

IF THERE IS ONLY ONE GOD, WHY ARE THERE SO MANY MONOTHEISMS?  
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All believers in one God derive their spiritual existence from the same deity, however that deity is called. Monotheism began as a *unifying* system. And yet from the earliest annals of religious history, we observe monotheists arguing, fighting and warring with one another over which understanding of God and the divine will is *really* true. Such observation almost requires us to ask: Is there something about the nature of monotheism that encourages conflict?

## ORIGINS

If we want to know about monotheism, we need to begin at the beginning, and the story begins with the *emergence* of monotheism. It seems to have taken monotheism quite a while to emerge as a belief system in the long intellectual history of humanity. There is still some controversy among scholars over exactly when, where and how monotheism emerged. I intend to explore the change in thinking about divinity, from a multiplicity of Gods to one God, a change that current Biblical scholarship places sometime around the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE or later. While my approach certainly includes theological issues, I want to be clear that I am not interested here in the theological problematic of "truth" in relation to God. I am working now as a historian, not a theologian, so in theory, I could arrive at the same conclusion whether I am a Jew, a Christian, a Muslim or none of the above.

There is wide agreement among biblical scholars and historians of religion that the Israelites did not suddenly come upon the notion of the One God. It was, rather, a process.

And in fact, Israel may not have been the only community working on the issue of monotheism. There is that pesky Egyptian pharaoh, Akhenaton whose reign seems to reflect, at the very least, a kind of henotheism in which only one God is worshipped while not denying the existence of other Gods. Some consider him to have been a true monotheist.[\[1\]](#) But his theology did not catch on. It died with him.

A similar relation to the Gods and the cosmos is reflected in ancient Israel during what appears to be a slow movement toward belief in- and worship of- only one great God. Virtually throughout, the Hebrew Bible conveys the view that the God of Israel exists alongside other Gods. Even psalms associated with the Temple cult assume the existence of deities in addition to the Israelite God, YHVH.  
(מי כמוך באלים...)[\[2\]](#)

And while current scholarship is now chronicling a history of emerging Israelite monotheism, it is also uncovering expressions of monotheism that, like the religion of Akhenaton, did not survive the vicissitudes of history. Much later than the Egyptian experiment, during the period of emerging Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism of Late Antiquity, some Greco-Romans held religious beliefs that, although generally labeled negatively as pagan or superstition by Christians, were actually competing Hellenistic expressions of monotheism that were arising at the same time.[\[3\]](#) And although less well known, the Qur'an refers to pre-Islamic *hanifs*, those who turn their faces away from idolatry toward the One God.[\[4\]](#)

In fact, the Bible contains a long record of Israelite polytheism. In one, Joshua directs a prayer to the common west Semitic deities, *shemesh* and *yareach* in an old poetic fragment: "Stand still, O Sun (*shemesh*) at Giv'on, O Moon (*yareach*), in the Valley of Ayalon!" (Josh.10:12), though the editor reconstructs the text to be an appeal to YHVH ("Joshua addressed the Lord and said in the presence of the Israelites..."). There are many more cases of monotheistically reworked polytheistic traditions in the HB that have been amply documented by biblical scholars.[\[5\]](#)

These are not cases of "straying after foreign Gods," an idiom found in Deut. 11:16. What is denounced in Israel is actually faithful commitment to indigenous pre-monotheistic Israelite religious practices.[\[6\]](#) A partial menu of what was worshipped by some ancient Israelites can be seen in 2 Kings 23:4-15. This is the story of King Josiah's reforms, and it lists all the old practices that Josiah put an end to. He destroyed the objects made for Ba'al and Asherah and the "Host of heaven," he suppressed the idolatrous priests who made offerings to Ba'al and the sun and moon and constellations throughout Judah, tore down the cubicles of the male religious prostitutes within the Temple itself, destroyed many altars and shrines, including the Tofeth in *Gey Ben-Hinnom* where people burned their sons or daughters to Molekh. He got rid of the horses dedicated to the sun and burned the chariots of the sun, defiled shrines built for the Goddess Ashtoret and the God Chemosh on the Mount of the Destroyer, and he shattered the sacred pillars and posts.

Most of these were not foreign deities, the Gods of the hated "Canaanites," but were actually Gods *traditionally* worshipped by Israel. N. P. Lemche has shown that "Canaan" refers more to a geographical area than a people, a land in which lived a variety of peoples that we know from biblical texts as Hittites, Girgashites, Emorites, Perizites, Hivites, etc., often lumped together in the Hebrew Bible (and Egyptian and Mesopotamian texts) as Canaanites.[\[7\]](#) The Israelites lived there too.

Israel, it now appears, emerged out of Canaan. To put it bluntly, Israelites *were* Canaanites, but they were one group of Canaanites that was experimenting with or were "growing" an innovative religious idea that would eventually result in monotheism. The Bible itself witnesses the bumpy road to monotheism. Why the arduous process, and why the near-universal change from polytheisms to monotheisms?

#### FROM POLYTHEISMS TO MONOTHEISMS

Scholars have been concentrating on a period called the "Axial Age," from approximately 800-200 BCE, that marks a series of conceptual revolutions in human thinking from Greece to China.[\[8\]](#) A crisis seems to have been brewing during this period with the growing awareness that the old traditions seemed increasingly irrelevant. To the point, the old polytheistic systems seemed no longer to speak to the intellectual and spiritual needs of the time. At this time, the Greeks began rejecting the Gods and the cosmology of Homer and Hesiod for Plato's portrayal of the ideal philosopher. In the Near East, however, it was felt that the old religious traditions needed not to be rejected – only reinterpreted.

If one were to travel across national borders in the ancient Near East, say from Persia to Babylonia and on to Harran, Phoenicia, Philistia or Egypt, one would pass from place to place but find virtually the same Gods. They might have different names but they occupied the same place on what one might call "the food chain" of divinity.

When the great Assyrian empire united all the many smaller kingdoms with their super-powerful national God, it began to evoke a kind of unified God theory. The structural changes in human governance under the empire also stimulated a reevaluation of the structures of the powers that run the cosmos. While the choice of some Greek intellectuals was to reject the old system entirely for a new one that we call philosophy, intellectuals further east tended to redefine the role of the divine in the old tradition.

Rather than the old series of parallel Gods with different names – something like the parallel kings of small ethnic regions – there emerged the notion, at least among one people called Israel, of a universal God – conceptually parallel to the emperor of the material world. This was an "inclusive monotheism" through which, for example, the God of Israel charges Cyrus, the King of the Persian Empire, to allow Judeans to return to Jerusalem in order to rebuild there the House of God (Ezra 1:1-3).[\[9\]](#)

According to some biblical scholars, the old God of the Exodus became associated with the old God of Sinai. The old God known as YHVH became associated with Elohim, El Shadday, and the Gods of the Patriarchs. That is, the Gods of old that Israel knew became united conceptually and structurally, in the One God, whose real "name" is YHVH, but who is also known by other names.

This view corresponds with my own work on "holy war" in ancient Israel and the ancient Near East.[\[10\]](#) In the ancient world, each nation or ethnic group had a variety of deities whom it worshipped, but each tended to single out one divine entity to which it found a more personal relationship, and it was this God that cared especially for its people. All wars between nations in those days were "holy" because they were divinely authorized or commanded. When humans of conflicting nations engaged in war, so did their national Gods. To put it simply, while humans were fighting down below, their Gods were fighting on high. Clear remnants of this exist in the Hebrew Bible, such as in Ex.12:12: "For I will pass through the land of Egypt this night...and against all the Gods of Egypt I will execute judgment."

An international worldview of polytheism makes sense in a world of small competing independent ethnic nations, each with its own national religion. There was always the hope and the possibility that "our God" (or Gods) would help us to beat "theirs" and thus provide greater material wealth and security. And most of the Near East was basically a level playing field among the nations and their Gods.[\[11\]](#)

The rise of the Assyrian Empire permanently changed the face of the ancient Near East. For the first time, an Assyrian super-king defeated virtually all other kings. The empire God, Ashur, likewise defeated the other Gods and became the "king of the Gods,"[\[12\]](#) as did the Babylonian God, Marduk, after the defeat of Assyria.[\[13\]](#) The military unification of empire posed the question of what was the value of the little Gods that could not defeat the great powers.

Like most peoples and their national deities, Israel tried to survive, but was eventually defeated by empire. Much has been written about how Israel "prepared" intellectually for a final defeat through its Deuteronomistic reforms associated with King Josiah and others during that critical century and a half between the destruction of the Northern Kingdom of Israel in 722 BCE, and the defeat of the Southern Kingdom of Judah in 586.[\[14\]](#) Perhaps Israel's national religion was somewhat better prepared than the national religions of other conquered peoples that disappeared from history. In any case, Israel went into exile **with** its God, and some texts of the Hebrew Bible witness Israel's anger and desire for revenge.

Other texts, however, convey a different sentiment. Perhaps the overwhelming shock of the destruction of Jerusalem forced a major intellectual and spiritual retooling among some Israelite thinkers. Some scholars trace a shift in conceptualization to the Persians, under which the defeated Gods become equated with the Empire God through the new title, *Elohey Hashamayim* – "the God(s) of the Heavens,"<sup>[15]</sup> and this term becomes a common one in the Hebrew Bible as well. Whatever the exact cause, the net result was, as witnessed by some Biblical texts, a repositioning of the God of Israel.

The ideal-typical expressions of this sentiment are the famous statements of Isaiah and Micah.

In the days to come, the Mount of the Lord's House shall stand firm above the mountains and tower above the hills; and all the nations shall gaze on it with joy. And the many peoples shall go and say, 'Come let us go up to the Mount of the Lord, to the House of the God of Jacob; that He may instruct us in His ways and that we may walk in His paths.' For instruction shall come forth from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. Thus He will judge the nations and rebuke the many peoples. And they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not take up sword against nation. They shall never again know war (Isaiah 2:2-4)

The image conveyed here is not only bucolic and sweet. It describes the future supremacy of the God of Israel that parallels the domination that of victorious God(s) of empire. But the victory of the God of Israel is only a vision, a dream. It is actually a militant triumphal statement couched in the particularist symbolism of Jerusalem. The final result is, indeed, peace, but it is an expression of intellectual acrobatics. It is peace along the lines of the *pax romana*. "[God] will judge the nations and rebuke the many peoples." And remember that it is only a vision, not one born of actual military and political victory. It is certainly not expressive of pluralism.

The Micah text parallels much of the Isaiah text but adds a surprisingly pluralistic note. The Israelite God, the "Lord of Armies" [*Adonai Tsevaot*] is responsible, but all peoples are nevertheless seen as walking according to the dictates of their own Gods.

Everyone shall sit under their grapevine or fig tree and with no one to disturb them, for it was the Lord of Hosts who spoke. Though all the peoples walk each in the names of its Gods, we will walk in the name of YHVH our God forever and ever. (Micah 4:4-5).

This added line in the Micah version of the vision is a surprisingly open expression of "inclusive monotheism." And there are other universalizing poems as well, in Hosea 2, Amos 5 and 9, Micah 5 and 6:2-7:7, and especially Isaiah 44:28-45:13. They are all late texts. The old local Israelite God is recast as the universal God of heaven.

This monotheism is typified by a merciful God. The older tribal or national Gods rendered judgment but rarely mercy. In this gentler monotheism, "[t]he Divine creates and is responsible for both good and evil, but his mercy is without end."<sup>[16]</sup> This is an inclusive perception of monotheism, but it seems to have existed side-by-side with a different worldview that some call "exclusive monotheism."

In the worldview of exclusive monotheism, the one true God is at war with the false Gods of all bad things. This notion seems to have become dominant in Judea during the tense period followed by the Maccabean revolt against the threatening culture of Hellenism. The overwhelming appeal of Hellenism and its steamrolling "cultural imperialism" was considered a threat to the very existence of culture and religion of the Judeans. But in the second century, BCE, the Maccabean revolt

succeeded in slowing down that threat by establishing a powerful particularism in the monotheism of Judea.[\[17\]](#)

The Hasmonean period that followed this revolt is known for its infighting between different expressions of Judaism, which in turn, increased the tendency toward polemical, exclusivist interpretations of the divine will. Hellenism's appeal and dominance as the "higher culture" needed to be rejected, but the various Jewish interpretive communities that emerged during this period also fought each other as well as the outside threat of Hellenism. Exclusivist expressions of Judean monotheism seemed to become dominant, and this would become the legacy of monotheism in general.[\[18\]](#)

This is not to suggest that there was only a single, unified religious expression of monotheism before this period. The Bible suggests that there were a number of different early expressions. But Hellenism brought a new idea to the Near East – that being that there is a single, absolute "truth" out there that is knowable, and that that "truth" renders all other attempts to understand the universe wrong, or false.

The combination of this Hellenic idea with the unification of empire, seems to have engendered the belief that only one truth is possible (or only one path to truth), and this became deeply associated with the monotheisms of the proto-rabbis and proto-Christians and Hellenistic Jews of the Hasmonean period, and for many centuries later.

But how would one simple change in the evolution of ideas – that is, that there is only one real truth or path to truth – end up sticking to most expressions of monotheism? To make sense of this, we need to look at another theory of religion, a theory of what makes some new religions succeed, while most new religions fail and are lost to history.

#### EMERGING RELIGIONS IN A RELIGIOUS ECONOMY

Rodney Stark has been the most prolific sociologist of religion studying the emergence of new religious movements (NRMs).[\[19\]](#) What follows are some rules that derive from his study of emerging religions.[\[20\]](#)

1. New religious movements begin when established religions do not speak to the theological and spiritual needs of a significant population of potential consumers.
2. But NRMs form best when there is room in the larger social and political system for them. They are most likely to succeed when there exists a religious "free market economy," where people can go and try to sell their religious ideas to a religious consumer market.
3. NRMs threaten established religions by their very existence, because they symbolize the failure of established religions to speak to everyone.
4. Whether an NRM begins as a branch or stream within an established religion (sect) or an independent movement (cult), it is opposed by established religions, which feel threatened by the new developments. Established religions try to control NRMs if they begin within them, or destroy them if they begin independently.
5. NRMs "fight back" through polemics, arguments, meant to prove to an audience of potential believers that they are better expressions of the divine will or provide better spiritual services than establishment religions.

Stark uses market-economy vocabulary when describing the emergence of NRMs. A new religious movement is a new "product" in the "religious economy," and those who promote the new product desire to gain "market share" in the "religious consumer market." The promoters – that is, believers and particularly the leadership of NRMs – attempt to "sell" their new product by demonstrating that it will provide better services and give more satisfaction than the traditional products on the market.

Stark conducted his initial studies on new religious movements in the USA and Europe, which all emerge within a religious environment that is overwhelmingly monotheistic and mostly Christian. New religious movements in a polytheistic environment seem not to be much of a problem for establishment religions.<sup>[21]</sup> If there already exist lots of deities, then a new deity or approach would not represent much of a religious threat (unless it represented a political or economic threat), just another God to the pantheon. But if one great God is supposed to cover all the functions, then any interlopers are existentially threatening.

Early on in ancient Israel as reflected by the Hebrew Bible, it mattered little what was the exact nature of God. Early expressions of monotheism – or to put it differently, early *monotheisms* – were all acceptable to one another because they were articulated and experienced in relation to the overwhelming falseness of polytheisms. It would be self-destructive and probably unimportant to be overly critical of the differences between the monotheistic expressions when the powerful specter of polytheism looms overhead. Therefore, monotheistic believers might disagree about any number of issues, but there was a limit beyond which the arguments would probably not pass.

The Jewish historian, Josephus, wrote that Sadducees, Pharisees, Essenes and other lesser known Jewish religious groups lived side-by-side in the Late Second Temple period. Those that did not retreat into their own communities like the Essenic type groups competed with one another openly over political influence, and sometimes nastily. They bickered and they fought with one another. But all were part of an inclusive group of monotheisms that saw themselves as a union in relation to the polytheist Greeks and Romans.<sup>[22]</sup> Soon after Josephus, however, this multi-monotheistic union would break apart.

By roughly the year "zero," Greco-Romans, tired of the old polytheistic systems that no longer spoke to them, began to become very interested in the various expressions of monotheism found in Judea. As Greco-Romans began joining one or another of the monotheisms "on the market," their consumer interest raised the stakes with regard to the differences and identities of the new religious products. Greco-Romans had the option of "shopping" for philosophical schools for centuries, but "better or worse" and "true or false" became important internal categories now also for religion because they could mean an increase or decrease in affiliation or support from the huge pool of potential patrons. The question of affiliation raised the stakes because numbers relate to political and economic power and influence, and the rise in the political and economic stakes naturally increased the level of polemic.

Internal differences tend to be unimportant when the battle with the outsider is the overwhelming consideration. But when the outside competition of polytheism began to subside, then previously unimportant internal issues became issues of the day.

#### THINKING LIKE GREEKS AND A STAKE IN THE "WORLD TO COME"

As more could be gained or lost in the competition between monotheisms, new and more effective tools were sought to enhance one's rating on the market. Two very important innovations entered the Judean universe during this late Second

Temple period. One, as I noted a few minutes ago, was syllogistic thinking and the search for [capital 'T'] Truth. The second innovation in this period was the notion that one earned a place in a heavenly World-to-Come based on one's acts or beliefs while living in this world.[23] We find neither of these in the Hebrew Bible.[24] Placed together, the notion of an absolute theological truth in combination with the enticement of heaven and the threat of hell, leads to what might be called *extremely* exclusivist monotheism.

During the early period of these emerging innovations, Josephus notes the differences between the Jewish "parties" or "philosophies." He also notes that Essenes and Pharisees believe that the soul is immortal. But there does not seem to be evidence in his works that right thinking merits a heaven or a hell, even among the Essenes who had a well-developed idea of a world to come of bliss and happiness, and another, "a darksome, stormy abyss, full of punishments that know no end." [25]

Inter-monotheistic polemic intensified and reached its first peak in the "Parting of the Ways" between Judaism and Christianity. The violent rhetorical battles recorded so clearly in the New Testament and more subtly in the Rabbinic literature of Talmud and Midrash, became emblematic of the relationship between monotheistic religions in general, extending beyond Judaism and Christianity to Islam and its derivatives.

The movements that became Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism emerged out of a spiritual environment that strongly reflected both Biblical and Greco-Roman religions and cultures. As they emerged into separate religious movements they competed fiercely for consumers from the Greco-Roman religious market,[26] and this increased the level of polemic between them. We do not have much left of the Jewish polemic because after the Jews lost the market to what eventually became a virtual Christian monopoly, it became un-politic and eventually illegal to criticize Christians and Christianity in a Christianized Roman Empire. But we have plenty of the Christian polemic against Judaism (and Jews), and it became quite shrill.[27]

This ancient Jewish-Christian competition set the tone for all subsequent relations between different expressions of monotheism. Once the overwhelming threat of state-sponsored Roman polytheism was eliminated under Constantine in the fourth century, the winners of the competition no longer needed to tolerate alternate monotheisms. On the other hand, once Christianity was in power, internal divisions within the Church that were voluntarily suppressed in the face of pagan Roman opposition began to come to the fore. The *right* expression of the divine will became a matter of great concern – of ultimate concern for many. Getting it right or wrong meant a future eternity in bliss, or an eternity in wretched misery. This became much more of an issue to Christians than Judaisms, but that may have been one reason why Christianity captured the market in the first place. To use the economic vocabulary of Stark et al, what eventually became important was not only the product, but also the brand name.

This may not be an overstatement. John Gager has demonstrated that from the perspective of most Greeks and Romans in the 1<sup>st</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> centuries, the religious product was, simply, monotheism. The leading brands were the movements that became Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism. Both movements had similar features: worship of one mighty and universal God, ancient origins, moral-ethical systems, scripture-based traditions, messiahs, and salvation. The infamous defamatory anti-Jewish diatribes of the Church Father, John Chrysostom, were attempts to keep the Greco-Roman consumer pool loyal to his brand of monotheism in the church. The problem was that his parishioners were attending both church and synagogue.[28] He did not want them to be consumers of the Jewish brand of worship as well his own.

In the course of polemic, the stakes are inevitably raised. When the stakes are low, it matters little what one thinks. But when the risk is the difference between eternal bliss and eternal damnation, based on what one thinks or believes, then it matters a lot.

This perspective also may have spurred the development of monotheistic "holy war." As we know from the Bible, there was plenty of violence and strife among Israelites and in the ancient world in general. As I have already mentioned, the Hebrew Bible witnesses both religious rivalry and political rivalry couched in religious terms. But the rivalry was clearly and un-self-consciously associated with *material* issues, and the stakes did not include the notions of eternal damnation or bliss. I would suggest that with the convergence of the two notions of right belief and the expectation of reward or punishment in heaven or hell, competition and fighting between groups, even over purely material issues, became articulated increasingly in spiritual terms.<sup>[29]</sup> The convergence moved conflicts – or more accurately, motivation for engaging in conflicts – from the material to the spiritual-ideological. When war becomes ideological, it has a greater tendency to become total war because rather than just acquiring someone else's resources, you are fighting a war of good against evil. In such cases the enemy tends to become dehumanized (i.e. "evil") and much more liable to be killed *en masse*.

This transition needs to be explored further, but it may mark the conceptual birth of "holy war" as we have come to know it between and among all three families of monotheistic religion.<sup>[30]</sup> "Holy war," whether named Crusade or Jihad, was always a distinct possibility (and not infrequently, also a reality) among competing religious expressions *within* as well as *between* monotheisms. The wars between Sunnis and Shi'is and the Albigensian Crusade mark only two of the best-known examples of "holy war" waged *within* monotheistic systems. And Judaism also has its expression of "holy war," called *milchemet mitzvah*, though not developed nearly to the extent as Christianity and Islam.

The emergence of Islam followed the basic model described above of a threatening new religious movement that was opposed by the establishment religions. In the case of Islam, the most powerful establishment religion was the old Arabian idolatry. The Islamic requirement of worshipping only the one Great God threatened, among other things, the lucrative pilgrimage industry established in Muhammad's home town of Mecca.<sup>[31]</sup> But the Judaism practiced in the city of Medina was also threatened when Muhammad emigrated to that town and began preaching a monotheistic alternative to Judaism.

The later militant opposition of the Christian Byzantine Empire, both on the battlefield and in the propaganda of the Church, spurred the Muslims to develop their own nasty polemics. The Qur'an, however, like the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, contains both militant and peaceful material, either of which can be activated by religious scholars when the need arises.

#### THE UNITY OF DIFFERENCE

It has been a long evening. We've explored early motivations for religious competition, polemic and eventually, war between monotheisms. We have observed how monotheism may have emerged from a paradigm shift caused by the conquests of empire. Even the God of Israel, who was not engaged in any truly successful conquest of empire, assumes the universal image of "God of Armies" (the meaning of "Lord of Hosts"). Perhaps, ironically, because it never actually became a political Empire-God, the God of Israel was the only God of the ancient Near Eastern world that survived the Roman Empire.

As various polytheisms gave way to competing notions of monotheism, the monotheisms came increasingly into competition and polemical relationships with one another. The polemics were and are expressed, not only in purely theological terms, but also through a cultural discourse that was influenced by the languages and worldviews of the Hebrew Bible and ancient Near East, the Greco-Roman world, Persia and Arabia.

Among the three "families" of monotheisms (Judaisms, Christianities, and Islams), therefore, each system reflects different anthropologies as well as theologies. Each family is made up of distinct member groups that express unique aspects of the Ineffable God, each member group according to its own particular cultural, social, intellectual and linguistic discourse. The differences are not merely accidents of human culture and history. The differences reflect what is unique in every one of us who make up the members of our religious families, even as we all reflect, at the same time, our unity as creations of God.

We rightly strive for a post-polemical age when we can agree to disagree without feeling so threatened that we lash out in violence. Peace and fullness is and should be our grand aspiration, but these will never be achieved by attempting to reduce our differences. The end of religious diversity is impossible. A universal monotheism never existed, and it never will exist. But neither is a universal monotheism desirable, for distinctiveness is part of our createdness. Monotheism cannot be homogenized, for the unity of the Divine Essence is not a unity that can be reflected adequately in human terms, and certainly not by the example of theological or religious uniformity. An observation is given in the Talmud:[\[32\]](#) "This expresses the greatness of the Holy One: a man stamps many coins with one die and they are all alike, but the King of the king of kings,[\[33\]](#) the Holy One, has stamped all humanity with the die of the first Adam, but not one of them is like the other."

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[\[1\]](#) Donald Redford, "The Monotheism of Akhenaten," in Hershel Shanks and Jack Meinhardt, *Aspects of Monotheism* (Washington: Biblical Archaeology Society, 1996), 11-26. For a fuller discussion, see Erik Horning, *Akhenaten and the Religion of Light* (transl. David Lorton, Ithica, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), 87-94.

[\[2\]](#) Ps.8:6; 82; 86:8; 89:7; 95:3; 97:7; 135:5; 138:1; 148.

[\[3\]](#) Polymnia Athanassiadi and Michael Frede, *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

[\[4\]](#) Most references are to Abraham the *hanif*. Some note how his monotheism is prior to those of Judaism or Christianity, and Muhammad himself is referred to as a *hanif* on at least one occasion (Q.2:135, 3:67, 95, 4:125, 6:79, 10:105, 30:30). See Uri Rubin, "Hanifiyya and Ka`ba: An Inquiry into the pre-Islamic Background of *din ibrahim*," in *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 13 (1990), 85, 112; Andrew Rippin, "Rhmnn and the hanifs," in Hallaq and Little, *Islamic Studies Presented to Charles J. Adams* (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 153-168; Dale Eickelman, "Musaylima: An Approach to the Social Anthropology of Seventh Century Arabia," in *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 10 (1967), 17-52; Ella Landau-Tasseron, "Unearthing a Pre-Islamic Arabian Prophet," in *JSAI* 21 (1997), 42-61, and G. R. Hawting, *The Idea of Idolatry and the Emergence of Islam: From Polemic to History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

[\[5\]](#) See Smith, *Origins*.

[6] Herbert Niehr, "The Rise of YHWH in Judahite and Israelite Religion," in Diana V. Edelman, *The Triumph of Elohim: From Yahwisms to Judaisms* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1995), 51.

[7] N. P. Lemche, *The Canaanites and Their Land: The Tradition of the Canaanites* (JSOT Sup. 110; Sheffield: JSOT, 1991), 25-62.

[8] Karl Jaspers, *Vom Ursprung und Ziel der Geschichte* (Munich: Piper, 1949), cited in S. N. Eisenstadt, *The Origins and Diversity of Axial Age Civilizations* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986). Thomas L. Thompson, "The Intellectual Matrix of Early Biblical Narrative: Inclusive Monotheism in Persian Period Palestine," in Diana V. Edelman, *The Triumph of Elohim: From Yahwisms to Judaisms* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1995)

[9] Thompson (p. 116) generalizes far more than the sources would seem to indicate, but he is building a case really for Israel.

[10] Reuven Firestone, *Jihad: The Origin of Holy War in Islam*. NY: Oxford University Press, 1999; "Holy War Idea in the Biblical Tradition," in Palmer-Fernandez, G. (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Religion and War* (1st ed.). New York: Berkshire/Routledge, 2004, 180-85; "Conceptions of Holy War in Biblical and Qur'anic Tradition," *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 24 (1996), 801-824.

[11] Diana V. Edelman (ed.), *The Triumph of Elohim: From Yahwisms to Judaisms*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1996, 20-21.

[12] J. B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (ANET) (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950), 278, 283, 285, 288, 295, 297, 298.

[13] ANET 307, 310. Whether the unifying process under the Assyrians and Persians resulted in a slightly different relationship of the great God of empire with local national Gods makes little difference to the basic argument.

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[15] Edelman, 22.

[16] Thompson, 122.

[17] Elias Bickerman, *From Ezra to the Last of the Maccabees* (NY: Schocken, 1962), Lawrence Schiffman, *From Text to Tradition: A History of Second Temple and Rabbinic Judaism* (NY: Ktav, 1991), 60-79.

[18] Thompson 124.

[19] For a recent bibliography of his work, see his *For the Glory of God* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

[20] See Stark, and Laurence R. Iannaccone, "A Supply-Side Reinterpretation of the 'Secularization' of Europe," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 33 (1994), 230-52, Stark, "How New Religions Succeed: A Theoretical Model," in *The Future of New Religious Movements*, ed. by David G. Bromley and Phillip E. Hammond (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 11-19); Stark and William Sims Bainbridge, *A Theory of Religion* [Peter Lang, 1987] (Rutgers, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996).

[21] Stark, "The One True God" (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 31-113.

[22] Josephus, *The Jewish War*, Transl. G. A. Williamson, Rev. E. Mary Smallwood (London: Penguin, 1981), 133-138.

[23] George Nickelsburg, Jr., *Resurrection, Immortality, and Eternal Life in Intertestamental Judaism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972); J. Edward Wright, *The Early History of Heaven* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[24] With the one exception of Daniel 12.

[25] Josephus, *The Jewish War* p. 137. That right belief may result in a place in the World to Come later becomes axiomatic in Rabbinic Judaism (Mishnah Sanhedrin, chapter 10).

[26] John Gager, *The Origins of Anti-Semitism* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1985).

[27] At the top end can be found John Chrysostom's 8 "Sermons Against the Jews." Marcel Simon, *Verus Israel* Transl. from the French, H. McKeating (London: Littman Library, 1996) 217-223.

[28] Gager, 119.

[29] Stark argues that not all warring is materialist in origin. Readiness for martyrdom would disprove that, and the Crusades, if material-driven, would have been directed toward Spain rather than the Holy Land in the 11<sup>th</sup> century (*One True God*, 151-152).

[30] James Turner Johnson, *The Holy War Idea in Western and Islamic Traditions* (University Park: Penn State Press, 1997), Karen Armstrong, *Holy War: The Crusades and their Impact on Today's World* (NY: Doubleday, 1988), Majid Khadduri, *War and Peace in the Law of Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1955), Alfred Morabia, *La Notion de Jihad dans L'Islam Medieval* (Paris, 1975), Rudolf Peters, *Jihad in Classical and Modern Islam* (Princeton: Markus Wiener, 1996), Salo Baron and George Wise, *Violence and Defense in the Jewish Experience* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1977), Reuven Firestone, *The Resurrection of Holy War in Modern Judaism* (forthcoming).

[31] Not for religious reasons, because from the perspective of the polytheist, veneration of only one God within the system was not considered threatening.

[32] Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:5.

[33] Note how its designation for God reflects the Achaemenid discourse of "king of kings."