



The Old Ones in the Old Book: Pagan Roots of the Hebrew Old Testament

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The ancient Israelite religion revealed in the early texts of the Old Testament is not monotheistic but a polytheistic paganism.

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Steve Cran says

Any serious student of the Bible realized that the Ancient Israelite Religion has its roots in the Pagan religion of the Near East. Yet if I were a fundamentalist Jew or Christian this book would not convince me.

The book starts out identifying the three patriarchs of the Bible and describing them as mighty beings as opposed to tribes or gods. They were also situated in different areas of Canaan. Moreover each of their gods has a different name. For Abraham it is El Elyon and for Isaac his god is called "The Dread of Isaac" and for Jacob it is called "The Might of Jacob". I agree that the Old Testament God might be a fusion of different deities but the example he cites here could well be different titles for the same god. The use of El pertains to God.

There are different strands of the Bible. There is the Priestly strand, there is the J strand, E Strand and the prophet. Each set of authors had a different perspective and name for god. The first part of Genesis calls god Elohim, the J calls him Yahweh.

The Bible was put together during the Babylonian exile and was used to promote a monotheistic god who was kind, loving and wise. The first Israelites were polytheistic or at least henotheistic.

Philip West subscribed to the view that the Israelites left Egypt and became acquainted with Yahweh, the Midian storm god of the desert. He controlled weather to get the Israelites out of Egypt. But at that time he was not alone. Examples of magic are used where staffs turn to serpents and Moses holds up his hands to have his army be victorious. If his hand falls his army begins to lose. They also use a bronze image of a serpent to cure its venom. The circumcision ceremony may have been protective magic.

Yahweh was a warrior, jealous and kind of mean. He demanded absolute obedience. Worship only him, no images which can control him. Magic was forbidden.

Their entry into Canaan was slow and gradual. Along the way they adopted many things from the Canaanites. Holidays, custom and building structure. Yahweh took on the characteristics of Baal and El. They even took to worshipping Anat and Asherah. To stop worshipping those goddesses invited trouble.

David took on the Zadokite / Canaanite priesthood upon conquering Jerusalem. Israel was polytheistic. As the Bible was redacted they borrowed elements from Babylonian mythos.

In the end a narrative was formed and it is questionable how good monotheism was. After all it could not examine suffering, took us away from nature and the feminine divine, magic and personal power are diminished.

There are some faults to this book. One is that the sources for theist part are studies on the Old Testament. Where are the sources on Pagan religions. There are also many theories regarding the Israelites he only focused on one. Biblical narrative Abraham came from Sumeria. This is not dealt with in the same seriousness as the Exodus. Egyptian Pagan contributions are completely ignored.

Diana Jones says

The "Old Ones in the Old Book" is an excellent title that explores the historical evidence that still remains in the Old Testament (after much editing by Church fathers) concerning the Canaanite Gods and religion that was a rather large part of ancient Hebrew life and beliefs before, and during, the switch over to the now Jewish God Yahweh. Philip West has done an amazing job in his research for this book, his writing style is very engaging and his material is very understandable for the non-biblical scholar while avoiding the trap that many other authors fall into of seemingly dumbing down his voice for his non-scholarly audience. I thoroughly enjoyed this book and highly recommend it to anyone who has an interest in the early history of Judaism, of Middle Eastern religions, and of the crafting of the Old Testament and the hidden gems of Paganism that still can be found in it. My only real complaint concerning it is that it is far too short!

Victor De witt says

The discussion on monotheism vs. polytheism is good.

Hekates Lady says

this book is a must for Pagan scholars - it traces the deities worshipped in areas from the Bible - it holds many revelations and the research is top notch
