:19) (41); 6. circumcision (Exod. 4:24-26) (42, 43); and 7. naming rituals (Ruth 4:14-17; 1 Sam. 4:20-21) (42). Meyers' study offers several guides: 1. "health care systems" were integrally related with religious culture (21); 2. magic was a tool/means that afforded a sense of control and mental ease in confronting and handling life and death issues (20, 21, 22); 3. the household is a strategy to meet the productive and reproductive needs and as such the center of the economic, social, and religious life (24, 30f, 59); 4. wherever ritual behaviors took place in household space, that space would be transformed into sacred space for the duration of the rituals (25); and 5. the orientation of the biblical text reflects the perspectives of its writers (7, 8, 24, 60, 69, 70).

<sup>9</sup> See Jerome C. Ross, *The Composition of the Holiness Code (Lev. 17-26)* (Ann Arbor: UMI, 1997; [UMI 9816816]), 157 n. 40. From study of the Holiness Code (Lev. 17-26), I have observed the following characteristics of "popular religion": 1. involvement of the elders or invoking of the clan leaders as representatives of the populace [Alan Cooper and Bernard Goldstein, "At the Entrance to the Tent: More Cultic Resonances in Biblical Narrative," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 114 (1997): 206f; Jer. 26:11, 16f]; 2. the prevalence of the veneration of the clan deities [Alan Cooper and Bernard Goldstein, "Exodus and Massot in History and Tradition," *MAARAV* 8 (1992): 29f; idem, "The Cult of the Dead and the Theme of Entry into the Land," *Biblical Interpretation* 1 (1993): 294f; cf. Schmidt, "The Aniconic Tradition"]; 3. the promulgation of the "all-Israelite" view [Israel Knohl, *The Sanctuary of Silence: The Priestly Torah and the Holiness School* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 65, 190f]; 4. the elevation of *Shabbat* to an equal status with the Tabernacle [Knohl, *The Sanctuary of Silence*, 16-19]; 5. the inclusion of the *gêr* (resident alien) [Knohl, *The Sanctuary of Silence*, 21, 18]; 6. the anthropomorphizing and personalizing of God [Knohl, *The Sanctuary of Silence*, 170-172]; and 7. the view of the covenant between YHWH and Israel as being reciprocal [Knohl, *The Sanctuary of Silence*, 173f]. The latter five characteristics are features of H, that show evidence of influence by popular forms of Yahwism. Being 'priestly-popular', I perceive that H: 1. assumes that the elders are leaders, but not over the priests; 2. advocates the holiness of all Israelites, even the land, but in grades (94 n. 27; also 144f); 3. elevates *Shabbat* to an equal status with the Temple (151f); 4. denounces the clan deities (cf. Lev. 17:7; 19:4, 31; 26:1); 5. includes the *gêr* as equal on conditions of compliance (140-146); 6. adopts anthropomorphisms in describing YHWH; and 7. personalizes the covenant between YHWH and the people of Israel (see discussion of the divine self-introduction formulae—the short form and the long form—and the holiness formula: 47-51, 81-87, 175f). In this respect, I define "Israelite popular religion" as 'an unofficial form of Yahwism that

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normative, probably an extremely small sector of Yahwists was strictly monotheistic, and this was due to the composite nature of the formative traditions and the polytheistic and the pluralistic backgrounds of the members that eventually formed Israel.<sup>10</sup> Only the Yahwism as practiced by the orthodoxy was strictly monotheistic; the other forms were syncretistic. That the theoretical arguments for both that were eventually transcribed and transmitted maintained a monotheistic overtone is a reflection of the perspectives of the elite who emerged during and continued after the monarchies. In all cases, YHWH was hailed as the head god,<sup>11</sup> which is confirmed by both archaeology and the Hebrew Bible. The significance of this for understanding the covenant relations is that belief in YHWH became the primary interpretive datum—his presence and activity were always referenced in explaining the events in the lives of the Yahwists. Good fortune was regarded as blessings from YHWH, while crises (e.g., conquest, destruction, and/or domination by foreign entities) constituted judgment by him.

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was headed by local leaders, who were not backed by the political overlords or the authorities in power.’

<sup>10</sup> Norman K. Gottwald, *The Politics of Ancient Israel* (Library of Ancient Israel Series; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 154-157, 209.

<sup>11</sup> Norman K. Gottwald, “The Theological Task after *The Tribes of Yahweh*,” *The Bible and Liberation: Political and Social Hermeneutics*. Revised Edition of *A Radical Religion Reader* (ed. Norman K. Gottwald; Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983), 190-200. Gottwald notes that the egalitarian intertribal movement created its own culture, spawning numerous exceptional new developments (191): 1. the sole high god usurps the entire sacred domain, calling for the exclusive recognition of one deity in the life of the people; 2. the sole high god is alone active in the world; 3. the sole high god is conceived by egalitarian sociopolitical analogies, that is, the representations of YHWH are chiefly those of a warrior-leader who brings the distinctive intertribal community into existence and defends it; 4. the sole high god is coherently manifested or experienced as powerful, just, and merciful; 5. the sole high god is in bond with an egalitarian people, an intertribal formation (193); and 6. the sole high god is interpreted by egalitarian functionaries (194).

**B. Traditio-historical Overview of Covenant-faithfulness:  
Selected Crises**

Rightfully considered theology,<sup>12</sup> the efforts at interpretation of Y<sup>H</sup>W<sup>H</sup>'s activity and presence in the lives of ancient Israel and Judah entailed sociopolitical strategies designed toward the survival of the ancient Yahwists, who were a minority within the ancient world.<sup>13</sup> For the sake of expediency, see the accompanying diagrams and discussions of the major events in the lives of the ancient Yahwists. Here, selected crises will be discussed in order to demonstrate the theme of Y<sup>H</sup>W<sup>H</sup>'s covenant-faithfulness—that Y<sup>H</sup>W<sup>H</sup> always keeps his commitments to the covenant with Israel and Judah, even when they do not, revealing himself as savior-bestower of blessing in times of peace and prosperity and judge-punisher in times of crisis.

First, the debut of the monarchy in ancient Israel precipitated numerous crises in their history. Though it provided a necessary means of protection, internecine struggles ensued between the tribal

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<sup>12</sup> Theology is essentially interpretation of some historical phenomenon from the perspective of some beliefs, which is directed toward some concern in the life of its composer, seeking to engender, influence, or inform sociopolitical behavior. It is the concepts, statements, or theories that constitute the verbal expressions of some faith. For instance, Yahwistic theology consists of: 1. Y<sup>H</sup>W<sup>H</sup> as a subject or an actor within history or human affairs; 2. the presence of the extraordinary as an indicator of the presence of Y<sup>H</sup>W<sup>H</sup>; and 3. allusions to historical entities or things in subservience to Y<sup>H</sup>W<sup>H</sup>, that is, the dominance or sovereignty of Y<sup>H</sup>W<sup>H</sup>. Theology presupposes: 1. some specific historical context(s); 2. some particular audience(s) and author(s)/writer(s); 3. some specific concern(s) or problem(s) that warranted its statements; and 4. some criteria or standards that are acceptable to its addressees and its author(s)/writer(s). It is obvious, then, that theology has the following ingredients: 1. some “interpretive” concept(s); 2. endorsement of some specific socio-politico-religious posture(s); and 3. some pattern(s) of action or policy(-ies) relevant to the specific and original historical context(s), and possibly subsequent context(s). In this respect, faith is an ideology for living that is manifested in customs, institutions, practices, symbols, and concepts, statements, or theories (i. e., doctrines or dogmas, which entail principles, norms, criteria, or standards). Theology constitutes the latter expressions of faith, which entails the belief-statements or the doctrines that are fostered for the meaningful and the purposeful existence of its proponents; as such, it is code language for some historical item (e. g., event, experience, institution, phenomenon, policy, practice) that it endorses, encourages, or explains.

<sup>13</sup> See the accompanying chart “The Rosetta Stones.”

culture and the subsequent hierarchy. Particularly, in moments when the kings deviated from established tribal standards, critical views were offered by those who suffered. The earliest reflections of a Yahwistic monarchy are 1 Sam. 9:1-10:16 and 1 Sam. 7:2-8:22; 10:17-27a; 12. These two passages present the options that the early Yahwists considered. The progressive Yahwists, who evidently had the resources and the political clout, portrayed the king as an instrument of YHWH (1 Sam. 9:1-10:16) and contended that a modified or tribally-controlled monarchy is the best option for protection and survival, that is, that YHWH's protection may be gained through backing Saul's regime. In response, the conservative Yahwists held that authentic Yahwism is incompatible with monarchalism, regarding the latter as a viable option for preservation of freedom that can thwart the very freedom that it is intended to preserve (1 Sam. 7:2-8:22; 10:17-27a; 12). Looking back, the Deuteronomistic Historian (i.e., the writer(s) of the historical work that included earlier traditions and consisted of Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings called "DH," and possibly other later writers) soberly documented the ambivalence regarding these two conceptions. On the one hand, DH conceded that a modified form of monarchy was granted and utilized by YHWH in order to sustain Israel; however, maintenance of the standards of Yahwistic tribalism was mandatory for enjoying the benefits of the monarchy (1 Sam. 9:1-10:16). On the other hand, he contended that Yahwistic monarchalism emerged out of necessity, being conceived as a concession by YHWH for Israel's lack of courage or trust, that is, allegiance to the strictures of Yahwistic tribalism (1 Sam. 7:2-8:22; 10:17-27a; 12).<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> The ambivalence that DH documents regarding the earlier conceptions of monarchy (1 Sam. 9:1-10:16 and 1 Sam. 7:2-8:22; 10:17-27a; 12) reaches a marginal resolution with David. DH substantially agrees with the early tradents from David's court. Those from David's court argued that: 1. in spite of David's violation of tribal standards, his success in achieving freedom qualifies and substantiates him and his regime as instruments/signs of YHWH's sovereignty that warrant allegiance or compliance (1 Sam. 16:1, 12f, 18; 17:37, 45-48; 18:12, 14, 28-29; 23:14; 30:6; 2 Sam. 3:1; 5:10; 8:6, 14); and 2. establishment of the Davidic dynasty is the by-product of David's allegiance/faithfulness to Yahwism that endeavored to symbolize YHWH's presence in Jerusalem (2 Sam. 7; notice the different connotations of "house" ~~tyBe~~ vv. 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 11, 13, 16, 18, 19, 25, 26,

[Footnote continued on next page ... ]

During the reign of Solomon, the monarchy developed administratively. Consequently, it was seen as a major cause for defection from YHWH (cf. 1 Kgs. 4-5). The focus of 1 Kgs. 4-5 is transparent, requiring one to read against the rhetoric of the text. The administrative list (4:1-19) and the daily rations (Eng. 4:22-28; Heb. 5:1-8) of Solomon's household betray the large quantities of materials, even the extravagance, that characterized his reign. Furthermore, the favorable tint (4:20; Eng. 4:29-34; Heb. 5:9-14) that is given promotes a positive picture of Solomon's reign and obviously served as propaganda. Here, Solomon's excess is countered by purported endorsement by YHWH, camouflaging the real situation: the incompatibility of the fundamental tenets of Yahwism with monarchalism shows in the tendency to usurp control politically, to contaminate ideologically, and to exploit the Yahwistic constituency. In this respect, the Yahwists claimed that the monarchy constituted the prime cause for deterioration of traditional Yahwism (cf. 1 Kgs. 9-11). Certainly, DH regarded the ideological contamination and the economic exploitation that were precipitated by the monarchy as having adverse affects upon Yahwistic orthodoxy, thereby requiring tribalistic networking for maintenance of his exilic populace.

When the kingdom of David-Solomon splintered, the division was attributed to YHWH (1 Kgs. 12:12-24). 1 Kgs. 12:1-24 clearly represents the Southern Kingdom (Judah)'s explanation of the Northern Kingdom (Israel)'s successful secession, an apology that contains an internal critique: the decrease of the Davidic dynasty's domain during the reign of Rehoboam is justifiably due to his continuation of the exploitative strategies of Solomon, his father, and thereby constitutes the legitimate punishment of the South by

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27, 29). At the latest, during the Babylonian exile, DH corroborates the earlier tradents, arguing that: 1. in spite of being the mechanism that caused the demise of the nation, the monarchy under David stands as a memorial to the freedom that YHWH provides—YHWH's sovereignty is shown in the birth of a Yahwistic nation and the realization of freedom by means of the very organization that impedes such (1 Sam. 16:1, 12f, 18; 17:37, 45-48; 18:12, 14, 28-29; 23:14; 30:6; 2 Sam. 3:1; 5:10; 8:6, 14); and 2. the origin and the longevity of the Davidic regime are by-products of David's loyalty to Yahwism, which still retains legitimacy and significance (2 Sam. 7). The dilemma with the monarchy was that its need was recognized yet it was not fully desired or compatible with Yahwistic standards.

YHWH—the mixed blessing of decrease of the administrative domain coupled with continuation of the administration. For the early Yahwists, acceptance of this view as fact translated into abandonment of any attempts at retaliation against the Northern Yahwists or at reacquisition of lost territory. Later, this rather bleak scenario was viewed positively by DH, who argued that the existence and the operation of the Davidic dynasty were a mixed blessing, entailing punishment in the form of dismantling for exploitation/oppression and mercy in the form of perpetuation of the dynasty and, after the fall of the Southern Kingdom, the lineage and the people of David—the Yehûdîm and Judaism.

In the 8th century B.C.E., the Northern Kingdom (Israel) was destroyed by the Assyrians. Its demise was understood as punishment by YHWH for idolatry (2 Kgs. 17), while the Southern Kingdom (Judah) was spared by YHWH for the sake of his promise to David (2 Sam. 7; 1 Kgs. 11:12, 13, 32, 34, 36; 15:4; 2 Kgs. 8:19; 19:34; 20:6). Explaining what had happened to the respective nations, Southern Yahwists who survived the crisis, at the earliest, contended that this catastrophe was the consequence of ideological contamination and constitutional violation (cf. 2 Kgs. 17) and advocated compliance with Zionistic Yahwism and submission to Assyrian vassalization (i. e., no rebellions). They also contended that the survival and the perpetuation of Judah (in spite of its oppressiveness and in contrast to Israel) indicate its legitimacy, that is, that Judah is (now?) backed by YHWH, who endorsed the Davidic dynasty and regime (cf. 2 Sam. 7; 1 Kgs. 11:12, 13, 32, 34, 36; 15:4; 2 Kgs. 8:19; 19:34; 20:6). Again, during the Babylonian exile, the fall of the Northern Kingdom was interpreted by DH as punishment by YHWH for idolatry (1 Kgs. 13:1-10; 2 Kgs. 17, especially vv. 7-18, 20-23, 34-40; 18:9-12; 23:17-20), while the survival of the Southern Kingdom was understood as the consequence of a promise that YHWH made to David, i. e., as being spared “on account of David” (דַּוִּד ! [m] ): 2 Sam. 7; 1 Kgs. 11:12, 13, 32, 34, 36; 15:4; 2 Kgs. 8:19; 19:34; 20:6). Addressing the destruction of the Davidic monarchy, DH posited that the demise of Israel and Judah is a point of continuum, in which Yahwistic standards were continually compromised, precipitating commensurate

crises, and suggested that compliance with Zionistic Yahwism and submission to Babylonian vassalization are warranted.<sup>15</sup>

The ultimate crisis was the destruction of the Southern Kingdom (Judah) in 586 B.C.E. by Babylon. This event bears multiple interpretations. Jeremiah's prophecy (cf. Jer. 24-25, 27-29, 37-38) constitutes foreign policy advice that answers the question of Judah's course of action regarding Egypt and Babylon. For example, in the vision of the good figs and the bad figs (Jer. 24), YHWH commends the good figs, that is, those who settle in Babylon or exile. The sense is that the best option or strategy for survival is surrender to Babylon, possibly gaining their favors for voluntary compliance, as opposed to aligning with Egypt and opposing Babylon—accept the offer of colonial existence in Babylon! He regards Babylon as the instrument of YHWH (cf. Jer. 24-25, 27-29, 37-38). Similar to Jeremiah, Ezekiel interpreted the exile as punishment by YHWH for unfaithfulness and as fulfillment of the prophetic messages (cf. Ezek. 8:3, 7, 14, 16; 9:3, 9-10; 10:3-5, 18-19; 11:23; 43:1-2; 48:35). By means of an itinerary that depicts YHWH's departure from Judah for idolatry, Ezekiel argued that the demise of the Southern Kingdom is the consequence of ideological contamination and constitutional violation, whereby

<sup>15</sup> DH's bias against the monarchy and toward the South shows in his evaluation of the kings: while all the kings of Israel receive a negative assessment, a few kings of Judah (David, Asa, Jehoshaphat, Joash, Amaziah, Azariah, Jotham, Hezekiah, Josiah) receive a positive assessment and the outstanding ones are those who stage freedom-fighting efforts (Hezekiah, Josiah; cf. David), which DH evidently regards as a most outstanding feature of Yahwism. See DH's evaluation formula, "in the eyes of YHWH"—*hwhy-ynq* [B: 1 Kgs. 11:6; 14:22; 15:5, 11, 26, 34; 16:7, 19, 25, 30; 21:20, 25; 22:43, 53; 2 Kgs. 3:2, 18; 8:18, 27; 12:3 [H]; 13:2, 11; 14:3, 24; 15:3, 9, 18, 24, 28, 34; 16:2; 17:2, 17; 18:3; 21:2, 6, 16, 20; 22:2; 23:32, 34, 37; 24:9, 19. DH appropriates data from sources that are no longer extant. See his "footnote formula"—"and the remainder of (his) words..are they not written in the scrolls of the matters of the days of the kings...?"

*hf[; rva}l kw. hmd w. yrbdI rtyw.  
`hmd w. yrbdI rpseI [; ~ybitK. ~heaAl h] Atmkxw.*

1 Kgs. 11:41; cf. 14:19, 29; 15:7, 31; 16:5, 14, 20, 27; 22:39, 46; 2 Kgs. 1:18; 8:23; 10:34; 12:20; 13:8, 12; 14:15, 18, 28; 15:6, 11, 15, 21, 26, 31, 36; 16:19; 20:20; 21:17, 25; 23:28; 24:5; cf. 2 Chron. 13:22; 20:34; 25:26; 26:22; 27:7; 28:26; 32:32; 33:18; 35:26; 36:8.



Yahwistic standards were compromised, prompting destruction and deportation by the Babylonians and suggesting that acceptance of the circumstances of Babylonian colonization by establishment of Yahwistic colonies constitutes the best option for the survival of the Jews (cf. Ezek. 8:3, 7, 14, 16; 9:3, 9-10; 10:3-5, 18-19; 11:23; 43:1-2; 48:35). Third is the classic statement. DH argued that the impact of cultural diversity that was evidenced in allegiances to the arrangements of the dominant or foreign nations (cf. “other/foreign gods” ~yrkə] ~yhil ə/—1 Kgs. 9:6, 9; 11:4, 10; 14:9; 2 Kgs. 5:17; 17:7, 35, 37, 38; 22:17; and “high places/shrines tAmB ;.. ashterôth” trōv.]; cf. hrve] / tArve ] ~yrve] / tAbCm—1 Kgs. 3:2, 3; 12:31, 32; 13:2, 32, 33; 14:23; 15:13, 14; 16:33; 18:19; 22:44; 2 Kgs. 12:4; 13:6; 14:4; 15:4, 35; 16:4; 17:9, 11, 29, 32; 18:4; 21:3, 7; 23:4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 13, 15, 19, 20) led to violation of Yahwistic standards (cf. “statutes tAQxu ... ordinances ~yj Pymī ... law hrAT ... commandments” tAcmi—1 Kgs. 3:3; 18:18; 2 Kgs. 17:8, 13, 16, 19, 34, 37; 18:36; 21:8; 22:8, 11; 23:9, 24), which resulted in national catastrophes. According to DH, these disasters were especially caused by repeated disobedience of “the word of YHWH” (hwhy-rbD.—1 Kgs. 2:27; 5:19; 6:11; 8:20; 12:15, 24; 13:1, 2, 3, 5, 9, 17, 18, 20, 26, 32; 14:18; 15:29; 16:1, 7, 12, 34; 17:2, 5, 8, 16, 24; 18:1, 31; 19:9; 20:35; 21:17, 23, 28; 22:5, 19, 28, 38; 2 Kgs. 1:17; 3:12; 4:44; 7:1, 16; 9:26, 36; 10:10, 17; 14:25, 27; 15:12; 19:21; 20:4, 16, 19; 23:16; 24:2, 13; also consider the preponderance of messenger formulae—“thus said YHWH” hwhy-rmā; hKə—1 Kgs. 11:31; 12:24; 13:2, 21; 14:7; 17:14; 20:13, 14, 28, 42; 21:19; 22:11; 2 Kgs. 1:4, 6, 16; 2:21; 3:16, 17; 4:43; 7:1; 9:3, 6, 12; 19:6, 20, 32; 20:1, 5; 21:12; 22:15, 16, 18).

### Conclusion

Now, this sampling of events in ancient Israel and Judah shows their assessments of numerous crises by means of connecting them with YHWH. In all cases, they indict themselves for idolatry or unfaithfulness in contradistinction to YHWH, whom they believed maintained covenant-faithfulness as reflected in his execution of punishment of his unfaithful covenant-partners. The social ramifications of this are crucial. The writers of the Hebrew Bible were repentant: in light of catastrophes that might have prompted

assimilation to foreign cultures and abandonment of Yahwism and in spite of circumstances beyond their control, they resolved to hold to their standards and thereby articulate survival strategies consonant with their early beliefs. They both critiqued themselves and confronted their circumstances. As a minority people throughout their history, they survived deposition and domination—the very lessening of their freedom or self-determination—by means of embracing the idea of the universalism of YHWH’s sovereignty.

The belief in the universalism of YHWH’s sovereignty emerged with the classical prophets (e. g., Amos and Hosea). This view countered the claims of foreign cults that YHWH was being defeated, when Israel and Judah suffered political or national demise. Instead, the Yahwists argued that the sovereignty of YHWH includes control of foreign nations and powers as his instruments of punishment of Israel and Judah, when they violated the covenant stipulations. In other words, they perceived the national catastrophes to Israel and Judah as instances of YHWH’s employment of foreign nations to conquer and dominate Israel and Judah, in order to prompt their meticulous/strict adherence to the standards of Yahwism. Consequentially, this entailed domestic policy (i. e., usurpation of prevalent Yahwistic administrations) or foreign policy (i. e., acceptance of the political arrangements under foreign jurisdiction including surrender). These catastrophes constituted crises, that is, situations that were incomprehensible, wherein their operative data were no longer functional. Existentially and somewhat psychologically, the prophetic interpretations served the purpose of preservation of sanity and of promotion of ideological adherence in light of undergoing crises (cf. Amos 2:6-7; 3:10, 15; 4:1; 5:7-13; 6:4-6; 7:10-17; 8:4-6; Hosea 2:8, 13, 17; 4:1-2, 8; 6:10; 9:1, 9).

The consequence of this view is the somewhat ambivalent view. The ancient Yahwists unequivocally upheld the innocence of YHWH! This is shown by the claims of the classical prophets, who employed court or legal language<sup>16</sup> in order to argue that the crises that occurred

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<sup>16</sup> See. Claus Westermann, *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech* (trans. Hugh Clayton White; Philadelphia: The Westminster, 1967); Michael De Roche, “Yahweh’s *rib* Against Israel: A Reassessment of the So-Called “Prophetic [Footnote continued on next page ... ]

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to them were the just results of their misbehavior and that Y<sub>HWH</sub> acted fairly in orchestrating the catastrophes that impacted them. Moreover, they claimed that the constancy of the covenant is solely due to Y<sub>HWH</sub>! For them, the uncontrollable, undeserved, unearned, and unexplainable goodness of life itself is absolutely attributed to their god, who mercifully tolerates them in the midst of and in spite of their (i. e., Israel and Judah's—human) covenant-unfaithfulness. Here, the ultimacy of Y<sub>HWH</sub>'s (i. e., divine) covenant-faithfulness<sup>17</sup> stands in stark contrast to that of his human partners. The underlying sentiment of the ancient Yahwists is that they—all humans—live by grace!



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Lawsuit” in the Preexilic Prophets,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 102 (1983): 563-574.

<sup>17</sup> See references to “covenant-faithfulness” **dsx**; Genesis 19:19; 20:13; 21:23; 24:12,14,27,49; 32:10; 39:21; 40:14; 47:29; Exodus 15:13; 20:6; 34:6,7; Leviticus 20:17; Numbers 14:18,19; Deuteronomy 5:10; 7:9,12; Joshua 2:12,14; Judges 1:24; 8:35; Ruth 1:8; 2:20; 3:10; 1 Samuel 15:6; 20:8,14,15; 2 Samuel 2:5,6; 3:8; 7:15; 9:1,3,7; 10:2; 15:20; 16:17; 22:51; 1 Kings 2:7; 3:6; 8:23; 20:31; 1 Chronicles 16:34,41; 17:13; 19:2; 2 Chronicles 1:8; 5:13; 6:14,42; 7:3,6; 20:21; 24:22; 32:32; 35:26; Ezra 3:11; 7:28; 9:9; Nehemiah 1:5; 9:17,32; 13:14,22; Esther 2:9,17; Job 6:14; 10:12; 37:13; Psalms 5:7; 6:4; 13:5; 17:7; 18:50; 21:7; 23:6; 25:6,7,10; 26:3; 31:7,16,21; 32:10; 33:5,18,22; 36:5,7,10; 40:10,11; 42:8; 44:26; 48:9; 51:1; 52:1,8; 57:3,10; 59:10,16,17; 61:7; 62:12; 63:3; 66:20; 69:13,16; 77:8; 85:7,10; 86:5,13,15; 88:11; 89:1,2,14,24,28,33,49; 90:14; 92:2; 94:18; 98:3; 100:5; 101:1; 103:4,8,11,17; 106:1,7,45; 107:1,8,15,21,31,43; 108:4; 109:12,16,21,26; 115:1; 117:2; 118:1,2,3,4,29; 119:41,64,76,88,124,149,159; 130:7; 136:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24,25, 26; 138:2, 8; 141:5; 143:8, 12; 144:2; 145:8; 147:11; Proverbs 3:3; 11:17; 14:22,34; 16:6; 19:22; 20:6,28; 21:21; 31:26; Isaiah 16:5; 40:6; 54:8,10; 55:3; 57:1; 63:7; Jeremiah 2:2; 9:24; 16:5; 31:3; 32:18; 33:11; Lamentations 3:22,32; Daniel 1:9; 9:4; Hosea 2:19; 4:1; 6:4,6; 10:12; 12:6; Joel 2:13; Jonah 2:8; 4:2; Micah 6:8; 7:18,20; Zechariah 7:9.