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## THE GOD OF THE PATRIARCHS AND THE UGARITIC TEXTS: A SHARED RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL IDENTITY

JED ROBINSON

In Exod 6:2–3, God spoke to Moses, telling him that “I am Yahweh. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as El Shaddai (אֱלֹהִים), but by my name Yahweh (יְהוָה) I did not make myself known to them.” This passage, along with other passages in the Hebrew Bible, has been used to show that the Canaanite god El may lie behind the the mid-second-millennium B.C.E. cult of ancient Israel. This theory has received much attention since the discovery and translation of the texts found at Ugarit (modern day Ras Shamra) in northern Syria. In the Ugaritic texts, the god *’il* or El is clearly portrayed as the supreme god of the Bronze Age Canaanite pantheon and shares many similarities to Israel’s patriarchal deity. It was during this same period that Canaanite culture has been thought to flourish in Syria-Palestine. This paper will explore some of the archaeological evidence of the two cultures but will rely mostly on the historical textual evidence and research of modern scholars to show a shared religious tradition between the Bronze Age ancestors of Israel and the native inhabitants of the land of Canaan.

Canaanite religion is often mentioned as an abominable cult in the Hebrew Bible—an enemy to the God of Israel.<sup>1</sup> Because of this, much of early scholarly research was polemic in nature and conducted with a preconceived notion of the religion of Israel’s neighbors as being “inferior, puerile, barbarous, retarded or shocking.”<sup>2</sup> In 1929, a vast library of texts was discovered in the northern Levantine city of Ugarit which greatly enhanced our understanding of the Canaanite culture and cult. Many liturgical manuscripts from this library bring to light various aspects of the late Bronze Age Ugaritic religion, such as the pantheon of gods and cultic practices like ritual sacrifice. The textual evidence discovered at ancient Ugarit has raised many questions about Bronze Age Israel’s culture, ethnicity, and religious tradition.

In this paper I will try to identify evidence of a shared religious tradition between Israel and the Ugaritic peoples by exploring: (1) the definition of the word *Canaanite* and the problems associated with it, (2) the word *’il*, and

1. As an example, see the story of the prophet Elijah and the priests of Ba’al in 1 Kings 16–18.

2. Delbert R. Hillers, “Analyzing the Abominable: Our Understanding of Canaanite Religion,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 75, no. 3 (1985): 254.

the god El, in West Semitic languages/cults, (3) the Bronze Age cult of the Patriarchs and the god El in ancient Israel, and finally, (4) the relationship of Iron Age Israel's god Yahweh and El.

### Defining *Canaanite*

Is it possible that the Bronze Age God of Israel was a Canaanite deity? That depends on what definition of Canaanite is used. The biblical texts usually refer to the Canaanites as those who inhabited the land of Canaan or the land west of the Jordan River. The term *Canaanite* is very vague and seems to connote both a large group of peoples which inhabited the land of Canaan (Gen 12:6; Josh 3:10) or one of many smaller groups or tribes which inhabited the land, included with such groups as the Amorites, Perrizites, Hivites, Jebusites, Moabites, and so on (see Gen 15:19–21; Exod 3:8; Josh 24:11). It is still not clear whether the term *Canaanite* describes an actual people or is a method of describing an area or region that was inhabited by multiple peoples. Revisionist scholars have even gone as far as to claim that Canaanites are a construct invented by the biblical writers.<sup>3</sup>

Mark Smith prefers to abandon the term *Canaanite* in favor of the term *West Semitic*, which would include the Canaanite, Amorite, and Ugaritic cultures.<sup>4</sup> Israel would fit under this umbrella, sharing similar parameters in “language, social structure, religious terminology, and religious practice (prayer, sacrifice, and religious experience and even conceptualizations of deity).”<sup>5</sup> Although it is clear that one culture does not equal another, the evidence points to the sharing of similar tradition among all these separate groups, as will be discussed later. William Dever suggests that Canaanite geographically refers to the southern Levant but ethnically or culturally refers to the “closely related, indigenous West Semitic peoples living in these regions.”<sup>6</sup> Dever further states that these peoples would be called in our period “Canaanites and Amorites; Israelites; Phoenicians; Aramaens; and various peoples of Transjordan such as Ammonites, Moabites, and Edomites.”<sup>7</sup>

Scholars continue to use the term *Canaanite* when describing the inhabitants of second-century B.C.E. Palestine. There are many extrabiblical sources referring to Canaan, dating to as early as 1500 B.C.E. For example, the Egyptian Amarna Letters of the second century B.C.E. refer to the “kings of Canaan”<sup>8</sup> and a “man of Canaan.”<sup>9</sup> An Akkadian text found at Ugarit also refers to “the sons of Ugarit,” and the “sons of Canaan,”<sup>10</sup> making a distinct

3. Niels Peter Lemche, *The Canaanites and Their Land: The Tradition of the Canaanites* (Sheffield, U.K.: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 152.

4. Mark S. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel's Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Text* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 16.

5. Smith, *Origins of Biblical Monotheism*, 17.

6. William G. Dever, *Did God Have a Wife? Archaeology and Folk Religion in Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2005), 253.

7. Dever, *Religion in Ancient Israel*, 253.

8. EA 30.

9. Anson F. Rainey, “Who Is a Canaanite? A Review of the Textual Evidence,” *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 304 (1996): 3.

10. Quoted in Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism*, 15; see also M. Dietrich, O. Loretz and J. Sanmartin, *The Cuneiform Alphabetic Texts from Ugarit, Ras Ibn Hani and Other*

differentiation. An Iron Age Egyptian stele, *The Merneptah Stele*, dating to 1208 B.C.E., also shows a clear differentiation between the land of Canaan and the people of Israel:

Plundered is the Canaan with every evil;  
 Carried off is Ashkelon; seized upon is Gezer;  
 Yanoam is made as that which does not exist;  
 Israel is laid waste, his seed is not;  
 Hurru is become a widow for Egypt!<sup>11</sup>

“Canaan” is written in a determinative denoting land, while Israel is written in a determinative denoting people.

Clearly the people of Israel were seen as distinct by 1200 B.C.E., but distinct in what manner? If Canaan described a geographic area and Israel described an ethnic group in that same area, then it is plausible that foreigners could view Israel as Canaanite in nature, as well as the other distinct ethnic groups living in the land of Canaan—even though they did not consider themselves Canaanite. Lester L. Grabbe argues that “our term ‘Canaanite’ as a contrast to ‘Israelite’ is nonsense. Israelites were as much Canaanite as anyone else.”<sup>12</sup>

Whatever the term used to describe the West Semitic inhabitants of Canaan, our understanding of their culture has been greatly increased since the discovery and translation of the texts found at Ugarit. These texts are largely religious or mythological in nature and paint a picture of the late Levantine Bronze Age world from which Israel evolved. The Bible spends a considerable amount of time pointing out the differences between Canaanite and Israelite religious tradition; however, considering the Ugaritic texts, many shared traditions start to emerge. Concerning these similarities, Mark Smith pointed out: “These specific points of contact between Ugaritic and Israelite religion need not be understood as pointing to a single or ‘same’ religion, but they do point to a larger religious tradition shared broadly by West Semitic peoples, including the Israelites.”<sup>13</sup> To find examples of this shared religious tradition, I will examine the head god of the Canaanite pantheon found in the Ugaritic texts compared to the descriptions of the Bronze Age God of Israel found in the Old Testament.

### **The Word *‘il* and the God El in West Semitic Language and Cult**

The name of the head Canaanite god is *‘il* or El, which is the same word for “god” in many of the West Semitic traditions and other ancient Near Eastern cultures, including Israel. While El can also be used as an appellative of deity in the Ugaritic texts, it is much more commonplace as a proper name. Frank Moore Cross shows evidence of El being used in the “earliest old Akkadian sources without the case ending, unambiguously the divine

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*Places* (Munster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1995).

11. James B. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950), 378.

12. Lester L. Grabbe, *Ancient Israel: What Do We Know and How Do We Know It?* (New York: T & T Clark, 2007), 51.

13. Smith, *Origins of Biblical Monotheism*, 17.

name and not an appellative.”<sup>14</sup> Cross also points out that Amorites used the term *‘il* to denote “god” and that *‘il* is also found as a divine proper name in Old South Arabic.<sup>15</sup> Cross believes that because of the fact that *‘il* appears as a proper name in the earliest strata of languages belonging to East Semitic, Northwest Semitic, and South Semitic, we may conclude that this denotation of *‘il* belongs to Proto-Semitic.<sup>16</sup> The question of whether El was the proper name of a god is laid to rest by the texts found at Ugarit where El is repeatedly portrayed as the head of the pantheon.<sup>17</sup>

The word *‘il* is used over five hundred times in the texts from Ugarit.<sup>18</sup> The most obvious usage of the word is the name of the divine patriarchal god, who was the head of the pantheon.<sup>19</sup> El has a role as the father (*‘ab*) of the pantheon and of humankind.<sup>20</sup> He is seated before the divine council (El’s family) as its head.<sup>21</sup> He is portrayed as being elderly and bearded and is often called the “ageless one” or “father of years.”<sup>22</sup> He acts as a help to both the lesser gods<sup>23</sup> and mankind.<sup>24</sup> Interestingly, El is also seen as the creator in a Hurrian-Hittite text discovered in Anatolia.<sup>25</sup> El sits on the throne with his consort and wife Athirat, or biblical Asherah, the “Progenitress of the Gods.”<sup>26</sup> El’s attributes as a kind father are expressed in the phrase “Kind El, the Compassionate.” Another important epithet associated with El is that of “Bull,” found in almost all mythological or epic texts.<sup>27</sup>

The abode of El is described in the Ba’al myths as being “at the source of the rivers, amid the channels of the two oceans.”<sup>28</sup> El is seen as dwelling on a remote mountain in the north, with which Cross sees direct Biblical correlation in Isaiah 14:13, where the mount of the council of El is referenced to be in the distant north.<sup>29</sup> El is also said to dwell in a tent, pavilion, or tabernacle similar to the biblical *‘ohel mo’ed*.<sup>30</sup> This could correlate with the tent traditions of the

14. Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays In the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1973), 13.

15. Cross, *Canaanite Myth*, 14.

16. Cross, *Canaanite Myth*, 14.

17. See G. Del Olmo Lete, *Canaanite Religion According to the Liturgical Texts of Ugarit* (Bethesda, Md.: Eisenbrauns, 2004); Dennis Pardee, *Ritual and Cult at Ugarit* (ed. Simon B. Parker; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002); or G.R. Driver, *Canaanite Myths and Legends* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1956) for complete Canaanite deity lists from the texts of Ugarit.

18. Smith, *Origins of Biblical Monotheism*, 135.

19. James B. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, 131. See e.IIAB (5) where Ba’al calls El “his Father” and “the King” (his begetter).

20. Driver, *Canaanite Myths*, 29. Keret has a vision of El “the father of mankind.”

21. Cross, *Canaanite Myth*, 39–43.

22. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism*, 136.

23. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, 129–42, as Ba’al and Asherah beg El for a temple to be built for Ba’al.

24. Story of Keret.

25. KAI 26 A III: 18, quoted in Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism*, 137.

26. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, 132.

27. A similar epithet is found in the Hebrew Bible (see below).

28. Driver, *Canaanite Myths*, 77 III\*c.4.

29. Cross also sees references to the Garden of Eden here (Cross, *Canaanite Myth*, 38).

30. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, 133. See Cross, *Canaanite Myth*, 36–39; Smith, *Origins of Biblical Monotheism*, 136; and Conrad E. L’Heureux, *Rank Among The*

biblical Shiloh (Ps 78:60; Josh 18:1; 1 Sam 2:22) or even the seminomadic patrimonial traditions of the ancient Hebrews.

### The Cult of the Patriarchs and the God El in Ancient Israel

The connection between the Canaanite god El and the El of Israel largely centers on the religion of the great patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Mark Smith points out that Israel is called “Isra-el” instead of “Isra-yahwe,” or, perhaps better, “Isra-yah,” which would be “in accordance with other proper names containing the divine name.”<sup>31</sup> This suggests that the name of the early god may have been El, not the Mosaic god Yahweh. We know from the biblical record that Abraham started his epic in Ur, thought to be in Mesopotamia, and there moved to Harran. The account continues with Abraham moving through Damascus and southward to Hebron. We are told that God gave Abraham the land of Canaan as an inheritance. Abraham also spent much time traveling south to the Negev and into Egypt.<sup>32</sup> Though the story of the Patriarchs has very little extrabiblical archaeological or historical proof, the biblical record and tradition holds that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob lived in Canaan and were familiar with the people, customs, language, and religion of the people who lived there.

Evidence that the Bronze Age religion of Israel was different from the Iron Age religion exists in some distinct features found in Gen 12–50. For instance, God spoke to diverse people (not just those of the covenant) in an open and inclusive manner. These people include pharaoh of Egypt,<sup>33</sup> Abimelech of Canaan,<sup>34</sup> and Abraham.<sup>35</sup> Also, in these passages there is an absence of antagonism between the native Canaanite population and the Patriarchs, both religiously and socially. Furthermore, the important role the head of house played in religion (patrimonial society)<sup>36</sup> and the name Elohim is more fundamental than Yahweh, where the reverse is true outside of Gen 12–50.<sup>37</sup> These distinct features and others are not conclusive, but do point to an early memory of at least familiarity with, if not shared, traditions of language, custom, and religion.

Though we are not sure when Abraham would have first entered Canaan, due to confusions and lack of historical evidence, scholars usually place it much later than the Bible’s in-text dating. William Dever argues that the Hebrew Bible places Abraham at around 2100 B.C.E. and the Exodus at around 1450 B.C.E. (see Gen 47:9; Exod 12:40; I Kgs 11:42). However, due to

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*Canaanite Gods El, Ba'al, and the Repha'im* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Edward Brothers, 1979), 26–29, for more information on the abode of El.

31. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism*, 143.

32. See Gen 11–28. For further reading see W. F. Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan* (New York: Doubleday, 1968), 65–73.

33. Gen 12:14–20.

34. Gen 20:1–18.

35. Gen 17:1–15.

36. For detailed information on the West Semitic patrimonial household, see J. David Schloen, *The House of the Father as Fact and Symbol: Patrimonialism in Ugarit and the Ancient Near East* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2001).

37. For more on this, see Richard S. Hess, *Israelite Religions: An Archaeological and Biblical Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 149–51.

archeological evidence such as the Marneptah stele, Dever dates Israel's arrival in Canaan ca. 1200 B.C.E. and the Patriarchal age somewhere in the "early-mid 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium B.C.E."<sup>38</sup> If these dates are correct, then the age of the patriarchs would be near the end of a millennium of West Semitic/Amorite cultural tradition in Syro-Palestine. Ugarit was the heir of this tradition, as evidenced by the Ugaritic texts.

In the Old Testament narrative of the Patriarchs, God is given many epithets which start with El. Also, many descriptions of ancient Israel's God are similar to those of Ugarit El. For example, in the Bible, God or "El Shaddai" is depicted as being a provider of progeny in the Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob stories.<sup>39</sup> In Gen 49:25 Jacob describes El Shaddai as the provider of the blessings of the "breast and womb" (תַּחַת בְּרֵכַת שְׂדַיִם וְרֵחִים), thus establishing a possible connection to blessings of progeny. In Gen 28:14 the blessings of eternal progeny are passed on to Jacob at Bethel (for Bethel's significance, see below). Later, Hannah goes to the temple at Shiloh to pray for blessings of progeny from Yahweh (1 Sam 2). In the Ugaritic Texts, El is also depicted as a provider of progeny. In the Keret epic, King Keret asks the Father God El for a blessing of progeny, saying, "Grant that I may get sons, grant that I may multiply kin.' And the bull El his father answered (with) kind words while Keret wept, while the gracious one, servitor of El, shed tears."<sup>40</sup> El then tells Keret to go and offer sacrifices (including a sacrificial lamb) to be provided with a way to obtain a wife to bear him children.

Specific epithets with connections to the Ugaritic texts are numerous in the Bible. El Shaddai is used many times (especially in Gen and Job). God tells Moses he was called El Shaddai by Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in Exod 6:2–3. El Shaddai is traditionally rendered "God Almighty" in most translations of the Hebrew Bible, but "Shaddai" (שְׂדַי) in biblical Hebrew could also be translated as "mountain" or "mountains" in the dual form.<sup>41</sup> Dever and Cross both argue that "El Shaddai" would really mean "El, the One of the Mountains."<sup>42</sup> This corresponds very closely to the Ugaritic El, who also dwelled on the mountain (see above), as well as to many other Near Eastern deities who did the same. Cross mentions the Amorite Deity Amurru and his epithets, "he who dwells on the pure mountain," "lord of the mountain," and he who "inhabits the shining mountain."<sup>43</sup> The significance of the mountain comes into play later in Israel's history with Yahweh and the stories associated with Sinai and other holy mountain sites.<sup>44</sup>

In Gen 49:25, El Shaddai is also mentioned along with other El epithets including "Bull of Jacob." Ugaritic El was also known as the bull (as shown above in the Keret text, as well as in many other texts). El Shaddai is also known as the name of the god that appeared to Jacob at Bethel (Gen 43:14;

38. Dever, *Religion in Ancient Israel*, 253.

39. See Gen 15:1–2; 21:1–2; 24:60; 28:14.

40. Driver, *Canaanite Myths*, 29 l.ii.4.

41. See BDB, 961; see also Dever, *Religion in Ancient Israel*, 257–258; Smith, *The Early History of God*, 8; and Cross, *Canaanite Myth*, 54–56.

42. Dever, *Religion in Ancient Israel*, 257; Cross, *Canaanite Myth*, 55–56.

43. Cross, *Canaanite Myth*, 57.

44. For example, when Moses goes to Horeb and sees the "burning bush" in Exodus 3 as well when Moses goes up Sinai to receive the law in Exodus 19.



48:3). Bethel is usually translated “house/temple of God” but could also be rendered “house/temple of El.” In Gen 31:13, God appears to Jacob at Paddan Aram and identifies himself as “El-Bethel” (בֵּית־אֵל הָאֵל), which could be translated as “The God of the House of El.”<sup>45</sup>

Other El epithets appear in the Biblical texts. Dever, Smith, and Cross all point out that El Elyon (see below) of Gen 14:18–24 and Deut 32:8–9, El Olam of Gen 21:33, El Elohay-Israel of Gen 33:20, and finally El Roi of Gen 16:13 all have connections to the ancestral god of Israel, El.<sup>46</sup> Biblical personal names also point to Israel’s connection with El. *Isra-el*, *El-ijah*, *El-isha*, and *Samu-el* are all examples. Shaddai names also appear in the bible, such as *Zuri-shaddai* in Num 1:5–6 and *Ammi-shaddai* in Num 1:12. Later in the Bible, after the exodus from Egypt, many names are combined with the divine name Yahweh, such as Hezekiah or Joshua. As substantiated in Exod 6:3, this fact supports the idea that prior to the exodus the God of Israel was probably known as El or one of his epithets. Cross also agrees that all of these El epithets used in the Bible are variant cult forms of El and could be attributed to the Canaanite El.<sup>47</sup> We also know from Exod 6:3 that if they can be attributed to such epithets as El Shaddai, then they were probably attributed to Yahweh as well in Israel’s later religious tradition.

### The Relationship of Yahweh and El in Iron Age Israel

The evidence that points to a shared West Semitic traditional or ancestral deity does not end with Moses and the emergence of the deity titled Yahweh. The scripture previously mentioned, Exod 6:3, equates the ancestral god of Abraham with Jehovah by essentially saying he was called El Shaddai by the ancients and now will be called Jehovah (Yahweh). This could mean that Yahweh is only another epithet of El. This also helps explain why there are no or very little polemics in the Hebrew Bible towards El, while the Canaanite god Ba’al is seen in a very polemic light. Yahweh is also portrayed very similarly in the Bible to the descriptions of El in the Ugaritic texts. Yahweh is seen as an ageless or elderly god in many scriptures (Ps 102:28; Job 36:26; Isa 40:28; Tob 13:6) including Dan 7:9–14; 22, in which he is seated amidst the heavenly hosts, similar to Ugaritic El’s divine council.<sup>48</sup> Yahweh also appears in vision and dream to his patrons, corresponding to El Shaddai and the Ugaritic El.<sup>49</sup>

An extrabiblical source is suggested by Smith as evidence of Yahweh sharing the characteristic of a long beard with El. An “enthroned bearded god appears on a Persian period coin marked *yhd*, ‘Yehud’” possibly meaning Yahweh.<sup>50</sup> Yahweh and El are also both portrayed as fathers both to other divine beings and to mankind (Deut 32:6; Isa 63:16; Exod 4:22; see above for El descriptions). Both El and Yahweh are associated with dwelling in

45. Dever, *Religion in Ancient Israel*, 259.

46. Dever, *Religion in Ancient Israel*, 257–64; Cross, *Canaanite Myth*, 49–60; Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism*, 48–49, 156–57.

47. Cross, *Canaanite Myth*, 49.

48. See also 1 Kgs 22:19; Isa 6:1–8; Jer 23:18.

49. See 1 Sam 3:4; Gen 28; and the Keret Epic of Ugarit cited above.

50. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism*, 142.



a tent,<sup>51</sup> as well as being associated with mountains.<sup>52</sup> Also, when Moses brought down the law etched in the tablets by the hand of Yahweh, he found Israel worshipping a golden bull calf (Exod 32:4). It has been suggested that this represented the Ugaritic El epithet “Bull,” but it could also be applied to Canaanite Ba’al.<sup>53</sup>

Frank Moore Cross has put forth evidence showing that the translation of Exod 3:14 as Yahweh could actually be alternatively translated as an epithet of the god El. Cross believes that the traditional rendering of “Lord of Hosts” could be translated as “El who creates the (heavenly) armies.”<sup>54</sup> Cross goes on to compare this with Ugaritic epithets of El as a “Father of the Gods” and “creator of creatures.”<sup>55</sup> Cross believes Israel saw Yahweh as simply a new epithet of ancient El; however, there is evidence of that Israel saw Yahweh and El as two separate beings.

In the Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS) translation of Deut 32:8–9 we find evidence of Yahweh being a son of El, “When the Most High (Elyon) allotted peoples for inheritance, When He divided up humanity, He fixed the boundaries for peoples, According to the number of the divine sons: For Yahweh’s portion is his people, Jacob His own inheritance.”<sup>56</sup> Scholars such as Mark Smith use this text to show the original separation of El and Yahweh in Israel. According to Smith, this text found in the DSS as well as the Septuagint portrays Yahweh as one of El’s sons, but later in pure monotheistic Israel the text was changed from “sons of El” to “sons of Israel.”<sup>57</sup> The latter remains in most modern translation of the Masoretic Texts (a much later source of the Hebrew Bible). The evidence is not clear as to whether Yahweh was a title of ancient El or if Yahweh replaced ancient El after the exodus, but the evidence seems to support that El and Yahweh are connected.

## Conclusion

Was the pre-Iron Age God of Israel a Canaanite deity or vice versa? This question can be answered by asking another question. Were the ancestors of the people of Israel considered Canaanite in Bronze Age Palestine? The answers: both yes and no. The archaeological evidence suggests that Ugarit and Canaan were seen as two separate peoples. It is possible that the ancestors of Israel would have been seen as a separate people as well. It is also possible that they were not seen as a separate people because of the many similarities in culture, language, and even religion. From the outside looking in, a foreigner may well have labeled all the inhabitants of the land of Canaan as Canaanites, including the ancestors of Israel.

These West Semitic peoples did share a religious tradition in the descriptions and epithets of their main god. The Ugaritic texts show that a god named El was worshipped in the land of Canaan. This ancient tradition was

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51. See Psalm 78:66; Joshua 18:1 for the tent tradition of Shiloh. Also, the tabernacle or tent of the Exodus was seen as the abode of Yahweh.

52. “El Shaddai” (see above), the home of Ugaritic El (see above), and Sinai or Horeb.

53. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism*, 32.

54. Cross, *Canaanite Myth*, 68–70.

55. Cross, *Canaanite Myth*, 70.

56. 4QDeut.

57. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism*, 143.

preserved in the Hebrew Bible as many of the descriptions and even epithets of Ugaritic El applied to the Israelite god as well. In the Iron Age, Israel kept these historical memories of El. They were either applied to the old god El's new epithet, Yahweh, or the new god Yahweh inherited many of the historical traditions associated with ancestral El.

A surface reading of the Hebrew Bible would lead one to conclude that Canaanite peoples and Israel had distinct religious traditions and cultures. A more in-depth examination, however, shows evidence of shared and common elements. Ancient extrabiblical texts, such as those found at Ras Shamra, have shed great light on some of these common elements. Though Bronze Age Israel and other West Semitic peoples may not have had the exact same cult, it is plausible that these two groups at this time shared many traditions. What differences existed may have grown greater over time, but echoes of a shared tradition are alive in the Iron Age worship of Yahweh. Was the pre-Iron Age God of Israel a Canaanite deity, or was the pre-Iron Age God of the Canaanites a Hebrew deity? These questions cannot be answered right now. However, evidence suggests that the divide between the two may not be as broad as once believed.