

Asherah." In contrast in Ps 106:34-40 we have a sad commentary on what did happen eventually in ancient Israel. The psalm says,

They did not destroy the peoples as the
LORD had commanded them,
but they mingled with the nations and
adopted their customs.
They worshipped their idols, which became a
snare to them.
They sacrificed their sons and their daughters
to demons.
They shed innocent blood, the blood of their
sons and daughters, whom they sacrificed
to the idols of Canaan, and the land was
desecrated by their blood.
They defiled themselves by what they did; by
their deeds they prostituted themselves.
Therefore the LORD was angry with his
people and abhorred his inheritance.

Despite this sad commentary on cultic practice, in the area of language the Hebrews were both creative and successful in dealing with Canaanite religion. They simply took the old linguistic survivals that came down in their language and either demythologized the terminology or created their own anti-mythology. Every culture must find its expression of theological verity in terms of the language that is available and is used. Though the Hebrews were showing an emphatic reaction to a Canaanite polytheism it must be borne in mind that they were not literary iconoclasts as were the Jews of a later date. Many highly graphic phrases especially those which express the personal nature of God were used to enhance Hebrew monotheism.

We have noted that the Lord is called "the rider on the clouds" (Ps 68:5), a frequently used epithet for Baal. This may suggest an early date but not necessarily a primitive stage of Hebrew religion. It marks a time of religious vitality and verbal fluency. It would have been impossible in the Maccabean period when Hebrew was wooden and Hebrew scholars were given to the use of anti-anthropomorphisms. The poet of Ps 68 expressed God's control over nature in artful poetic idiom without necessarily a thought of the polytheistic usage. The Canaanite substratum was a readily available vehicle through which the prophets and poets could communicate the truth of the character of their only God and other theological truths as well. Though the idiom was freely used, it was not carelessly used so that only theologically acceptable concepts were communicated. As mentioned, the common Semitic word *'ilat* meaning "goddess" was rejected by all Old Testament writers of all periods. Female deities like Asherah were referred to by the proper names given to their images but were never called goddesses simply because the Hebrews had no mythology in which such a concept would have meaning.

That certain valid theological concepts are not late in human history still does not answer the question of when and where they originated. According to the Bible, man originally had a true concept of deity which he proceeded to distort. The Hebrew prophets rejected these distorted