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Everything Belongs to Me: Holiness, Danger, and Divine Kingship in the Post-Genesis World

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Abstract

The biblical concept of holiness continues to be a subject of debate among scholars, in several respects. These include the basic meaning of קדש, the relationship between holiness and danger, and the morality or amorality of the holy. This article offers a fresh examination of these issues. In addition, the article assesses the significance of the fact that the root קדש is almost totally absent from the book of Genesis. While aspects of holiness are anticipated in Genesis and intimated by several characters, the lethal danger presented by the holy enters the biblical world only in the book of Exodus, where it is intimately connected to Yahweh's taking on the role of Israel's exclusive divine suzerain. After this change is discussed in general terms, two specific events which illustrate this difference are examined, one which takes place before the initial mention of holy ground in Exodus 3 and one which occurs shortly after. In each instance God attacks the person to whom he appears. In the first case, the patriarch Jacob successfully wrestles a blessing out of God. In the second, Yahweh seeks to kill Moses (or one of his sons). This article concludes by examining the ways in which scholars have attempted to explain the theological differences between Genesis and later books. Such explanations must take into account the new character traits Yahweh displays after Genesis, including the relationship between his deadly wrath and his need to guard his prerogatives as the holy and jealous divine king to whom everything under heaven belongs.

Keywords: Holiness, danger, Genesis, Yahweh as king, divine jealousy, Gen. 32.25-33, Exod. 4.24-26, biblical theology.

The biblical concept of holiness continues to be a subject of debate among scholars, in several respects. These include the basic meaning of קדש, the relationship between holiness and danger, and the morality or amorality of the holy. A fresh examination of these issues is in order. The same is true for another important aspect of holiness which has received less attention, namely, the nearly total[1] absence of the root קדש in the book of Genesis. I will argue that this is not merely a case of what Gammie (1989: 123) calls 'vocabulary rather than substance'.[2] While elements of holiness are anticipated in Genesis and intimated by several characters, the lethal danger presented by the holy enters the biblical world only in the book of Exodus, where it is intimately connected to Yahweh's taking on the role of Israel's exclusive divine suzerain.

After discussing various perspectives on danger and the divine in the Hebrew Bible I will examine two specific cases of divine attack on a human being, one which takes place before the initial mention of holy ground in Exodus and one which occurs shortly after. In the first instance, the patriarch Jacob successfully wrestles a blessing out of God. In the second, Yahweh seeks to kill Moses (or one of his sons). Viewing these scenes together reveals how much the biblical world has changed between Genesis and later biblical books. After examining how scholars have attempted to explain this change, I will conclude by discussing the character traits which Yahweh displays after Genesis, including the relationship between his deadly wrath and his need to guard his prerogatives as the holy divine king whose name is 'Jealous' (יהוה קנא שמו, Exod. 34.14).

Genesis as a 'Safer Place': Holiness and Danger before and after Exodus 3.5

After the proleptic reference to the seventh day being 'consecrated' (ויקדש אתו) in Gen. 2.3, the term קדש is virtually absent until Moses

1. According to Kornfeld (2003: 529), 'only in Gen. 38.6-24 does J use a *qdš* derivative to describe Judah's daughter-in-law as קדשה, "consecrated", albeit without ascribing to her any religious consecration'. Although many commentators on Gen. 38 state that Judah (and/or the narrator) use the term קדשה in reference to Tamar, it is actually only Hiram who uses this term when seeking the woman whom we know to have been Tamar; see Lasine 1989: 52 n. 3.

2. Gammie is referring to the fact that 'except in psalms, none of the prophetic traditionists favored the use of terms of holiness in connection with the deity'. He sees this 'attenuation' as 'largely in vocabulary rather than in substance' (1989: 123).

comes upon 'holy ground' in Exod. 3.5.[3] Could this imply that characters in the book of Genesis inhabit a world which is devoid of holiness and its attendant dangers? While scholars including Knohl have recently noted the change in divine–human relations beginning with the revelation of God's name Yahweh in Exod. 6.2-3,[4] few have asked whether characters in the present text of Genesis inhabit a different—and 'safer'—spatial world than the characters mentioned after the אדמה has been divided into holy and profane zones.[5]

Traditionally, the verb קָדַשׁ has been understood to denote a setting apart or separation. However, Jenson argues that the etymological derivation of קדש from a root meaning 'cut' or 'separate' is 'highly speculative and the approach to its meaning through etymology has now

3. On the term קדשה in Gen. 38.21-22, see n. 1 above. On the place-name קָדֵשׁ in Gen. 14.7; 16.14; 20.1, see below. Fischer (1989: 110) notes that 'אדמת־קדש, literally "ground of holiness [*Heiligkeit*]"', is a unique combination. The only other related passage is Zech. 2.16, which speaks of אדמת הקדש, literally 'ground of the sanctum (*Heiligtum*)', referring to 'the territory of Judah, from which the expression "holy land" originates'. For 'unclean ground' (אדמה טמאה), see Amos 7.17 and Houtman 1993: 349.

4. Knohl (1995: 168) believes that Exod. 6.2-3 is the first 'Holiness School' (HS) text in the Bible. He perceives a radical difference between what he calls the 'Genesis period' and the 'Moses period' (1995: 137-38, 168; 2003: 23). The personalized, anthropomorphic and moral Elohim of Genesis contrasts strongly with the amoral and impersonal Yahweh introduced with the revelation of the name 'Yahweh'. Knohl equates 'Yahweh' with Otto's description of the numinous, and views its 'amoral dimension' as a hallmark of the 'priestly torah' (PT) (2003: 21-22; cf. 1995: 138 n. 54; on Otto, see below). In addition, 'from the time of the revelation to Moses [in Exod. 6.3] and onward', nothing in the PT 'is written about God's essence, nor is God associated with any attribute'—not even holiness, wrath, or jealousy—as he is in the later writings and editorial work of the HS (2003: 20-21). Because Knohl focuses on isolating different sources on the basis of sharply different ideologies and resultant theories of holiness, he underplays how these hypothetical source materials interact in the present text to produce a theology which transcends even his more 'democratic' HS.

5. A number of scholars besides Knohl do find substantial discontinuities between Genesis and later books. Wenham contrasts the 'air of ecumenical bonhomie about the patriarchal religion' with 'the sectarian exclusiveness of the Mosaic age' (1980: 184; cf. Moberly 1992: 99). Levenson (2004: 18) argues that Abraham and later groups living under Pentateuchal law live 'in different realities'. At the same time, Levenson contends that 'Genesis offers less evidence for the difference between the patriarchal and Mosaic God than first seems the case'; in fact, he denies that 'God has changed His character' after Genesis (2004: 12, 13). I will argue that the later books present dangerous facets of Yahweh's character which were not on display in Genesis. Another scholar who has recently emphasized the continuities between Genesis and later books is McConville (2006: 49-52).

largely been abandoned' (2003: 98; cf. Propp 1998: 200).[6] Speaking of the priestly concept, Jenson (1992: 48) suggests that the 'holy' may be best defined as 'that which belongs to the sphere of God's being or activity'. Similarly, Propp (2006: 683) suggests that קדש is 'Yahweh's prerogative, that which properly belongs to him and sets him above his Creation'.

Propp goes on to remark that 'for me, at least half of Holiness is fear' (2006: 683).[7] The fearful and deadly danger of the holy is an integral part of its meaning for many scholars,[8] whether or not they point to Otto's famous notion of the dread associated with the numinous.[9] The examples of the danger of holiness most cited by biblicists include the stories of Nadab and Abihu, Korah, and the reports of the ark's lethal

6. On the methodological challenges in defining קדש, see Jenson 2003: 96-97 and below. Propp (2006: 688) claims that 'as God primordially separated (*hibdîl*) light and dark, Heaven and Earth, the realms of purity and corruption', the priest must 'separate (*hibdîl*) between the holiness and between the profane, and between the impure and between the pure'. However, the Creation story in Gen. 1.1–2.3 does *not* speak of any separation of realms of purity and corruption. That form of separation is not reported until after Exod. 3. Nor are priests *creating* separation; rather, they are acknowledging and protecting a deep existing ontological separation, which first manifests itself at Sinai in Exod. 3.

7. Not all characters who find themselves in holy space experience fear. For example, Kornfeld (2003: 529) points out that in the burning bush episode Moses' fear is *not* prompted by holiness but by the manifestation of God's power. Nor does the Shunammite exhibit fear when she is in the presence of Elisha, whom she describes with the unique expression, 'holy man of God' (2 Kgs 4.9; see Lasine forthcoming).

8. Referring to ancient Greece, Parker identifies two distinct sources of 'religious danger', one involving pollution (μίασμα) and the other the sacred (ἅγος). While 'gods seem irrelevant' to μίασμα, ἅγος 'has its source in a sacrilegious act'. The sacred is 'indeed contagious, in the sense that the offender falls into the power of the offended god'. The reason for 'avoiding [the ἐναγής] is not fear of contamination but to escape being engulfed in his divine punishment'. In contrast, miasma 'is a dangerous dirtiness that individuals rub off on one another like a physical taint' (1983: 8-9, 11-12). See further in n. 59 below.

9. Otto 2004: 14-22. Otto's concept of the 'numinous' has been criticized for a number of reasons. Gooch notes Rainer Flasche's charge that Otto deepened the 'irrational tendencies of his time' (2000: 178; cf. 147, 207, 212). Von Hendy (2002: 180; cf. 181) faults *Das Heilige* for displaying 'an extremely uncritical projection as universal of religious and philosophical beliefs peculiar to their time and place' (cf. Jay 2006: 121). This would have to include a disregard for forms of religious feeling which do not conform to his template. Also problematic is Otto's use of the Hebrew Bible to illustrate his contention that the full experience of the holy includes the individual's awareness of his or her own worthlessness.

power in 1–2 Samuel.[10] Fear of the God whose power is displayed in these narratives certainly seems appropriate, especially when that power seems to be indifferent to the subjective guilt or innocence of those it destroys.

Scholars who attempt to describe the danger presented by the holy employ strikingly similar metaphors. Haran and Propp speak of the Tabernacle possessing a 'lethal aura' and being like 'a nuclear power plant' (Haran 1978: 187; Propp 2006: 690). Knohl (1995: 150) characterizes a sacred enclosure as 'a kind of minefield', while Kaminsky (1995: 89) and others compare holiness in general to 'an electric charge'. This metaphor recalls Otto's earlier description of Yahweh's wrath as 'stored electricity' (*gespeicherte Elektrizität*), which discharges itself on those who come near to it (Otto 2004: 21).[11] It is therefore not surprising that Mary Douglas describes the destructive effect of impurity in the Bible as 'physical, like a lightning bolt or disease' (1993: 23), and Jacob Milgrom compares it to a 'noxious ray'.[12] These metaphors all emphasize the elements of impersonality and amorality which are usually associated with the destructive effects of pollution, rather than the danger of offending a deity by proximity or through impure persons contacting his holy possessions and spaces.

Within the priestly corpus, Klawans distinguishes between the danger stemming from 'ritual impurity' and 'moral impurity'. Ritual impurity 'can convey an impermanent contagion', but as long as one 'avoids contact with…holy objects while impure…there is little chance of danger or transgression'. In contrast, moral impurity 'leads to a long-lasting, if not permanent, degradation of the sinner'. While 'ritual impurity can be ameliorated by rites of purification', moral purity is achieved by

10. See Lev. 10.1-7; Num. 16–17; 1 Sam. 4–6; 2 Sam. 6. It is hardly surprising that the story of Uzzah's demise in 2 Sam. 6 is included in the *haftorah* for the torah portion *Shemini*, which relates the deaths of Nadab and Abihu.

11. Steussy (2000: 131 n. 2) compares God's anger in 2 Sam. 6.7 and Exod. 19.21-25 to 'a flash of energy triggered by contact rather than a considered act of divine decision'. She notes that the 'nonrational aspect' of bursting forth is clearer in Exodus, where God's warning suggests that he 'does not *will* to "break out"'.

12. Milgrom (2000: 729; cf. Maccoby 1999: 18-22). It is an 'aerial miasma' polluting the sanctuary which possesses 'magnetic attraction for the realm of the sacred' (Milgrom 1983: 77; cf. 79). West uses a similar metaphor when he argues that 'desacralization rites [in ancient Greece] surely do not exist to protect men from divine sanctity (as if from overexposure to X-rays) but to complete the demarcation of the sacred from the profane' (1985: 93-94).

punishment, atonement, or by avoiding morally impure acts (2004: 2042, 2044-45; cf. 2000: 25, 41).

Many commentators assert that different biblical sources conceive the dangers of the holy in different ways. According to Regev (2001: 255), holiness in the Priestly Schools is dynamic and active and 'any contact with that holiness must be cautious and gradual'. In Milgrom's formulation, impurity is 'virulent, dangerous to humans and God alike' (Milgrom 2000: 730). Milgrom goes on to stress that 'the threat to God is not from nonexistent demons but from humans who willfully or inadvertently violate the divine commandments and ultimately drive YHWH out of the sanctuary'. In contrast, holiness in Deuteronomy is merely 'a static situation or a sort of legal status', according to Regev. Consequently, there is no reason to keep holiness 'so restricted and isolated from the common and profane' (2001: 255).

Other scholars find these bodies of texts to have much more in common. For example, Kaminsky (1995: 63-64; cf. 88-95) sees no qualitative difference between God's wrath against Korah and Uzzah and divine wrath in other sections of Deuteronomistic History. Kaminsky believes that 'while different sources have different understandings of idea of holiness, they share certain basic assumptions' (1995: 65). He notes that the idea of God as a dangerous power only counteracted by ritual procedures is found as early as Exodus and is linked to divine jealousy (64).[13]

Many scholars believe that their understanding of holiness is fully present in Genesis, except for the vocabulary.[14] In addition to Jacob's theophany at Bethel and later so-called *hieroi logoi* reporting Jacob's erection of altars and pillars,[15] the garden of Eden narrative is often

13. As examples Kaminsky cites Exod. 4.24-26; Exod. 12, and Num. 17. To be precise, Exod. 4.24-26 does not constitute proof that Yahweh's danger is *only* counteracted by ritual actions. For all we know, Moses or his son could also have been spared in a different way. Regev does not discuss 'the Deuteronomistic literature or the Prophets', although he admits that 'their perceptions of holiness are quite relevant' (2001: 243 n. 1). According to Gammie, even though the Deuteronomic authors do not use קדש of God, they 'nonetheless describe the presence of an awesome God' (1989: 106, 108). He believes that the central chapters of Deuteronomy evolve 'one of the most complex and impressive theologies of holiness in the Old Testament'.

14. In contrast, Moberly (1992: 99) and others (e.g. von Rad 1962: 175; Wenham 1980: 184) believe that holiness *is* 'entirely lacking' in Genesis; see further in nn. 19 and 68 below.

15. Whether or not Gen. 35.1-7 is ascribed to J or to post-P and 35.9-13 to P, these reports of purifications, altars, and pilgrimages are not associated with the danger of the

cited in this regard, even though it does not refer to the garden as holy, use antonyms for holiness, or mention the concepts of purity and impurity (see Wright 1996: 306).[16] According to Kornfeld (2003: 529), J texts prior to Exod. 3.5 'avoid all *qdš* derivatives';[17] even the Bethel theophany is not an exception, since Jacob calls the place נורא ('fearful'), but not קדוֹשׁ (Gen. 28.17).[18] Kornfeld acknowledges that Genesis maintains *qādēš* as a place-name (Gen. 14.7; 16.14; 20.1), but not to refer to either sacrificial offerings (Gen. 4.3-5; 8.20; 22.2) or places where the patriarchs encountered God (Gen. 12.6; 21.33). While Kornfeld describes the avoidance of קדש as intentional, he does not suggest a reason for its absence. Von Rad's depiction of the Yahwist's work offers one possible reason; here the cultic orientation has been

holy, taboos concerning holy ground, contagion, and so on. The significance of burying the 'foreign gods' in Gen. 35.4 has been variously interpreted (see Hamilton 1995: 375). On Gen. 28 and 35 as *hieroi logoi*, see, for example, Coats 1983: 206-208, 236-39. Wright (1992: 243) is more cautious, saying only that places where God appeared to patriarchs who set up pillars or altars 'may be considered sacred'; as examples he cites Shechem in Gen. 12, and Bethel in Gen. 28 and 35.

16. Wright adds that other principal phenomena associated with holy places, such as sacrifice, are also absent (1996: 306). He therefore concedes that the argument for the garden's holiness is circumstantial. For Wright, the primary evidence for the garden's sanctity is the presence of the deity (1996: 307; cf. 310), although he also claims that plausibility of the garden's holiness is increased by the fact that other J tales in the primeval history (e.g. Gen. 4 and Noah's clean animals) 'reflect cultic themes and interests' (1996: 311). Wright (1996: 324) believes that 'a diachronic explanation provides a solution' to the perceived problem of holiness in the garden, by separating Gen. 2–3 into an original 'paradise' story, which includes the theme of the garden's holiness, and a 'creation story'. This strategy also requires him to bifurcate Yahweh's character. In the creation story God is helpful and beneficent, while in the paradise material he is a jealous deity (1996: 326). By 'jealous', Wright does not have in mind the later implications of Yahweh as an אל קנא, which I discuss below. Rather, he is interpreting God's motivation for prohibiting the eating of the tree of knowledge as 'jealousy about the unique attributes of divine beings… He does not want people to be like the gods' (1996: 319).

17. In addition, חלל and טמא (both in piel) appear only once in the book of Genesis, both in contexts of tabooed sexual relations outside a cult setting (BDB 320, 379), but with no outburst of divine power of the type dramatized in Lev. 10 or 1 Sam. 6. In Gen. 49.4, חלל is used in reference to Reuben's sleeping with his father's concubine, and טמא appears three times in the rape of Dinah episode, beginning with Jacob's interpretation of what happened to Dinah as 'defilement' (v. 5).

18. Cf. the use of the niphal participle נוֹרָא in Exod. 15.11 and Judg. 13.6. In contrast to Kornfeld, Otto (2004: 153-54) points to this passage to support his view of holy fear.

stripped away from old traditions, 'as though they had changed into a chrysalis and emerged in new, free form, [having] risen high above their sacred, native soil' (1972: 29).[19]

Whether or not we accept von Rad's portrayal of the Yahwist's lofty ideas, at Sinai we are brought back down to earth. That is, we are confronted with a concept of sacred soil which involves the danger of proximity to God and the holy. People who try to fight God or his wonder-working prophets on *this* soil—or who even contact the holy in all innocence—can end up like Nadab and Abihu, Korah,[20] the citizens of Beth Shemesh, Uzzah, or even the forty-two little youngsters mauled by bears when the 'holy man of God' Elisha is on the road to Bethel.[21]

Of course, the danger of violent death exists in Genesis as well. Within the human sphere, Cain kills Abel, Simeon and Levi slaughter the Shechemites, and Joseph's brothers attempt to kill him. And while military encounters are reported in Genesis 14, there are no detailed

19. Von Rad describes characters in Genesis as moving 'in a partially or even completely "cult-less" atmosphere' (1972: 29). Admittedly, von Rad is talking about the Yahwist and not all of Genesis, but, as Whybray (1987: 95) points out, for von Rad the importance of J dwarfs the other sources. Cf. Brett (2002: 129), who notes in passing that 'Genesis has no interest in the cult of holiness, i.e., the text has no interest in the defining characteristic of Priestly tradition'.

20. Moses' implicit status as a unique holy man is called into question by his first-cousin Korah in Num. 16. Moses tells Korah and his 'band' (עדה) that in the morning Yahweh will make known 'who is his and who holy', and cause the one chosen to come near to him (Num. 16.5). Moses himself sets the terms for the test. Korah and his band are to put incense and fire into their censers before Yahweh; the man that Yahweh chooses, 'he is the holy one' (v. 7). Korah and company are annihilated. Even though the issue here is the priesthood, the main party whose status as 'the holy one' is in dispute is not Aaron but Moses. Although there are many ambiguities in the text as it stands, Aaron is clearly passive and silent in these scenes, as he is later, when Moses directs him to go between the living and the dead. Korah himself focuses on Moses as his adversary.

21. 2 Kgs 2.23-25; 4.9. Perhaps we could view characters in Genesis as illustrating what Wright (1992: 246) calls 'the neutral and basic state [of the] profane and pure', lacking the dynamic elements of holiness and impurity. In his schema four states are possible: profane and pure, profane and impure, holy and pure, and holy and impure. 'Profane and pure' is a neutral and basic state since it lacks dynamic elements of holiness and impurity. Klawans (2004: 2044) also posits 'four possible states'. These are the 'diametrically opposed statuses of ritual impurity and holiness', and, in between, two 'intermediary—and, in many cases, overlapping—positions'. Thus, 'in the absence of impurity one can be considered to be pure (טהור)', and 'in the absence of holiness one can be considered to be "common" (חל)'.

accounts of killing, no reports of the defeated kings being tortured or their corpses mutilated, and no 'body-counts'.[22] In addition, Abraham intends to sacrifice Isaac on God's orders and Esau expresses the intention of killing Jacob (Gen. 27.41). A number of characters fear (rightly or wrongly) that others intend to kill them.[23] God too employs lethal violence, twice on a mass scale with the Flood and Sodom, and twice with individuals, the brothers Er and Onan. He also plagues Egypt and Gerar, although in neither case is anyone said to have died.[24] And of course he sentences the primordial couple Adam and Eve, and their descendents, to mortality.

Genesis also alludes to later acts of mass violence committed or commanded by Israel's holy divine king. In Gen. 15.13-16 Yahweh informs the anaesthetized[25] Abram that his descendents will be abused as slaves (ועבדום וענו אתם) for four hundred years, and only return to the land of promise when the guilt of the indigenous peoples is 'complete'. This passage is often viewed as a thematic link between Genesis and Exodus. For some scholars it constitutes 'an exquisitely artful interlacing' of the patriarchal stories with later books (Levenson 1993: 88; cf. McConville 2006: 78); for others, it 'proves the rule' that the 'ethos' of these stories is discontinuous with later books (Moberly 1992: 104; cf. Schmid 2006: 31-48). In keeping with the rest of Genesis, 15.13-16 only hints at Yahweh's future violence against the Egyptians (הגוי אשר יעבדו דן אנכי) and leaves unmentioned his later command to exterminate tribes of Canaanites in a holy war (Exod. 23.23; Deut. 7.2, 6; 20.16-18).[26] In terms of the issue of Yahweh's relative morality in

22. The violence exerted by the coalition of great powers (Gen. 14.5, 7) is described only with the rather general verb 'to strike' (הכה); the same is true for Abraham's subsequent victory over, and pursuit after, the four great kings (vv. 15, 17).

23. This fear is expressed by the patriarch in all three wife–sister stories; in the case of Isaac there turns out to be no rational basis for his fear. In addition, Jacob fears that Esau intends to kill him when he learns that his brother is approaching with an entourage of four hundred, and then fears that his neighbors will attack him because of his sons' massacre of the Shechemites.

24. While intimations of holy danger and contagion may be present in the stories of Sarah entering the harems of foreign kings, when we come to the rape and acquisition of Jacob's daughter Dinah by a foreign prince there is no mention of any plague breaking out. Nor is the punishment meted out by Dinah's brothers viewed as just punishment for violations of Yahweh's holiness, either by the narrator or by Jacob (Gen. 34.30; 49.5-7).

25. That is, a תרדמה 'fell upon' Abram (15.12).

26. Within Genesis, the only hint of the latter devastation is the ironic word-play in 15.15-16, which juxtaposes Abraham's death in peace (בשלום) with Israel's return to the

Genesis and later books, the most startling aspect of this forecast is that Abram is being told that his descendents will endure centuries of grievous suffering through no fault of their own![27]

In general, the divinely executed punishments of death reported in Genesis are qualitatively different from the deaths caused by God after we encounter holiness in Exodus 3.[28] To give just one preliminary example, the destruction of the Egyptian first-born resembles the destruction of all living things in the Flood and the destruction of Sodom in being a divine response to human actions which God considers to be evil. However, in the case of the Egyptian plagues, the issues of human violence, immorality and incivility highlighted in Genesis are less salient than lack of respect for Yahweh's dignity, the power of his holiness, and his ultimate authority, as well as the dignity of his 'son' Israel.[29]

land when the Amorites' guilt is complete (שלם), a return which involves the Amorites' destruction in war.

27. No reason is offered here—or elsewhere—to explain why Yahweh could not have had Abraham's family wait in comfort in Hawaii until the Amorites had filled their sump of guilt sufficiently for the Israelites to pump them out of Canaan. Surprisingly, modern commentators rarely mention this problem, while older commentators like Calvin tend to justify the mass suffering by suggesting that in his dealings with his own people the Lord 'always makes a beginning from death'. Calvin adds another edifying message to the story by adding to the text. In his version, the fact that Abram 'acquiesced in an oracle so sorrowful, and felt assured' shows that his faith was 'admirable and singular' (2001: 145-46). In point of fact, Abram's words are not quoted, and nothing is said about his thoughts or feelings after he descends into the תרדמה. According to Van Seters (1992: 320), Gen. 15.13-16 is 'a theodicy of the exodus'. Whether it constitutes a satisfying justification for the exodus is another matter. In either case, the passage provides no 'theodicy' at all for the protracted suffering of the Israelites *prior to* the exodus. On the issue of Yahweh's morality in Genesis and later books, see below.

28. This includes the new elements of holy ground, holy objects, and the possibility (or reality) of being a holy people after Exod. 3. The holiness of the people is asserted as a reality in Deut. 7.6; 14.2, 21.

29. Cf. Knohl (1995: 138) states: 'The Ten Plagues narrative does not portray a righteous judge seeking to rescue his people from the…Pharaoh. God's main purpose in smiting Egypt is to make his name known in the midst of the land' (cf. Saggs 1978: 37 and contrast Moberly 1992: 97-98). The protection of the Hebrew slaves from death of the first-born involves the smearing of blood on the lintel of Hebrew homes. However, the paschal celebration also involves the purity of circumcision, as Propp (1998: 238-39) points out. The apotropaic effect of the blood from Zipporah's action in Exod. 4 issues from the circumcising of her son and her address to the 'bridegroom of blood'. Does the blood, especially the blood of circumcision, protect one from the danger of

Indeed, the key difference between Genesis and the post-Exodus 3 worlds may concern the nature and consequences of human contact with the divine, a difference which cannot be adequately explained by the fact that the various sources which have been woven into the text as it stands may have different notions of the holy.[30] Jacob does not drop dead from contacting God, as others do later from touching[31]—or merely looking at (or into)[32]— God's holy ark. In the latter instance, the

contact with Yahweh or his 'destroyer' (המשחית, Exod. 12.23; 2 Sam. 24.16)? In addition to the relative lack of danger experienced by Jacob in Gen. 32 *vis-à-vis* Exod. 4, we might point to the relative safety of Abraham in Egypt (Gen. 12) and the deadly danger endured by his descendents in Exod. 12. It is also significant that danger from both God and humans like the king of Egypt seems to be considerably greater in biblical narrative after Exod. 3; the innocuousness and ineptitude of the earlier Pharaoh's attempts to kill Hebrew male babies in Exod. 1 increases this impression. He is easily fooled, and his plans are easily foiled, by a series of five women, ranging from Hebrew slaves to his own daughter.

30. This is particularly a problem with Knohl's interpretation of the 'revolution' within the priestly corpus concerning the relationship between God and humans from the 'Genesis period' to the 'Moses period' (1995: 141); see n. 4 above.

31. In 2 Sam. 6.6 Uzzah takes hold of the ark to steady it. God then strikes Uzzah there על־השל (v. 7), a difficult phrase which seems to indicate an inadvertent (or at least undefined) error. As Campbell points out (2005: 66), the narrator's emphasis is on David's reaction to the killing rather than the nature of Uzzah's actions. Whybray (2000: 11) describes that reaction as 'a real terror in the face of a terrifying and utterly unpredictable God'. Various attempts have been made to find Uzzah's guilty of a sin worthy of a capital punishment. Leibowitz (1980: 91) concludes that 'saving the ark from falling when touch of it is prohibited [is not] a token of respect for the will of God but rather of rebellion against Him and His will'. More recently, Haase argues that Uzzah was leading a priestly rebellion against David's plans to sequester the ark in Jerusalem, bringing about his death. In contrast, Campbell insists that 'as a son of Abinadab, no one was better qualified than Uzzah to touch the ark' (2005: 66). Propp (2006: 166) and Steussy (2000: 131) both note that the verb describing Yahweh's anger 'breaking out' against Uzzah is used in Exod. 19.22 in a warning that Yahweh may break out against the priests who approach Yahweh if they do not sanctify themselves. Propp claims that 'the root *prṣ* describes a semi-spontaneous outburst of divine wrath and consequent damage' in 2 Sam. 6.8 and 1 Chron. 15.13. He does not explain what he means by '*semi*-spontaneous'.

32. In 1 Sam. 6.19 the men of Beth-Shemesh look at or into the ark of Yahweh. Their earlier joy at the return of the ark, and their sacrifice of the milch cows to Yahweh, imply that they had no intention of disrespecting their God by their actions. Nevertheless, they suffer more devastation than was experienced by the Philistines, who had taken and repeatedly transported the ark. Some commentators assume that the people had violated a taboo by looking at or into the ark (if that is what ראו ב means here [see,

survivors at Beth-Shemesh are well aware what caused the destruction of their fellow citizens: God's holiness. They ask, '"Who is able to stand before Yahweh, this holy God?"' (v. 20). It is as though Jacob and the other *chutzpah*-filled residents of Genesis were receiving a "vaccination" of holiness when they experienced the fearful divine presence, rather than contracting its lethal, contagious essence at full strength.

Yahweh's Attacks on Jacob and Moses: Is the Holy God Amoral and Demonic?

Contrasting the divine attacks on Jacob and Moses can clarify this difference. When Moses first hears God's voice speak from the *s^{e}neh* bush at Sinai, telling him that he is standing on holy ground, he hides his face because he is afraid to look upon God (Exod. 3.4-6). Similarly, Jacob is afraid after God speaks to him in a dream, for he realizes that Yahweh is 'in this place'. He even declares that his location is 'fearful' and calls it 'Bethel'.[33] At the same time, Jacob is so far from displaying the dread which is later expressed by the Israelites at Sinai—or by Samson's father Manoah (Judg. 13.22)[34]—that he aggressively negotiates extra perks for himself beyond the wonderful gifts which Yahweh has just promised to him.[35]

e.g., Campbell 2003: 81]; LXX has 'saw'). For Josephus (*Ant*. 6.1.4), the problem is that the victims were not priests.

33. Scholars including Westermann (1985: 460) and Hamilton (1995: 239, 244) take for granted that the theme of holiness is present in Gen. 28. This is understandable in terms of the element of fear, which is usually assumed to be caused by the presence of the numinous in a divinely favored location. Rashi's imaginative and ingenious explanation for the angels on Jacob's ladder assumes that this theophany occurs near the boundary between Holy Land and other land: 'Those angels that accompanied him in Eretz Israel do not go outside of Eretz Israel and ascended to heaven. [Then] the angels of outside of Eretz Israel descended to accompany him' (Davis 2004: 314). As noted by Sarna (1989: 199), Jacob does not erect a sanctuary at Bethel after the theophany. In contrast, Coats contends that one of the consequences of Jacob's vow 'will be Jacob's embracing…the place where he stands as sanctuary and the wealth God gives him as a source of support for the sanctuary' (1983: 206-208).

34. In Gen. 32.31 Jacob claims to have seen God and had his life preserved (ותנצל נפשי). This would seem to anticipate Gideon's and Manoah's later expectation that one can die from having seen God.

35. Hamilton characterizes Jacob as having had to 'contend with his own fears all his life' (1995: 377). In reference to Jacob at Bethel, Hamilton claims that Jacob is 'frightened' both here and elsewhere in his career; in fact, 'Jacob's life is laced with

Similarly, Jacob exhibits no fear during his nocturnal wrestling with God,[36] even though he had been mortally afraid of his brother Esau shortly before (Gen. 32.8). Nor does Jacob acknowledge Penuel as a holy location after the theophany, even though he 'saw' God there. As Köckert (2003: 171) points out, this 'victorious wayfarer' does not come to the goal of his journey in Penuel or establish a cult or sanctuary there. Admittedly, the place where Yahweh later attacks Moses or his son is not made into a sanctuary either. In fact, it is not even named. However, as I will discuss below, the attack on Moses takes place within the context of a mission which directly involves Yahweh's holiness.

Comparing these two intentionally obscure and disconcerting stories is not without its own dangers. I say 'intentionally' because in both stories the identity of the protagonists is often hidden from our view by the use of pronouns instead of proper names. While there are a number of similarities between the stories, each must also be viewed in terms of its larger context in Genesis or Exodus in order for their meaning and functions to be established, and for the differences between them to be fully perceptible.[37] Here I will focus primarily on those aspects of the stories which might shed light on the question whether the report in Exodus illustrates a 'new' relation between the holy God and humans.

Most modern commentators on Genesis 32 assume that Jacob is grievously wounded by God's touch, and is afflicted with this injury for the remainder of his life.[38] As Turner (2000: 143) puts it, Jacob's 'limp

fear' (1995: 244). Insofar as there is any truth to this overstatement, the fear is a reaction to situations which Jacob himself has created through his habit of tricking and betraying those nearest to him.

36. Jacob, and later King Josiah (2 Chron. 35.21-22), are not the only human characters in ancient literature who are said to 'fight' a god. Euripides coined the word θεομαχεῖν (to 'fight god') to describe the young Theban king Pentheus's resistance to the god Dionysus in *The Bacchae* (see, e.g., Kamerbeek 1948: 274, 278).

37. Westermann (1985: 516-17) seriously overstates the similarities. He contends that 'the manner of the attack is the same', that Jacob is as 'defenseless and unsuspecting' as the victim in Exod. 4, that the attack in both cases takes place prior to a 'dangerous meeting', and that the attacker in both stories is a demon. None of these assertions are supported by the present text of Gen. 32. (Admittedly, Jacob fears that the meeting with Esau presents a danger to himself, but his fears turn out to be unfounded.)

38. Tubbs *et al*. (2008: 157) note that in Post-Biblical Hebrew גיד can refer to a variety of bodily tissues. Hoenig (1997: 684-87) lists a variety of possible injuries which might have been suffered by the patriarch, concluding that Jacob 'appears to have sustained neurological injury to his sciatic nerve as well as musculoskeletal damage to his hip….[causing] a *temporary* limping gait' (684, emphasis added). Hamilton (1995:

defines his future. As he hobbles toward his meeting with Esau…he must trust…on God's protection, or Esau's mercy on a cripple if he is to survive.' Yet the text provides no basis for assuming that Esau views Jacob as a vulnerable hobbling 'cripple' or that Jacob is counting on Esau having mercy for his disabled twin. In fact, nothing at all is said about Jacob limping after Genesis 32. In ch. 33 Jacob tells Esau to go ahead not because *he* can only move slowly, but because of the slow pace of the animals and children.[39] Lack of mention of a permanent injury may have prompted the rabbinic tradition that the healing power of the sun cured Jacob's injury.[40] Even within ch. 32, Jacob's continued grip after the opponent's action does not indicate that Jacob had suffered a severe blow, unless we attribute to the patriarch a heroic ability to endure or ignore intense pain, or conclude that he is afflicted with congenital analgesia.

Genesis 32 as a whole emphasizes the rewards Jacob receives for his tenacity and perseverance rather than reporting a close call with death from contact with the holy God. God apparently 'throws the fight' and once again rewards his feisty amoral follower. In contrast, God *is* said to seek the death of Moses or his son[41] in Exodus 4. Jacob does not have

327, 330-31) believes that the expression נגע ב (in Gen. 32.26 [H]) may indicate that the opponent 'struck' Jacob's hip socket rather than merely touching it. Sarna (1989: 227) points out that Jacob would have been unable even to limp, let alone continue wrestling, if he had dislocated his hip. He describes the injury as a 'strain'. Kaminsky (1995: 97 n. 7) notes that the 'exact meaning [of the verb יקע] is unclear'. He points out that it is used both in reference to Jacob's 'dislocated' thigh and to a means of execution in Num. 25.4. In terms of the theme of holiness, while v. 33 adds that one cannot eat the sinew or tendon (or sciatic nerve?) of the thigh (גיד הנשה) because of Jacob's injury, most scholars have not concluded that this part of an animal's body has become sacred due to God having touched Jacob there.

39. One might object that it is not unusual for an infirmity to go unmentioned in biblical narrative. For example, Moses' supposed speech impediment, which Propp (1998: 230) views as a 'humiliating disability', is not a factor once Moses and Aaron negotiate with Pharaoh, and would seem to be contradicted by the eloquence and length of Moses' farewell speeches in Deuteronomy. Cf. the lack of any mention of Moses' brow sending out beams of light after Exod. 34.

40. See Gen. 32.32, Mal. 3.20 and the sources cited by Ginzberg (1968: I, 388-89; V, 308).

41. For rabbinic opinions on whether it is Moses or his son who is the target of Yahweh's attack, see Greenberg 1969: 111-13. Childs (1974: 103), Houtman (1993: 447) and Propp (1998: 233), among many others, favor Moses as the intended victim. The fact that Yahweh had just been talking about killing sons (of the Egyptians) lends support to the notion that Moses' son is the victim. However, other factors imply that

his wives present to help save him as does Moses, nor does he need them to be present. He does quite well by himself. No apotropaic blood needs to be spilt here.[42]

While Jacob responds to the divine attack in a way which seems extremely aggressive and self-confident, Moses seems entirely passive, or at least immobilized. Greenberg believes that the motive for the attack is 'no clearer' in Exodus 4 than it was for the attack on Jacob, adding that 'it is not evident that fault lay with any of the protagonists' (1969: 111; cf. Kaplan 1981: 72). Nevertheless, many commentators on Exod. 4.24-26 *do* fault the protagonist, working on the assumption that such a divine attack *must* constitute punishment for a serious prior misdeed, the same strategy which is often used to explain the unhappy fate of subjectively innocent victims of the holy (see n. 31 above). In other words, they seek a crime to fit the punishment. Propp offers an extreme example of this strategy. He does not follow those who conclude that Moses is being punished for neglecting to circumcise one of his sons, or that Moses remained too half-hearted or desultory about fulfilling his mission even after he left for Egypt.[43] Instead, Propp

Moses himself is the target. For example, if the attack is aimed at the son, why is it Zipporah and not Moses who then takes action? The narrator's use of the verb בקש in v. 24 also implies that Moses is the target, for several reasons. As noted by Kaplan, Exod. 2.15; 4.19, and 4.24 are the only three places in the Pentateuch where this verb is used in connection with killing. In the first two cases Moses is the one who is to be killed, implying that Moses may also be the intended victim in the third case. Kaplan believes that this string of appearances illustrates a 'profound confusion of identities, this time between God and Pharaoh' (1981: 69-70), both of whom, in this reading, seek to kill Moses. And this verb is also used in reference to those who allegedly seek to kill the Moses-like prophets Elijah and Jeremiah (see 1 Kgs 19.10, 14; Jer. 11.21). Kaplan concludes that Exod. 4.24-26 is constructed in a way which 'allows for and indeed compels *both* readings' (1981: 65).

42. Köckert (2003: 162) rejects the view of Westermann and Gunkel, who infer from Exod. 4 that the attack on Jacob in Gen. 32 'had as its goal the killing of the patriarch'. Köckert rightly notes that what was 'explicitly expressed as the intention [in Exod. 4] is significantly absent in Gen. 32, which is also unaware of any magical defense'. Some scholars (e.g. Propp 1998: 238) speculate that Zipporah actually smears or 'dabs' the blood on Moses' penis. There is no direct evidence for this in the text; in fact, we do not know at whose feet or legs she places the excised foreskin. Cf. the suggestion that God touches Jacob's 'scrotum' or 'genitals' in Gen. 32 (e.g. Hamilton 1995: 331; Smith 1990: 466-67).

43. Lockshin (1997: 48) notes the talmudic charge (*b. Ned.* 32a) that Moses is being punished for 'dawdling' in the performance of circumcision and Rashbam's view that Moses had dawdled in returning to Egypt to free the Jews.

contends that Moses is being punished for having killed the Egyptian many years earlier,[44] in spite of the fact that there is no evidence in the Pentateuch that God disapproved of Moses' act against the Egyptian.[45]

Propp is operating on the assumption that Yahweh's actions 'are rarely if ever irrational', even though he himself had defined קדש as the numinous (1998: 234, 200), which *is* irrational, according to Otto. A number of scholars argue that a 'rational' explanation is simply not appropriate when coming to terms with these nocturnal divine attacks. For example, Greenberg (1969: 111) believes that the lack of motive for the attack in Exodus 4 'is part of the non-rationality of these stories: the irrational is an accepted part of life'. Kaplan (1981: 71-72) agrees that there is a 'mysterious, non-rational, almost demonic' atmosphere to the story and a quality of 'moral opaqueness' which makes it 'an error to seek a reason' for the attack.

Kaplan's mention of a 'demonic atmosphere' in Exodus 4 recalls the once-popular theory that in earlier versions of the story of Jacob at the river the attacker was a demon. This notion was also applied to Exod. 4.24-26 by some early interpreters (see, e.g., Houtman 1993: 439-47). Most recent commentators do not favor this interpretation. Westermann is an exception; he concludes that the attacker in the *present* text of *both* stories is a 'hostile demon or an evil spirit' (1985: 516-17).[46]

However, a number of modern scholars do agree that the divine attack against Moses or his son may be a 'demonic' or 'satanic' act by *Yahweh himself*, or reveal a 'demonic' aspect of Yahweh's nature. For example, Houtman (1993: 435) concludes that 'to the writer of Exodus

44. Following the logic of commentators including Propp, if the victim of the divine attack is Moses' son, this could be construed as an example of the sons being punished for the sins of their fathers. If so, it would parallel the tenth plague, in which the first-born of Egypt die for the sins of their 'father', the Pharaoh.

45. Nor does the narrator point out the irony of a manslayer being the one to announce to his people (and to record for posterity) the commandment not to kill.

46. The most recent and thorough refutation of this notion for Gen. 32 is by Köckert (2003: 160-74). Propp (1998: 240-41) asks 'is Yahweh among the demons?' in Exod. 4.24-26, and answers that the Israelites 'were forced to impute to Yahweh a degree of maleficence in order to explain reality'. He then adds that this story also depicts 'Yahweh's dread unpredictability' and, like the book of Job, 'probes the seemingly irrational cruelty of the universe and its Maker'. Propp does not attempt to show how his attribution of irrational cruelty and maleficence to Yahweh is compatible with his earlier assertion that Yahweh's actions 'are rarely if ever irrational', or his use of that assumption to argue that Moses must have committed a crime for which the attack is an appropriate punishment.

it appears not to have been an insuperable problem to attribute to YHWH a (in our eyes) demonic role'.[47] Kaiser (2000: 81) goes so far as to describe Yahweh as behaving 'quite openly as a bloodthirsty vampire'. Otto assumes that Yahweh's attack is an example of 'incalculable and arbitrary' divine wrath or ὀργή.[48] He assigns this divine behavior to a 'lower stage of the *numen*' in the 'chain of development of religious feelings', which 'has nothing to do with moral qualities' (2004: 21, 92-93). Similarly, Buber (1958: 58-59) contends that 'the manner in which Yhvh meets Moses as a demon'[49] illustrates 'the early stage of Israelite religion'.

More recently, Köckert (2003: 178-79) has stressed that if we are to understand the story of the attack on Jacob, we need to correct 'our harmless ideas' of what a person in antiquity might connect with a deity: 'Yahweh is just as little a distillation or prisoner of our moral ideas as any other ancient god. In this sense Yahweh too is undoubtedly a-moral'. Kaminsky goes further. Not only is there is 'an amoral dimension to God's behavior', but holiness '*in general*…and the consequences that flow from it, often operate in what could be termed an amoral universe' (1995: 63, 88-89, emphasis added).[50]

47. Just before the attack, Yahweh states emphatically that *he himself* will kill the first-born of Egypt (v. 23). In Exod. 12.29 Yahweh does so. In v. 23 Moses had told the elders that Yahweh will strike the Egyptians, but not allow 'the destroyer' to strike you who have applied the blood to your doorways (cf. 2 Sam. 24.16; Ps. 78.49). In contrast, several targumim distance Yahweh from the attack on Moses by having 'the destroyer' seek Moses' life; see *Frag. Targ.* 4.25; *Cod. Neof.* 1, fol. 114a; cf. *Targ. Ps.-J.* 4.25. According to *Jub.* 48.2, the attacker is 'Prince Mastema', that is, Satan.

48. However, there is no explicit mention of divine anger in Exod. 4.24-26, although Yahweh was angry at Moses earlier (v. 14). Otto (2004: 92-93) concludes that if the attack is 'demonic', it is not the act of a 'demon' in the modern sense, but of a *daimon*, which Otto calls a *Vorgott*.

49. Quell has also detected 'an element of daemonic horror' in the laws concerning 'involuntary error' in Lev. 4, because 'unwitting sin can only be spoken of on condition of a good will on the part of the agent'. This element can even make itself felt within the cult, in spite of 'softening' through cultic compensation (1933: 274). In contrast, Milgrom (2000: 730-31) stresses that in the חטאת 'an individual has no responsibility for polluting the sanctuary unconsciously'; therefore, P's concept of impurity is 'a far cry from pagan (demonic) impurity, which indeed is "a non-moral evil power"' (2000: 731). See further in n. 62 below.

50. As illustrations of his first point, Kaminsky cites Lev. 10.1-7 and 2 Sam. 6.6-8. For the amoral aspect of God's behavior he cites both these passages as well as Exod. 4, Num. 16, and Num. 25. Herion (1992: 993) cites Exod. 4 and 2 Sam. 6 (as well as Gen.

On the basis of Genesis 32 and Exodus 4, one could conclude that in this holy 'amoral universe' God likes to encounter his favorites in sparsely populated open spaces at night soon after he has conversed with them, when they are on the way home after a long exile and about to meet their brothers the next day.[51] When Yahweh attacks Moses, the prophet is on a mission he received on the holy ground of Sinai. This mission—when (and if) Moses can reach Egypt safely—involves being an agent of death on Yahweh's behalf; in fact, Yahweh tells Moses that he will kill Egypt's first-born just before he seeks to kill Moses (Exod. 4.21-23). In contrast, Jacob is *not* being employed as a weapon of mass destruction. Nor are the seventy members of his family being enslaved in a foreign country. In fact, the one son who later becomes a chattel slave ends up controlling Egypt and being the means of keeping his family alive and safe. And the Pharaoh whom Jacob encounters in Egypt is a pussycat compared to the ancient Stalins, Mugabes, and Cheneys with whom Moses is forced to deal.

Holiness and the Character of Israel's Divine King

While some scholars emphasize the amorality and 'demonic' aspects of Yahweh's behavior when he attacks his favorite humans, Yahweh also displays new personality traits in Exodus 4—and throughout the Bible after this point—including wrathfulness and jealousy. Otto (2004: 96) contends that Yahweh's wrath and jealousy are both 'encompassed and permeated' by the defining traits of the holy, namely, 'the *tremendum* and *majestas*, the *mysterium* and the augustness of his irrational divine nature (*Gottwesens*)'. According to Muilenburg (1962: 618), 'the dynamistic and daemonic force of [Yahweh's] holy jealousy is great'. He points to the rich biblical vocabulary for divine anger, but of the six

32 and other passages) as examples of 'irrational' behavior and 'inexplicable caprice' by Yahweh.

51. Moreover, in neither case does the narrator mention anything about the victim of the attack telling their brother about the bizarre happenings of the previous night, let alone exclaiming, 'you wouldn't believe what happened on the road last night!' (Jacob, the man who had just claimed to have seen God face to face, tells his hairy brother that seeing Esau's face is like seeing the face of God [Gen. 32.31; 33.10]!) A lesser similarity is that the verb (פגש) used for Yahweh 'meeting' or 'encountering' Moses to kill him is also used of Jacob's and his family's meeting Esau in Gen. 33.8 (cf. 32.18) after Jacob's nocturnal encounter with God, as well as of Moses meeting Aaron in Exod. 4.27.

terms for wrath he cites[52] none is used in reference to God in the book of Genesis. When Abraham aggressively bargains with God about justice in Sodom, he implores God not to be angry at him for his persistence, but there is no hint that God is, or might become, angry. On the contrary, Yahweh is extremely patient and forbearing with Abraham. Herion finds it 'curious' that 'despite much provocation by human sin, God in Genesis is never explicitly said to have "become angry"' (1992: 993). He notes that 'Yahweh's anger (*ʾap*) is kindled for the first time against Moses when the latter attempts to break out of his special calling as deliverer' at the burning bush. These facts lose their 'curiousness' when we recognize that it is the combination of the deadly holiness, wrath, and jealousy of a divine king which first enters the biblical world at this decisive point.

Nor does Yahweh take his people's possession of idols and 'other gods' as personally in Genesis as he will later. Beginning with Exodus, his jealous insistence on his people's exclusive loyalty and worship brings death, disaster, and ruin to those whom he hates for hating him (Exod. 20.5; Deut 5.9). In contrast, in Genesis 31 neither God nor a divine or human messenger of God registers dissatisfaction at Laban or Rachel for possessing, let alone stealing, תרפים. And while in ch. 35 God tells Jacob to erect an altar at Bethel, he says nothing about the people divesting themselves of idols or other gods in order to avoid his hot displeasure and the death it could bring.[53] It is Jacob himself who includes the instruction to remove 'the foreign gods (אלהי הנכר) that are among you' when he tells those with him to clean themselves and change their clothes (Gen. 35.2).[54]

For Sarna, the significance of Jacob's order to put away these 'idols' is that 'for the first time in the Bible, there now appears a recognition of tension between the religion of Israel and that of its neighbors' (1989:

52. The terms are קצף, חרון, אף, חמה, זעם, and עברה.

53. We should also keep in mind that while ancient readers may have understood the stories in Genesis in terms of the cult practices and notions about holiness of their own time (and may have viewed these stories as reporting the origin of those practices), Genesis itself describes a world in which the inhabitants are *not* aware of those practices and later associations with holiness.

54. As Hamilton (1995: 375) points out, these actions are not mentioned as being carried out when Jacob erects the altar later in the chapter. In ordering this ritual cleansing, Jacob uses the verb טהר, not קדש. Kornfeld (2003: 527) notes that while קדש has no synonyms, it is related to טהר, since being consecrated presupposes a condition of cultic acceptability and purity.

239).[55] However, if any tension is indicated, it would seem to be solely on Jacob's part; no foreigners express or exhibit tension between their gods and Israel's god in Genesis. To the extent that Jacob does exhibit 'tension', it foreshadows an appropriate reaction to his god's *later* jealous exclusivism. The patriarch does not pulverize or otherwise obliterate these so-called idols, as do Moses and later cult reformers. Nor does Jacob—or the narrator, or God—castigate the people (including Laban and Rachel) for possessing these 'gods', let alone punish them.

Jenson notes that one of the definitions of holiness offered by biblical scholars involves Yahweh's character. He cites Olyan's view that holiness is Yahweh's 'quintessential characteristic' (Olyan 2000: 17), noting that this 'helpfully corrects approaches to holiness which suggest that it is an impersonal force or power' (Jenson 2003: 104-105; cf. 121). And because character is indicated above all 'by how a person acts in a story', we must understand holiness 'in relation to the actions and purposes of the holy God' (2003: 104). As an example Jenson points to God's wish that the people become holy (104-105). Rogerson (2003: 21) also believes that holiness in the Old Testament is 'ultimately grounded in the moral character' of Israel's God, whose chief attributes he takes to be 'unfailing love, mercy and forgiveness'. Now, if King Yahweh's holiness is grounded in his moral character, we must assess his character in terms of his actions and purposes as a moral agent, *including* his responses to perceived disrespect for his defining trait of holiness. We are then forced to ask whether actions such as destroying vast numbers of people in Beth-Shemesh for looking at the ark express the character traits of unfailing love, mercy and forgiveness, or immoral grandiosity and rage.

Or should we defend these divine actions as *just punishment*, on the grounds that they are commensurate with the dignity of the offended party?[56] Parker describes the Greek gods as proprietors on a grand scale, who demand the same respect and deference as human proprietors, but

55. Sarna speculates that these 'idols' are probably household gods from the spoils of Shechem or items carried by the captives taken from the city, and perhaps include Rachel's תרפים (1989: 240).

56. Douglas observes that 'defilement as a violation of holiness is a particularly apt expression for an attack on the honor of God perceived as a feudal lord' (1999: 147). Douglas describes Israel as a 'patronal society' with Yahweh in the role of patron and overlord. The overlord's power protects his people, possessions, and places, 'and to insult any of them is an insult to his honour'. On Yahweh as a king, overlord, and royal parent to Israel, see below.

on a proportionally large scale. Here 'the sacred appears as the intensely venerable rather than the absolutely other' (1983: 152-53). In the biblical context, Yahweh is the ultimate proprietor. A number of passages insist that everything under heaven belongs to him[57]—including human thoughts and behavior—and the covenant laws reinforce this point. In this context, intentional and unintentional sin, and 'moral' and 'ritual'[58] impurity, can be indistinguishable from offending the deity, at least in terms of their dangerous consequences.[59] Since Yahweh is not a representation of natural forces, the expressions of his proprietorship and holiness also express his personality. Thus, the death of a character like Uzzah is not the impersonal working out of a natural force like electricity, which is indifferent to human intentions and divine moral considerations. It is an expression of the wrathful *person* Yahweh being indifferent to human intentions and to the morality of Uzzah's actions.[60]

57. As Yahweh himself puts it in Job 41.3 (H), מי הקדימני ואשלם תחת כל השמים לי הוא (NIV: 'Who has a claim against me that I must pay? Everything under heaven belongs to me'). Also see Deut. 10.14; Ezek. 18.4; Pss. 24.1; and 50.10-12; cf. Num. 16.5; Deut. 1.17; 1 Chron. 29.16; Ps. 22.28.

58. Klawans (2000: 25) adds that a few biblical narratives view at least one form of ritual defilement as a punishment for moral shortcomings. He points to Miriam's skin disease in Num. 12.10-15 and King Uzziah's similar ailment in 2 Chron. 26.16-21. He does not consider the possibility that Miriam's affliction may not be due to 'moral shortcomings', but the result of having offended King Yahweh by demeaning the divine king's most trusted human courtier Moses.

59. Gooch (2000: 150) notes that 'in several places Otto seems to have accorded primacy to the amoral religious moment', and quotes Feigel's remark that 'the numinous is not yet even for a moment useable as a criterion for distinguishing even between God and Satan'. As Parker (n. 8 above) points out in relation to ancient Greek religion, it can be 'extraordinarily hard to draw a line of demarcation between pollution and the consequences of divine anger', since 'for the outsider their practical consequences were the same' (1983: 10, 6). Parker notes that while certain unavoidable physical conditions are μιάσματα, ἄγος is a product of avoidable even if involuntary transgression. A corpse, for example, diffuses μίασμα, but ἄγος is only created if a survivor denies it the divinely sanctioned rite of burial (1983: 8). In the biblical context, Milgrom (1983: 78) points to persons who do not purify themselves after contact with a corpse as an illustration of the 'axiom, common to all ancient Near Eastern cultures, that impurity is the implacable foe of holiness wherever it exists; it assaults the sacred realm even from afar'.

60. No wonder David is angry, afraid, and unwilling to bring home the holy (2 Sam. 6.8-9)! Complicating matters further is Yahweh's unpredictability when he responds to seemingly similar 'offenses'. For example, making burnt offerings can result in one king being driven mad and being rejected while other monarchs do the same thing with no sign of displeasure from Yahweh or his prophets (1 Sam. 13.9-14; 15.15, 21-22;

In Genesis, Yahweh had predicted that the nation composed of Abraham's descendents would have a human king, but he does *not* say that he himself would become Israel's king (Gen. 17.6, 16; 35.11). Nor is this divine role forecast in the poetic blessings uttered by Jacob prior to his death (Gen. 49.1-27). It is Exodus which first reports that Yahweh has taken on the role of Israel's suzerain (Exod. 15.18; cf. Num 23.21; Deut 33.5). Israel's song at the sea announces that Yahweh, the incomparably fearful (נורא) and holy 'man of war', will reign eternally as their king (Exod. 15.3-18). The Sinai covenant then binds Israel to become distinct from the other nations as the special loyal vassal (סגלה, 'treasure')[61] of their holy suzerain. To fulfill their part in this new relationship Israel must become 'a kingdom of priests and holy nation' (Exod. 19.3-6).

This kingdom is fraught with danger for the subjects who must negotiate the new zones of holiness and avoid impurity, constantly keeping in mind their ruler's traits of jealousy and often amoral wrath.[62] The danger is already present when Yahweh offers the covenant to Israel. The people tremble[63] in fear of dying before and again after the giving of the 'ten words'. Yahweh's explicit instructions to Moses also make it

2 Sam. 6.17-18; 24.25; 1 Kgs 3.15; 8.64-65; cf. 2 Kgs 16.12-16). In this sense the danger of Yahweh's holiness is unlike nuclear power, which, in contrast, is consistently and predictably dangerous.

61. Cf. Propp (2006: 157): 'The vassal with special privileges was the king's "treasure" (Hebrew *s^{e}gullâ*)'.

62. According to Maccoby (1999: 168-69), if Milgrom's understanding of biblical laws concerning unwitting sins were correct, 'the observant Israelite' would have had to 'have been in a constant state of anxiety about ritual impurity'. While Maccoby does not believe that the laws necessitate such hypervigilance and anxiety, S.R. Hirsch thinks that one *should* be 'anxious' lest one carelessly commit an unwitting sin; he cites Isa. 66.2 (וחרד על דברי) for support (quoted in Leibowitz 1980: 28-29). Mary Douglas shares Maccoby's concern for the practicality of 'taboo-systems'. In her view, taboos 'protect the local consensus on how the world is organised', in part by threatening 'specific dangers' (including contagion) if its classificatory code is not respected (1993: 157-58; 2002: xi, xiii). Douglas believes that societies build 'a fund of latitude' into their systems in order to make them function smoothly. A taboo-system 'that allows for a large amount of unintentional taboo-breaking will also have an array of reconciling remedies', which are 'easy, and open to all who wish for it' (1993: 157). In the case of the biblical law on sin offerings, when you learn by divination what you have done wrong, 'you must do the ritual. By this device arguing and protesting innocence can be quickly dismissed, and the validity of the oracle is not brought into question.'

63. Exod. 19.16 (חרד); 20.18 (15) (נוע).

clear that death will result from approaching, including for the purpose of looking. Ordinary people and priests again need to do sanctifying rituals to avoid death. Toward the end of Exodus 20 Moses tells the people not to fear because God is testing them and teaching them to have his 'fear' before their faces as a deterrent from sinning (v. 17). The report ends with another account of the people staying at a distance[64] while Moses approaches God (v. 18), underscoring the exceptional status (if not nature) of Moses, who is asked to approach Yahweh on the people's behalf. Moses is the exception that proves the rule about the danger of contact with the holy.[65]

Conclusion

Having charted the ways in which Genesis differs from later books in its presentation of God and his holiness, other questions may well arise. For example: *Why* does Genesis differ theologically? What theological functions do these differences serve? Why did the final redactors of the

64. Moses calls attention to this spatial distinction again in Deuteronomy, expanding the extent of the people's fear of being consumed by the great fire because they heard the voice of Yahweh their God. This fear is expressed to Moses by all the elders and tribal heads, and Yahweh himself applauds their desire to have Moses be their intermediary (Deut. 5.23-31). In the preceding chapter Moses had already asked his listeners whether another nation has heard the voice of God from out of the midst of fire and survived (Deut. 4.33; cf. 5.26). At the beginning of ch. 5 Moses claims that Yahweh talked to the people 'face in face' out of the fire (פנים בפנים, Deut. 5.4). In these speeches, hearing Yahweh and seeing him both have potentially lethal consequences.

65. Moses' uniqueness in respect to holiness and danger is exhibited most dramatically when he descends Sinai in Exod. 34.29. The narrator tells us that the 'skin of his face was horn-like' or 'shone with horn-like beams' (see Propp 2006: 618; Houtman 2000: 714, 728). In Exod. 3 it was Moses who was told not to approach the holy ground and who experienced fear, hiding his face so as not to look upon God. Here it is Aaron and all the Israelites who are afraid when they see Moses' face, too afraid to approach him. However, their fear does not persist. After Moses calls out to them, Aaron and the men of the assembly return to Moses and speak with him. Then all the people approach Moses. Later Moses does hide his face, not with his garment as he had at the burning bush, but by putting a 'veil' over it. He is not attempting to prevent the people from becoming afraid if they had full visual contact with their leader. This is demonstrated by Moses removing the veil whenever he conveyed God's words to the people from this time forward. The veil is worn only when Moses is *not* engaged in receiving and communicating God's words to the people. Later stories which highlight the enormous quantum of spirit which Yahweh has placed on Moses also underscore the prophet's special relationship to Yahweh's holiness (e.g. Num. 11.16-17, 24-30; 27.15-23; Deut. 34.9).

present text retain two different understandings of Yahweh's relationship with his people? I would like to conclude this study by briefly reviewing the kinds of explanations which have been offered by scholars, all of whom perceive some sort of deep division between Genesis and later books.

One time-honored way of explaining such perceived contrasts is in terms of the ideological needs of the authors and their target audiences. For example, Liverani views the narratives in Genesis and Exodus as two contrasting 'mythical "foundation charters"', both of which were generated in order to serve vital functions for the 'returnees' and the 'remainees' in the post-exilic period (2006: 258). The patriarchal stories take place in a society 'where coexistence and collaboration between groups is necessary' and the 'political landscape' is 'unreal and rarefied' (2006: 260). This myth could be used by returnees as a 'prefiguration of their presence in the country' and offer the remainees 'a model for coexistence between complementary groups' (2006: 259, 270). In contrast, the 'harder' myth of the exodus and conquest offered a 'strong' model, preferred by supporters of violent confrontation who seek to exclude 'extraneous' people (2006: 261, 270). Liverani speculates that the '"softer" line' probably appealed to the first groups of returnees, while the harder attitude prevailed when priestly ideology became dominant later. The priestly 'utopia', which envisaged God's direct sovereignty, granted the priests a political role (2006: 324). In addition, their role in protecting the people from contact with the holy allowed them to establish 'purity criteria' which became a 'very powerful instrument for controlling the entire community' (355-57).[66]

Moberly's discussion of the differences between Genesis and later books focuses on theology rather than history (1992: 80-85).[67] His method is to isolate the 'fundamental ethos' of patriarchal religion and

66. Elements of Liverani's proposal are open to objection on several counts; see, for example, Na'aman 2006. However, it is difficult to dispute his claim that the patriarchal narratives were 'perfectly suited to support [a] position in favour of co-existence' (2006: 260; cf. 261). Nevertheless, that in itself does not require that the stories were 'generated' for this purpose during the period of the return. (Liverani believes that the Priestly redactor is the author of the 'patriarchal sagas' in their present form [2006: 263]).

67. This does not prevent Moberly from twice dismissing Liverani's historical proposals on the grounds that they are 'fashionable'; that is, because they follow the current fashion 'to see the patriarchal stories as a whole as an "invention" from the postexilic period' (2009: 128; 135 n. 16).

'Mosaic Yahwism' (1992: 83, 85, 93). The distinctiveness of the former lies in 'its open, unstructured, and nonlocated unaggressive nature, its "ecumenical bonhomie"' (1992: 104). As the negative prefixes to these adjectives suggest, Moberly characterizes patriarchal religion by a long list of what it 'lacks'.[68] In short, what is distinctive about patriarchal religion is primarily that it lacks whatever is distinctive about Mosaic Yahwism. Moberly then asks why a 'non-Yahwistic' tradition about patriarchal religion has been retained in a Yahwistic context (1992: 117). His answer is that the relationship between Genesis 12–50 and Exodus is analogous to the way Christians regard the 'Old Testament' in relation to the New. In each case, the new period of salvation history supersedes the older 'dispensation' (1992: 126). Mosaic Yahwism 'invalidates certain formal and practical aspects of patriarchal religion' (131).[69]

Stressing the discontinuities between Genesis and later books has also led other scholars to view one presentation of the deity as superior to the other. Not all assume that later is better. For example, the Assyriologist Saggs cautiously suggests that 'it is at least a theoretical possibility that the concept of deity attributed to the Mosaic period was a retrogression from that of the Patriarchs'. He not only views the Mosaic concept of God to be 'narrower [and] less tolerant' but 'more naïve' (1978: 36; cf. 38). A remark by Propp is worth mentioning in this regard. A propos of Exod. 23.24, Propp comments that passages which explain why the indigenous peoples of Canaan must be eliminated show that 'we are no longer in the idyllic past of Genesis' (2006: 289). Is it then possible that the stories in Genesis 12–50 express a sense of nostalgia for the relatively safe and 'idyllic' world before Israel took on the burden of becoming a 'holy nation' serving a jealous divine king?

68. This includes the lack of holiness, the absence of a sense of urgent religious choice, a lack of conflict between patriarchal and Canaanite religion, a lack of condemnatory attitudes, and a lack of aggression. In addition, the ethos implied by the injunction 'no other gods' is lacking, as are clear and developed references to 'foreign gods'. Patriarchal religion also lacks moral content or at least moral emphasis (Moberly 1992: 87, 89, 91, 94-95, 97-99, 118). McConville (2006: 49) rightly disagrees with Moberly on this last point, asserting that 'patriarchal religion should…not be contrasted with Mosaic in the sense that it is thought to have no moral framework or theology of judgment'. On 'ecumenical bonhomie', see n. 5 above.

69. As pointed out by Nicol, this 'analogy is neither as fitting nor as exact as Moberly believes' and 'is not likely to prove acceptable' to Judaism (1994: 564; cf. Levenson 2004: 14-16).

Another long-running controversy opposes Mosaic religion to polytheism rather than to patriarchal religion. Jan Assmann's work is the most prominent recent example. Although Assmann's major interest is on the differences between polytheism and the 'Mosaic distinction', he also perceives a 'radical' discontinuity between Genesis and later books. In fact, the Israelites' long stay in Egypt 'destroyed any continuity with the patriarchal past, as recounted in Genesis' (2008: 108; cf. 109). Assmann defends himself from the charge of having accepted 'the old cliché of "tolerant polytheism"' (2000: 189) by arguing that polytheism is just as intolerant as Mosaic monotheism.[70] He does acknowledge one major difference: in Mosaic religion, the God's violent jealousy is primarily directed *inward*, toward his own people. The massacres in Exodus 32, Numbers 25, 1 Kings 18 and the book of Joshua are meant to 'wipe out the Egyptians and Canaanites in our midst and in our hearts' (2010: 17-18; 2008: 112, 115-16; cf. 2000: 186).[71] In fact, 'the "jealousy" of God belongs within the core semantics of monotheism', including the Mosaic 'No-other-Gods-movement' (2008: 115).

None of the explanations offered by these scholars takes into account the extent to which Yahweh's behavior as Israel's holy king is presented as a function of his character *and* his situation. It is Yahweh's personality, as it is expressed in his new royal role, which determines the specifically biblical manifestations of divine holiness, jealousy, and wrath.[72] The Hebrew Bible offers readers a uniquely complex and three-

70. One way in which Assmann argues that polytheism is just as violent as Yahwistic monotheism is by pointing to the destructive acts of the Assyrian army. However, he does recognize that this violence is political, not religious (2010: 18-19). While the Assyrians destroyed the holy places of those they invaded, this was not in order to prevent their own people from worshipping their disloyal vassals' gods (Assmann 2000: 190).

71. Assmann believes that these 'cruel stories stem from an early phase of monotheism' (2008: 116). Assmann might have added Jehu to his list of examples, since Phineas, Elijah, and Jehu are the only biblical figures to be called (or describe themselves as) 'jealous for Yahweh' (Num. 25.11, 13; 1 Kgs 19.10, 14; 2 Kgs 10.16)—and all three employ lethal violence, if not mass murder, to express their zealousness. That these narratives illustrate an 'early phase' of monotheism is open to debate.

72. Moberly contrasts patriarchal and Mosaic religions in terms of their 'particular kind of life-style', familial for the patriarchs and national for Israel (1992: 103). I would suggest that Israel's becoming a nation with Yahweh as its divine king involves a much more fundamental change in social organization than an alteration of 'life-style'. And,

dimensional portrait of Yahweh's personality as he responds to a variety of situations, beginning in Genesis and continuing in later books. As I have argued elsewhere, the way in which Yahweh acts in his new position of national leadership resembles the narcissistic manner in which human leaders have typically performed throughout history (Lasine 2001: 167-263). These actions are also affected by Yahweh's *other* new roles as Israel's possessive and jealous husband, and demanding—and sometimes abusive—father (see Lasine 2002). The three metaphors ultimately work together to communicate the specific nature of the holy God with whom the nation of Israel has to deal in order to survive and flourish. Israel's 'specialness' to its divine king operates on all three levels, each of which has its associated dangers. In addition to displaying exclusive loyalty to its divine sovereign, Israel must play the roles of Yahweh's 'trophy wife' and favorite child. The Israelites must mirror the nature—including the holiness—of their ruler, husband, and father. Failure to do so calls forth the special brand of jealousy and wrath which characterize Yahweh's holiness.

According to a well-known talmudic comment on Exod. 19.17, when Moses brought the people to meet God at Sinai, they stood 'under the mountain, indicating that God had turned the mountain over upon them like a tub or tank (גיגית), saying, 'If you accept the Torah, it is well; if not, there shall be your grave' (*b. Šabb.* 88a; cf. *b. ʿAbod. Zar.* 2b). Given the dread dangers associated with being the subject, spouse, and scion of this holy God, it is easy to see why it would take a mountain tilted over Israel's head to persuade it to accept Yahweh's offer. Life was certainly simpler—and safer—in Genesis.

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of course, familial practices continue in the nation of Israel, in an environment which includes elements of an 'enclave culture' (Douglas 1993: 33-34, 42-62).

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