

THE GOD OF THE FATHERS

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FEW students of the Old Testament would deny that the religion of the prophets of Israel was unique among the religions of the ancient world. According to many its culmination is to be found in the latter half of the book of Isaiah, which presents a pure and lofty monotheism, without parallel in the literature of the ancient East. God is God, teaches the prophet, and there is none to whom He may be likened; He is truly the Creator and Ruler of all things, and between Him and the creation there is an infinite gulf.¹ What, however, is to be said with respect to the origin of such exalted conceptions of God? Whence did the prophet derive his views?

Broadly speaking, we may say that there are two answers given to this question. In the first place, it may be maintained that the prophet proclaimed these high views of God, because God had revealed them to him. When, therefore, he taught that there was none to whom God could be likened,² he was uttering far more than the mature conclusion of years of meditation and thought, based upon his own reaction to the world about. His monotheism, therefore, was not the result of human wisdom, but of Divine revelation. Such has been the viewpoint of the historic Christian Church. Such, also, is the teaching of the Bible itself.³

The second answer which may be offered to the question above stated is that the prophet did not receive his monotheism by means of revelation from God. On the contrary, the sublime conceptions of God which are found in the latter half of the book of Isaiah are, according to the advocates of this view, the culmination of a long process of development

¹ Cf., e. g., Isaiah 40:12-28; 42:5,8; 44:24.

² Isaiah 40:18,25.

³ This statement naturally applies to the Bible only before it has been subjected to the dissecting process of destructive criticism.

in religious thought.⁴ They are the flower, so to speak, of Hebrew religion, the noblest expressions of the devout meditation of ancient Israel. Therefore, when we ask whence the prophet derived his ideas, we must, it is maintained, turn our attention to the course of events of which they were the climax, and seek to discover its origin. Those who reject the plain statements of the Bible find here a pressing problem which calls for solution. Indeed, it is this very question which is today agitating the minds of many scholars who discard the clear testimony of the Bible as to the beginnings of Israel's religion.

ALT'S VIEW OF PATRIARCHAL RELIGION

It is the purpose of this article to examine one of the more recent attempts to discover these beginnings elsewhere than in Divine revelation. Professor Albrecht Alt of the University of Leipzig has written a penetrating study in which he seeks upon somewhat new and independent lines to discover the nature of patriarchal religion.⁵ In the paragraphs which follow we shall seek to present the essence of his argument.

Alt takes his stand upon the position that historically Israel's formation as a nation rested upon the union of the different tribes in the worship of the god, Yahweh.⁶ But can we today, he asks, comprehend this event in its details? To answer this question in the affirmative is, he thinks, difficult, because of the nature of the literature which treats of the

⁴ It is this evolutionary conception of the development of Israel's religious ideas to their culmination in the pure monotheism of the so-called second Isaiah which underlies many of the recent treatments of Israelitish religion. This view has been expressed in particularly bald form in the recent work of Harry Emerson Fosdick, *A Guide to Understanding the Bible. The Development of Ideas Within the Old and New Testaments*, New York and London, 1938.

⁵ Albrecht Alt, *Der Gott der Väter. Ein Beitrag zur Vorgeschichte der israelitischen Religion*, Stuttgart, 1929. Although Alt does follow "somewhat new and independent lines" of investigation, he nevertheless has not broken with the documentary analysis of Genesis.

⁶ *Idem*, p. 1, "Die Entstehung des Volkes Israel beruht historisch auf dem Zusammenschluss seiner Stämme in der Verehrung des Gottes Jahwe."

events at Sinai.⁷ We must at least, however, seek to discover whether in the earlier religious experience of the tribes there was any preparation for the worship of Yahweh so that this latter would in some sense be an outgrowth of, and not entirely a radical break with, the past.⁸ Such traces of preparation may indeed be discerned, for they have not been entirely obliterated either by the influence of the Canaanitish religion or by the later Yahweh religion. To discover them we must turn to the book of Genesis where they occur in the remembrance of the God of Abraham, the Fear of Isaac and the Mighty One of Jacob, that is, in the God of the Fathers.⁹

There is, continues the argument, at least one passage where the relationship between Yahweh and the God of the Fathers is stated as basically as can be expected in the framework of the narrative. This is the Elohist representation of Yahweh's first revelation to Moses,¹⁰ a section which is not paralleled by the Yahwist, whereas the priestly writer merely blends into one event the revelation of the name Yahweh with the call of Moses, thus contrasting this name with the designation of deity which had been revealed to the patriarchs (cf. Exodus 6:2-8).¹¹ This reveals the fact that the writers

⁷ Alt's opinion of this literature is given in the following words, "Gerade die Überlieferungen Israels, in denen die Geschichte der Bindung der Stämme an Jahwe vor allem ihren Niederschlag gefunden haben sollte, die Sagen von Mose und Josua, sind in den uns vorliegenden Fassungen von der Tendenz auf Zuspitzung ins Persönlich-Heldenhafte und ebenso von dem Streben nach Ausweitung ins Allgemein-Volksmässige deutlich beherrscht und gestatten durchaus nicht immer eine sichere Heraus-schälung ihres ursprünglichen Gehalts" (*idem*, p. 2).

⁸ *Idem*, pp. 2, 3, "War etwa schon in den älteren religiösen Besitzständen der Stämme eine Vorbereitung auf das Kommende gegeben, so dass dieses sich nicht nur auf dem Wege eines radikalen Bruches mit der Vergangenheit an die Stelle des Vorhandenen zu setzen brauchte, sondern mindestens zu einem Teil an dieses auch anknüpfen und es in sich aufnehmen konnte?"

⁹ *Idem*, p. 9, "Das ist die Erinnerung an den Gott Abrahams, an den Schreck Isaaks, an den Starken Jakobs, zusammengefasst: an den Gott der Väter."

¹⁰ Exodus 3. Alt assigns verses 1, parts of 4, 6, 9-14, 18 ff., to the so-called document E.

¹¹ I. e. אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל.

of J, E and P had no strong, uniform tradition before them to which they felt themselves bound.

Since this is the case, Alt reasons, we must go behind the secondary elements which appear in the present documents and seek the older, genuine tradition of the people. To discover this, we must turn to the documents J and E, in which there occur the individual elements of the expression, "the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." In these documents the members of the expression occur both separately from one another and also in temporal sequence.¹²

For example, Alt refers to Genesis 26:24,¹³ which mentions "the God of Abraham." The author of J, he believes, thought that such an expression would serve the purpose of setting before the reader the inner connection between Abraham and Isaac. Hence, in this passage, Isaac is blessed because of Abraham. Likewise, in Genesis 28:13 (also J) the Yahwist seeks to connect Jacob with Isaac. In this latter instance, however, a new member is added to the designation of deity, and we read, "I am the Lord God of Abraham, thy father, and the God of Isaac."

The form in which these narratives appear before us, continues the argument, is a free creation of the Yahwist. To approach more closely to the roots of the tradition, therefore, one should examine such a passage as Genesis 31:53,¹⁴ which makes clear that both Jacob and Laban had a paternal deity, a *θεὸς πατρῶος*.¹⁵ Likewise, Genesis 49:25 reveals that the

¹² The passages in which these expressions occur are to be found in the patriarchal narratives of the book of Genesis.

¹³ Alt assigns this passage to the so-called document J.

¹⁴ Genesis 31:42-53 has proven difficult as far as source-analysis is concerned. So, with regard to 42a Alt says, "Die Meinungen über die Quellenzugehörigkeit sind hier geteilt. Da sich nachher in V. 53 die Beteiligung zweier Quellen, also des Jahvisten und des Elohisten, an der Erwähnung des Vätergottes, deutlich bemerkbar macht, wird man vermuten dürfen, dass auch in unserem Vers beide kontaminiert sind, und da der Jahvist bisher einfach 'Gott Isaaks' sagte, gehört der besondere Ausdruck, 'Schreck Isaaks' wohl eher dem Elohisten. Eine sichere Entscheidung vermag ich nicht zu geben" (*idem*, p. 17).

¹⁵ Genesis 46:1,3, thinks Alt, presupposes the existence in Beersheba of a cult of the "God of Isaac" (*idem*, p. 20).

writer thought of the paternal deity as belonging to the most ancient religious possession of Israel.¹⁶

Such a study of the tradition, it is asserted, reveals a difference between the "God of the Fathers" and the deities which appear as "Elim."¹⁷ The latter appear upon the scene but once,¹⁸ usually in connection with an individual saga which manifestly antedates the literary tradition. The revelation of an El seems to have produced little after-effect.¹⁹ Very different, however, is the situation with the gods of the Fathers. The mention of these paternal divinities appears in passages which are the free creation of the narrator. Apparently, therefore, both the author of J and the author of E had before them a tradition concerning these deities which they felt bound to maintain. In his narrative the author of J preserved the designation of deity which appeared in the ancient tradition and simply identified Yahweh with the God of the Fathers. The author of E followed the same practice, save that instead of the word Yahweh, he employed the word Elohim.²⁰

Alt believes that the ancient designations of the gods of the Fathers have not disappeared entirely. For example, Genesis 31:53b mentions the *פחד יצחק* which is a designation of that divinity whose appearance had produced fear in Isaac and who had bound Isaac to himself forever. Likewise, in the phrase *אֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב* (e. g., Genesis 49:25) there is a kindred type of expression. The word *אֱלֹהֵי* denotes the divinity, and *יַעֲקֹב* serves to identify the particular man who belonged to him.²¹

The phrases *אֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב*, *אֱלֹהֵי יִצְחָק*, *אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם* do not,

¹⁶ Genesis 49:25 is said to be "abseits von allem Bisherigen und ausserhalb der Sagenüberlieferung,"— and so to be considered as an independent document (ein Dokument für sich) (*idem*, p. 20).

¹⁷ The word Elim is thought by Alt to refer to the local deities of the Palestinian sanctuaries (*idem*, p. 21).

¹⁸ An exception is said to be found in the El Bethel, which is mentioned both in Genesis 31:13 and 35:7.

¹⁹ *Idem*, pp. 21, 22. The best refutation of this interpretation of the word *אֱלֹהֵי* is to be found, we think, in a careful examination of the contexts and exegesis of the passages in which the word occurs.

²⁰ *Idem*, pp. 24-26.

²¹ *Idem*, pp. 26-31.

therefore,²² belong to the original tradition, but were employed by the authors of the later documents for the purpose of unifying the elements which they found in this original source. To arrive at the primitive condition of this tradition, asserts Alt, we must cut out these expressions and assume behind each of them an original divinity.²³

Underneath the present literary re-working of the material traces of the pristine tradition are discernible. The authors of the documents J and E were interested in presenting a unified picture of the past. Nevertheless, despite this fact, we may discover in their writings the difference in attitude toward the Elim of the sanctuaries and the gods of the Fathers. To designate the Elim, the authors use an expression compounded with לֵאלֹהִים ; to designate the paternal deities, they use one compounded with לֵאלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתַי . Thus it is apparent that the difference between these two types of religion was known to the authors of the later documents.²⁴

There were, Alt argues, three principal cults of the gods of the Fathers. These were local and separated from one another. At Bethel was the Jacob cult, at Beersheba the Isaac cult and at Mamre that of Abraham. Due to the fact that these great sanctuaries influenced groups which lived at a distance from them, there came to be an interchange of the peculiar religious possessions of each sanctuary. Thus, at Beersheba there was an overlapping of the Isaac and Jacob cults, and the same thing was true of the cults of Abraham and Isaac. The peak of this process was reached in the union of the three figures Abraham, Isaac and Jacob into the same tribal tree.²⁵

After the Israelitish tribes had united in the worship of Yahweh, continues the argument, the cults of the gods of the Fathers still continued. Even after the entrance into Palestine, the worship of the patriarchal gods was probably carried on side by side with the national Yahweh religion, but due to

²² I. e., either when they occur separately or as individual members of a compound expression.

²³ *Idem*, p. 29, "hinter jeder der drei Gottesbezeichnungen ist ein ursprünglich ganz für sich stehendes Numen zu vermuten."

²⁴ *Idem*, pp. 30, 31.

²⁵ *Idem*, pp. 49-73.

the spread of the latter, their worship gradually became suppressed. Despite this fact, however, some of the characteristics of these paternal deities were assimilated into the worship of Yahweh. Thus, the gods of the Fathers became the παῖδαγωγοί to the greater god, Yahweh, who gradually assumed their place. Therefore, it may be concluded, "Abraham, Isaac and Jacob remain on the other side of Moses; but the lines which lead from their god to the god of Israel have become clearly discerned."²⁶

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Despite the radical character of the view which Professor Alt advances, it nevertheless contains certain salutary emphases which should be noted. For one thing it directs our attention to Genesis and seeks to discover there a specific preparation for the events which transpired at Sinai.

Valuable as this emphasis is, it nevertheless does not compensate for the deficiencies of the thesis. The chief criticism which we would urge against this interpretation of patriarchal religion is the subjectivity of its character. A cursory reading of the book of Genesis would not, we think, lead one to adopt the position that the religion of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob was of such a nature as Alt conceives it to have been. Furthermore, the weight and influence of tradition are opposed to this theory.

The subjectivity of Alt's main thesis appears in the first place in his acceptance of the documentary analysis of Genesis. The theory of the "God of the Fathers" is bound up with an acceptance of the view that the book of Genesis, as we now have it, is a compilation of at least three documents, which come from different periods of Israel's history. They have been pieced together by an editor or redactor to form the present book of Genesis.

As is well known, the documentary theory is of compara-

²⁶ *Idem*, p. 73, "Abraham, Isaak und Jacob bleiben jenseits von Mose stehen; aber die Linien sind erkennbar geworden, die von ihren Göttern zu dem Gotte Israels hinüberehren."

tively recent origin,²⁷ and has by no means found universal acceptance.²⁸ The arguments which may be urged against it are cogent and, in our opinion, convincing. Certain of its tenets are constantly being modified,²⁹ and this fact should enjoin caution upon those who would treat the theory as an established fact.

The subjectivity of Alt's thesis appears, however, not only in its postulation of the documentary analysis, but also in the assumption that we today can go behind the text to determine the original nature of the tradition. Not only, therefore, is it assumed that we are able to identify the various documents of which Genesis is thought to be composed, but also to detect the nature of the early sagas and traditions which are believed to lie latent in them. One of these traditions, according to Alt, is that which has to do with the worship of the "God of the Fathers." From it we are supposed to learn that Abraham was the first one to whom the God of Abraham appeared,³⁰ and that he was the founder of the cult of this divinity. We are also supposed to learn that Isaac and Jacob had similar experiences with individual divinities. The fact that Professor Alt is the first to arrive at such a view of patriarchal religion, is in itself an evidence of the subjectivity of the method employed.³¹

²⁷ Its beginnings are usually associated with the appearance of Jean Astruc's work, *Conjectures sur les mémoires originaux dont il paroît que Moïse s'est servi pour composer le livre de la Genèse*, Bruxelles, 1753.

²⁸ For example, it has not been accepted by the following scholars: William Henry Green, Geerhardus Vos, Robert Dick Wilson, Oswald T. Allis, James Orr, C. F. Keil, Wilhelm Möller, B. Jacob, G. Ch. Aalders.

²⁹ Cf., e. g., Volz und Rudolph, *Der Elohist als Erzähler. Ein Irrweg der Pentateuchkritik?* Giessen, 1933.

³⁰ With reference to Genesis 15, Alt says, "Ist dieses Stück (i. e. Genesis 15) wirklich eine alte Kultstiftungssage für den Gott Abrahams, so darf man übrigens auf Grund der einleitenden Worte des Numens: 'Ich bin dein Schild,' (v. 1) vielleicht vermuten, dass der sonst verlorene Sondername des Gottes Abrahams (s.o.S. 30) אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם war" (*idem*, p. 72).

³¹ In our opinion Alt's thesis has not yet received the attention which it deserves. In its main features it has been accepted by Elmer A. Leslie, *Old Testament Religion In the Light of the Canaanite Background*, New York, 1936. Lods notes some of its weak points in his article "Origins," in *Record and Revelation*, edited by H. Wheeler Robinson, Oxford, 1938. Barton rejects the theory, *Semitic and Hamitic Origins*, Philadelphia, 1934, p. 325 and in his article "The Present State of O.T. Studies," in *The*

The question arises, therefore, whether an examination of the material which Alt considers basic to his argument does indeed reveal a tradition regarding the existence of the religion of the gods of the Fathers. The two passages which are supposed to bring us most nearly to this original tradition are Genesis 31:53 and Genesis 49:25. In the first of these the phrase אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם is employed, and in the second אֱלֹהֵי יִצְחָק. It will be necessary to submit both these passages to an examination with the primary purpose of determining why these phrases are employed.

In the first place we turn to Genesis 31:53, a verse which follows the account of the covenant made between Jacob and Laban. According to Alt, we may learn from verse 53a that both Jacob and Laban appealed to their individual *θεὸς πατρῶος* as a guarantor of the covenant which had just been concluded.³² The god of Nahor, therefore, would be the paternal divinity of Laban, and the God of Abraham that of Jacob. Verse 53b says that "Jacob swore by the Fear of his father Isaac." The Fear of Isaac is, according to Alt, the name of the divinity which first appeared to Isaac and whose appearance caused him to fear. Isaac then became the founder of the cult of this divinity.

Is this, however, the proper interpretation of the phrase אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם? According to the text as it appears in Genesis, Laban and Jacob have just concluded a covenant between themselves. To ratify the covenant each would swear in the name of his god as its guarantor. It is Laban who speaks first, "The God of Abraham, and the God of Nahor, the God of their father, judge betwixt us," he says.³³ Because of the

Haverford Symposium on Archaeology and the Bible, New Haven, 1938, p. 57. Wilhelm Möller says, "Wenn Alt 'Der Gott der Väter' an Aussagen wie 'den Schild Abrams' 15,1, 'den Schrecken Isaaks' 31,53, 'den Starken Jacobs' 49,24 anknüpft, so ist das gegen früher ein erheblicher Fortschritt, wo man die Patriarchen stammesgeschichtlich oder als Götternamen deutete; doch ist das alles nur im engsten Zusammenhang mit der ganzen biblischen Geschichte und dem vollen biblischen Gottesglauben richtig zu würdigen. Dagegen wirken Alts Aufstellungen wie eine Karikatur." *Biblische Theologie des Alten Testaments in heilsgeschichtlicher Entwicklung*, Zwickau, 1939, p. 146.

³² *Idem*, pp. 17, 18.

³³ אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם וְאֱלֹהֵי נְחוֹר יִשְׁפְּטוּ בֵּינֵינוּ אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ.

polytheism which seems to be implied in these words, the passage has given difficulty to some commentators. In the first place, by his use of the plural verb **יִשְׁפֹּטוּ**, Laban implies that the god of Abraham and the god of Nahor were different gods. He then proceeds to equate them with the god of Terah (**אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם**).³⁴ Since Terah was a polytheist,³⁵ it becomes clear that Laban conceives the god of Abraham as not differing essentially from the god of Nahor. If then, in uttering his oath, Jacob had used the phraseology of Laban, he would have been guilty, at least by implication, of belief in polytheism.

Various attempts have been made to interpret the passage. Thus, the Septuagint omits the phrase **אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם** and translates the verb in the singular.³⁶ But the reading of the singular is the easier reading and supposedly an attempt to solve the assumed difficulty of the passage, and so is not to be preferred to the plural. Nor does the omission of the phrase **אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם** solve the difficulty. For if these words are to be taken as a later insertion we must ask the purpose of their inclusion in the text. Driver remarks that most modern scholars consider them to be a gloss which was added "for the purpose of softening a polytheistic trait by subsuming the God of Abraham and the God (or gods) of Nahor under a higher unity."³⁷ Does the inclusion of this phrase, however, really accomplish such a purpose? We are convinced that it does not. If this phrase is omitted, we may interpret Laban's words as referring to two distinct divinities, the God of Abraham and the god of Nahor. What, however, is the effect of the addition of the words **אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם**? In the first place, if the word **אֱלֹהֵי** is to be taken as a plural, it implies that Terah was a polytheist.³⁸ This certainly does not solve the difficulty. Even, however, if the word **אֱלֹהֵי** be taken as a singular, the difficulty remains. The phrase then serves to show that the

³⁴ As the following discussion will show, we believe these words to be a part of Laban's utterance, and not an explanatory gloss.

³⁵ Cf. Joshua 24:2,14,15.

³⁶ *ὁ θεὸς Ἀβραάμ καὶ ὁ θεὸς Ναχωρ κρινεῖ ἀπὸ μέσον ἡμῶν.*

³⁷ S. R. Driver, *The Book of Genesis*, London, 1909, p. 289.

³⁸ Cf. Payne Smith in *A Bible Commentary for Bible Students*, edited by Charles John Elliott, London and Edinburgh, Vol. I, p. 121.

god of Abraham and the god of Nahor, two different deities, were identical with the god of Terah. The polytheistic trait, however, would still remain. To soften it, the verb would have to be changed to the singular, for the use of the plural, we believe, is a strong indication that two distinct deities are meant.³⁹ If, therefore, a later scribe has inserted this phrase merely to cover up a polytheistic trait, he has, we think, not been successful in his attempt.

We assume, therefore, that the text is correct as it stands and is not to be altered so as to bring it into conformity with the reading of the Septuagint. Why, then, did Laban employ such phraseology? The answer to this question is not particularly difficult to discover, for Laban was a polytheist.⁴⁰ His use of the plural verb **יִשְׁפֹּטוּ**, as has been indicated, reveals the fact that he believes the God of Abraham and the god of Nahor to be two distinct deities. Nor is this contradicted by his attempt to identify them with the god of Terah. The most that such an attempt shows, if we assume that Laban is sincere in his purpose, is that he is exceedingly indiscriminate in his use of the word **אֱלֹהִים**. Laban, however, was not a man of sterling character, and the phrase **אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם** may represent an intentional attempt to deceive Jacob.⁴¹

In answer to the words of Laban, Jacob swears by the Fear of his father Isaac. It is obvious that if he had sworn by the God of Abraham, as Laban apparently expected him to do, it would not be clear that he was not a partaker in

³⁹ This is also the opinion of Driver, *op. cit.*, p. 289; B. Jacob, *Das Erste Buch der Tora Genesis*, Berlin, 1934, p. 625; apparently also Dillmann, *Genesis*, translated by Wm. B. Stevenson, Edinburgh, 1897, Vol. II, p. 267; Payne Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 121. Cf., however, Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis*, New York, 1925, p. 402, and Strack, *Die Genesis*, München, 1905, p. 119.

⁴⁰ Cf. also the reference to teraphim, Genesis 31:19,30-34, and the use of the verb **נִהְיֵיתִי** in 30:27. It may be, as Driver suggests, *op. cit.*, p. 277, that the verb is here used merely in the metaphorical sense of "perceive by careful observation." Cf., however, B. Jacob, *op. cit.*, p. 625.

⁴¹ Hengstenberg's words are pertinent, "Laban's character requires no delineation. Its principal features are avarice combined with cunning and accompanied by stupidity, which is often the case. Even religion he employs as a means to his ends." *The History of the Kingdom of God Under the Old Testament*, Edinburgh, 1871, Vol. I, p. 184.

Laban's polytheism. Much has been said about Jacob that is derogatory, and doubtless there were unlovely traits in his character. But there is one thing which in justice to him must be stressed. He was not the man who would consciously or intentionally deny his God. His fellowship with God had been very intimate, and he had experienced God's grace. He well knew that the so-called gods of Laban and Terah were not gods at all, and he also knew that if he were in any way to imply that these gods actually existed, he would be guilty of idolatry.

The passage, therefore, is very instructive as to the light that it sheds upon Jacob's character. Since the oath would be uttered audibly and would be heard by Laban, Jacob must be exceedingly cautious as to his choice of language.⁴² If he were to swear by the God of Abraham, he himself might be invoking the one true God, but Laban would receive the impression that Jacob agreed with him in his identification of the god of Abraham and the god of Nahor with the god of Terah. Such an act, therefore, would have been essentially deceitful.

Might not Jacob, however, have sworn by the God of Isaac and so have avoided giving a false impression? We think not. Laban, as has been indicated, was probably exceedingly indiscriminate in his use of the word אֱלֹהִים, and its use by Jacob would not have given a sufficient rebuke to Laban's suggestion. He must employ a specific designation for the God whom his father worshipped, a designation which would leave no doubt in the mind of Laban that this God was not in any sense related to the gods of Nahor and Terah.⁴³ He employs therefore an ancient designation of the true God (cf. verse 42, which introduces the expression). He swears by the Fear of his father Isaac.⁴⁴

⁴² Cf. Calvin, Comm. in loc., "But when once the only God is made known to us, we wickedly suppress his truth, unless by its light all the clouds of error are dispersed."

⁴³ It seems to have been the custom in antiquity for each one of the parties of a covenant, if different religious backgrounds were represented, to swear by his particular divinity as guarantor of the covenant. Cf. B. Jacob, *op. cit.*, p. 625.

⁴⁴ וַיִּשָּׁבַע יַעֲקֹב בְּפֶהֱרָא אָבִיו יִצְחָק.

We may reject the interpretation of these words which discovers in them reference to a divinity named Isaac whose appearance inspired terror.⁴⁵ Rather, they denote the Object of Isaac's fear and worship. By employing this phrase, Jacob makes it clear that the God whom he invokes is the same God that his father Isaac feared, and in no sense a divinity related to the paternal divinities of Laban.

Any analysis of verse 53 which would ascribe 53a to one document and 53b to another fails to account for this action on the part of Jacob. It is only when the passage is taken as a unit and so interpreted that it yields a consistent meaning, and this fact is a strong argument against the analysis into documents. We thus maintain that a correct exegesis of verse 53 makes it clear that the phrase יִצְחָק פֶּהֱרָא does not refer to a local divinity which first appeared to Isaac and whose worship Isaac instituted. It is, rather, an ancient designation of the one true God, and is employed in this instance for the specific purpose of distinguishing this God from false gods.

We must now consider Genesis 49:24,25 and seek to discover the reason for the employment in these verses of the phrase אֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב. Is Professor Alt justified in maintaining that this was the name of the God who first appeared to Jacob and whose worship Jacob first instituted? In other words, was Jacob the founder of the cult of the divinity who came to be known as the Mighty One of Jacob? This interpretation naturally implies that the utterances of these verses were not authentic, for it is difficult to conceive of Jacob, had he in reality been the recipient of revelation from one of the "paternal deities," mentioning this divinity in the same breath with the word שְׁדֵי.⁴⁶

In the opinion of the present writer, the text presents us with an actual record of the words of Jacob in which Jacob seeks to indicate that the reason why Joseph has prevailed over his enemies was due to the fact that he was in the

⁴⁵ Cf. Eduard Meyer, *Die Israeliten und ihre Nachbarstämme*, mit Beiträgen von Bernhard Luther, Halle, 1906, pp. 254-256.

⁴⁶ It is thought by many that אֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב should be read אֱלֹהֵי יִצְחָק. Jacob however, (*op. cit.*, p. 923), believes that the force of the מ from אֱלֹהֵי carries over, so that אֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב is really equivalent to אֱלֹהֵי יִצְחָק. Since אֱלֹהֵי is here obviously the more difficult reading, it is, we think, to be retained.

hands of a God of might and power. How better could this be stated in poetic language than by referring to this God as the Mighty One of Jacob? The word אֱבִיר therefore, brings this attribute of God into prominence, and the word יַעֲקֹב indicates that the God who caused Joseph to prevail was the same God whom Jacob worshipped. This latter thought is also brought out by the use of the words אֱלֹהֵי אֲבִיךָ, which serve to indicate that this God whom Jacob calls אֱבִיר was the true God who had blessed Jacob throughout his life.⁴⁷ The two phrases יַעֲקֹב אֱבִיר and אֱלֹהֵי אֲבִיךָ are employed, therefore, in parallel construction to indicate the source of Jacob's blessing.

Another designation of this source of blessing is also used by Jacob, namely, שְׂדֵי. This does not mean that Jacob conceived of שְׂדֵי as a different divinity from that which he called יַעֲקֹב אֱבִיר and אֱלֹהֵי אֲבִיךָ. Rather, he uses the word as another designation of the same God to whom he had just previously referred. The word is used in immediate parallel construction to אֱלֹהֵי אֲבִיךָ and is, we think, deliberately chosen. When Jacob had departed for the land of Paddan-aram, Isaac had invoked upon him the blessing of El-Shaddai (Genesis 28:3). Again, when his name was changed from Jacob to Israel, it was as El-Shaddai that God appeared to him (Genesis 35:11). Jacob had also told Joseph how El-Shaddai had appeared to him in Canaan and had promised him a great seed (Genesis 28:3).⁴⁸ During Jacob's lifetime as a wanderer, it was as El-Shaddai that God had protected him. He knew from experience how great were the blessings of El-Shaddai and for this reason invoked God as El-Shaddai to bless Joseph.

Such, we believe, is the natural interpretation of the use of the designations of divinity which occur in Genesis 49:24,25. Alt's view is, in our opinion, not obtained by proper methods of exegesis and therefore we feel constrained to reject it.

⁴⁷ Cf., e. g., Genesis 48:15. The attempt to point the word, אֱבִיר, "a bull," is certainly to be rejected.

⁴⁸ These passages are assigned by radical higher criticism to the so-called document P.

CONCLUSION

While, however, we reject the thesis which Alt has presented, we do rejoice that he has turned his eyes toward the patriarchal period. This is an emphasis that has been almost lost in some modern criticism. Alt's interpretation of patriarchal religion is, we believe, mistaken, but it is certainly not without value. It should remind us that there is indeed a God of the Fathers, a God who appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob. He, however, was not a limited divinity, the figment of men's imagination, but the living and true God. In the highest sense He is the God of the Fathers, who, because He is God, may freely dispense upon those of His good pleasure the "blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that coucheth beneath, blessings of the breast and of the womb."⁴⁹ And because He is such a God, we may assuredly believe "that many shall come from the east and the west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven."⁵⁰

NOTE

Alt believes that an historical parallel to the worship of the "patriarchal divinities" is to be found in certain inscriptions from the districts of Syria and Arabia which were once inhabited by the Palmyrenes and Nabateans. The pertinent quotations from these inscriptions are given by Alt, together with a bibliography of, and copious references to, the relevant works of reference. In the judgment of the present writer, this forms one of the most valuable contributions of Alt's work.

These fifty inscriptions come from the period, roughly speaking, from the first century B.C. to the early part of the fourth century A.D., and are written in the Aramaic and Greek languages. In both these languages compound expressions appear, similar in form to the Biblical expression אֱלֹהֵי אֲבִרְהָם. For example, in the Aramaic inscriptions there is reference to אֱלֹהֵי קַצְיֹ and in the Greek to θεὸς Ἀλμωσ. In his discussion (pp. 32-48) Alt shows that the phrase אֱלֹהֵי קַצְיֹ does not mean "the god קַצְיֹ", but rather, as Nöldeke first pointed out, "the god of קַצְיֹ", the word אֱלֹהֵי being in the construct state. This interpretation we

⁴⁹ Genesis 49:25.

⁵⁰ Matthew 8:11.

believe to be correct. In these inscriptions, therefore, we have a peculiar compound expression, the word אלה or θεός denoting the divinity, followed by the proper name of an individual or in some instances, possibly, a tribe.

What, however, does such an expression mean? Does the phrase אלה קציו mean that קציו was the first man to whom the divinity revealed itself and that he was also the founder of the cult of that divinity? To state the question in other words, do these inscriptions present the same type of religion which Alt believes that he has discovered in Genesis? Does the phrase אלה קציו possess the same meaning as that which Alt thinks is found in the expression אלהי אברהם?

It is our conviction that a careful study of these inscriptions, both the Greek and Aramaic, will make it clear that Alt's position is untenable. The most, it seems to us, that can be said about the meaning of such a phrase as אלה קציו, for example, is that it refers to the god whom קציו worshipped. There is no indication that קציו was the first to worship this god. He may have been worshipped by others also. For example, one inscription (no. 12 in Alt's list, from Şalchad, dated by Alt at 70 A.D.) mentions בעלשמן אלה מתנו. Another inscription (no. 15 in Alt's list, from Bosra, first century A.D.(?)) mentions בעלשמן אלה שעידו. Thus, one inscription identifies בעלשמן as the god of מתנו, and the other identifies him as the god of שעידו. This identification, we think, was not due to the fact that the religion of a settled land was suppressing the old tribal religion (cf. Alt, *op. cit.*, pp. 40 ff.). Rather, it was merely due to the belief that בעלשמן was the god whom מתנו worshipped (i. e., if our assumption that מתנו was an individual is correct), and that he was also the god whom שעידו worshipped.

We may also notice that there is no proof forthcoming from these inscriptions that the individual whose name was combined with the word אלה or θεός was the founder of a cult or the first recipient of revelation from the divinity. To discover in these inscriptions a type of religion similar to the so-called gods of the Fathers, is to impute to them a meaning which they do not possess. Our conclusion, therefore, is that they do not present an historical parallel to the so-called worship of the "paternal divinities."