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The Yahwist saga: A study of the form and purpose of the J source.

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THE YAHWIST SAGA

A STUDY OF

THE FORM AND PURPOSE OF

THE J SOURCE

By

Robert L. Humphrey

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through the Department of Theology in partial fulfilment of
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ABSTRACT

At the present time when the nature and value of religion
are being radically questioned, it is important to obtain a
clear understanding of the traditions upon which conventional
religious beliefs have been based. This study undertakes to
determine the original form and purpose of the Yahwist narrative
which lies at the heart of the Pentateuch; itself the heart
of the Hebrew Scriptures.

First the development of the tradition from small, scattered
literary units to their eventual amalgamation into a continuous
narrative is traced. An examination follows of the two most
important attempts to explain the nature of this narrative:
those of Gerhard von Rad and Artur Weiser. These are found un-
satisfactory and an attempt is made to view the J narrative as
a product of Israel's saga. tradition. After examining the
nature of saga and its development in Israel, the paper investi-
gates the historical factors which influenced the creation of
this particular saga. The suggestion is advanced that the
Yahwist saga was produced under the influence of the royal
court of David and his successors, that it was shaped so as to
promote the cause of the Davidic dynasty, and that the great
religious festivals at which people from all over Israel were
gathered together might have provided a setting for its narration.
Finally, an attempt is made to discern the main outlines of the
narrative in order to gain a better idea of the theme of the work.

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I wish to express my gratitude to my thesis director Rev. E. J. Crowley, C.Ss.R., whose suggestions and guidance have been of great assistance in the writing of this thesis. The monks of Mount Saviour Monastery, Elmira, N.Y., also deserve a word of thanks for their generous hospitality in providing a sorely needed refuge during the writing of the last few chapters of this paper. Finally, I must express my gratitude to all those who have listened so patiently to the ideas expressed here. Without their long-suffering support, this paper might never have been completed.

R. L. H.

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ABBREVIATIONS

BA	The Biblical Archaeologist
CBQ	Catholic Biblical Quarterly
JBL	Journal of Biblical Literature
W Z Leipzig	Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Karl Marx Universitet Leipzig

CHAPTER ONE: <u>INTRODUCTION</u>

This study is an attempt to achieve a better understanding of an Old Testament source; the Yahwist or J tradition in the Pentateuch. Considerable work has been done in this area, yet new questions arise and new techniques are developed to answer them. Since most books of the Bible were created by the combination and editing of older materials it has long been the goal of form criticism to discern the earlier literary forms of the units which lie behind the present text and to discover the actual life-situations which gave rise to them. But more recently interest has centered on the finished work itself, and scholars have attempted to understand the particular integration given to the source materials by the final author-editor. Using the methods of redaction criticism, they have sought to understand the literary form of the finished work, the life-situation which gave rise to it and the particular aims of its composer.[1]

The present study is concerned primarily with the question of literary form or genre, but its subject matter is neither an ancient tradition-unit nor a finished biblical book. Of

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1 Recently, James Muilenburg "Form Criticism and Beyond", <u>JBL</u>, 88 (Mar.1969) 1-18, has coined the term 'rhetorical criticism' and David Greenwood "Rhetorical Criticism and Form geschichte: Some Methodological Considerations", <u>JBL</u>, 89 (Dec. 1970) 418-426, has picked it up. However, the present writer fails to see how the goals or methodology of rhetorical criticism differ significantly from those of redaction criticism.

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concern here is the Yahwist narrative which lies at the heart of the Pentateuch, and which seems to have been preserved relatively intact in our present Pentateuchal text. It is the oldest of the traditions comprising the Pentateuch and appears to be the basis around which the others were woven. Over a period of nearly five centuries this narrative was supplemented by additions from the parallel Elohist tradition, by some Deuteronomic touches, and by the elaborations of the Priestly scribes which were intended to enhance the theological value of the original narrative.[2]

Such a complex document, representing centuries of acumulated experience and reflections is extremely difficult to decipher. However, by studying the major strands and then reconstructing the process by which they were developed into the final document, one is in a better position to understand the completed work. Obviously it is important then to determine as carefully as possible the original meaning of the central underlying narrative, the J source.

This is not a simple task. The J narrative is itself the product of many older traditions, some of which may extend back beyond the period of the patriarchs. This means that some of the material in J, for example the stories of Gn. 1-11, was more than eight centuries old when it was molded into a

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2 This summary of the development of the Pentateuch is based mainly on the observations of W. F. Albright Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan (Garden City, Doubleday, 1969), E. A. Speiser Genesis (Garden City, Anchor Bible, vol I, 1964), and the Pictorial Biblical Encyclopedia, ed. G. Cornfeld (New York, Macmillan, 1964)

continuous narrative. This material exhibits considerable variety of thought and expression, for the composer drew upon a rich assortment of source materials: myths, legends, songs, laws and genealogies.

The composite nature of J creates special problems for the student. Either the text must be broken down into its component parts, which must be studied individually; or one may treat the narrative as a unity, and attempt to see how the author has organized and developed his material. In the second approach, one must distinguish the special concerns of the final redactor from the multitude of concerns that find expression in the underlying traditions. This cannot be done until the various sources behind the text have been determined, the literary forms discernable in these units have been studied, and the way in which this once separate material has been gathered and developed has been examined. These are the tasks of literary criticism, form criticism, and tradition history respectively, and much of this work has been done. Once this work is accomplished, it is possible to distinguish the work of the final editor from that which he inherited. This is the task of redaction criticism.[3]

Although redaction criticism is a well-established branch of New Testament research, very little work has been done in

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3 For a concise statement of the aims of redaction criticism, see Norman Perrin, <u>What is Redaction Criticism?</u> (Phila., Fortress, 1969)

this area by Old Testament scholars.[4] This is partly due

to the nature of Old Testament material. Unlike the Gospels,

which represent four roughly parallel developments of the

same traditions, Old Testament documents do not afford

scholars the same opportunities to draw comparisons. Nonethe-

less, though the task is more difficult, the techniques of

redaction criticism can be applied to Old Testament works.

The present thesis is a sort of prolegomenon to a syste-

matic redaction critique of the Yahwist narrative. The

primary concern has been to determine the literary form or

genre of the work. This question is of necessity preliminary

to any attempt to discover the point of view, the motives

and the aims of the composition. The importance of this

question will be recognized once we realize that each genre

has its own peculiar mode of expression and its own concerns;

in short, its own thought-world. Historical writing differs

from political documents, and the novel from biography — yet

there is a possibility that an inexperienced reader might

confuse them. This is an even greater danger when dealing

with ancient literary forms whose modes of thought and ex-

pression are unfamiliar to us. In the case of a work as old

as the J narrative special care must be taken because a correct

interpretation of the narrative requires an understanding of

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4 A significant exception is the work of Gerhard von Rad.
See especially The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays,
trans. E. W. T. Dicken (N.Y., McGraw-Hill, 1966); Genesis,
trans. J. H. Marks (Phila., Westminster, 1961); and Old Testa-
ment Theology I & II, trans. D. M. G. Stalker (N.Y., Harper &
Row, 1962, 65).

the dynamics involved in the literary form.

Determination of the literary form of J involves some consideration of several related questions. Form and purpose are closely related because the form is usually dictated by the purpose for which the work was created. Thus, some investigation of the J author's purpose has been necessary. This in turn has required an attempt to determine its <u>Sitz im Leben</u> and to limn the general outlines of the narrative.

Doubtless the conclusions reached regarding these latter questions are of more interest than the analysis of the literary form. However, in this study these questions have been investigated only to the extent that they bear on the central question of genre. The conclusions are more tentative in nature, and in the long run are of lesser importance than the crucial question of the genre with which we are involved in reading the Yahwist narrative.

BASIC PRESUPPOSITIONS

Several presuppositions are inherent in an investigation such as this. First of all, it is assumed that at some point in time the Yahwist narrative had an independent literary existence; that it is the distinct creation of an author. This does not mean that J need have been a written document. Quite likely J was an oral composition, narrated orally and passed down by word of mouth. However, we assume that at some point the tradition was given a definitive form and that form has been preserved despite the subsequent history of the

tradition. Obviously if J is no more than a conglomerate of various blocks of material having no unity other than accident- ally similarities of style and vocabulary, if it is merely a creation of the literary critics, then any attempt to discern a unifying theme or to determine the literary form of the whole is vain.

But there are good reasons for assuming that J once was an independent literary unit. Several considerations would seem to indicate that the narrative reconstructed by literary criticism is essentially the same as the original. The most important evidence arises from a study of the traditions of Israel. We observe that ancient traditions appear to have been systematically collected and preserved and that the compilers of the traditions rarely excluded even the smallest section of the traditions which had come down to them.[5] Changes within the tradition units were more unconscious than deliberate, and were probably imperceptible at the time. Reverence for tradition permitted little tinkering.[6] No doubt, considerable changes occurred in some of the older myths and legends, but these changes were gradual and took place over long periods of time. In some places we are startled by the very primitive elements that have been retained; for example, the story of the marriage of the sons of God and the daughters of men in

5 Cornfeld, op. cit., 173.

6 Herman Gunkel, The Legends of Genesis, trans. W. H. Garruth (N.Y., Schocken, 1964) 39; Martin Buber, Moses (N.Y., Harper & Row, 1958), 18.

Gn 6:1-4.

If such care was taken to preserve even individual legends, it is reasonable to suppose that similar care was taken with the collection of traditions which we know as J. This is especially true if, as will be argued later, the J tradition had a unique place in the traditions of Israel. Consequently we should not suppose that J was subjected to wholesale revisions or that large sections of it were simply omitted. Rather the additions from the E tradition and the Priestly material was set side by side with the material of the J tradition. By and large, the older narrative was left untouched.[7]

The impression that J has been preserved largely intact is reinforced by an examination of the text. The material forms a continuous narrative with a certain inner progression and unity that mark it as the work of a creative author.[8]

As we shall note later, the latter half of the narrative, from Ex. I on, is somewhat fragmentary and sketchy. The simplest explanation for this is that sections of the original narrative have been lost. However, there are good reasons for supposing that the J narrative of the national history was originally somewhat sketchy. As we shall indicate later, the sketchy condition of J's account of the national history can be explained by the condition of the traditions which the

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7 Martin Noth, Exodus, trans. J. S. Bowden (Phila., Westminster, 1962) 14.

8 Artur Weisen, Introduction to the Old Testament, trans. D. M. Bauton (London, Darton, Langman & Todd, 1961) 102.

Yahwist had available to him.

Even taking into account the somewhat disjointed character of the latter half of the narrative and the fact that literary critics are unsure where it ends (there are reasons for feeling that it continues into the book of Judges), the overall impression created by J is of a unified work. There is every evidence that the material has been collected and arranged to conform to a specific theme. Furthermore, the presence of allusions to the Davidic kingdom throughout the narrative points to its creation at about the time of the united monarchy, that is, during the reigns of David and Solomon or shortly thereafter.

We conclude that the text presented us by the literary critics is the original form of the J narrative and that this represents a distinct literary creation, a shaping of ancient traditions into a unique mold by one whom we call the Yahwist.[9]

Any analysis of the Yahwist narrative must rest upon an accurate determination of which texts are a part of the narrative and which are not. After two hundred years of literary criticism there is general agreement as to the characteristics of Yahwistic material and as to which texts belong to the J tradition, but there are a number of texts about which scholars still debate. In this study the consensus text presented by Peter Ellis in The Yahwist: The Bible's First Theologian has

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9 Von Rad, Genesis, 24.

been used.[10] While this text has proved generally satisfactory, there seems to be a tendency on Ellis' part to assign material to the Yahwist about which there is question. Consequently, in cases where J authorship is questionable, I have been inclined to be somewhat more conservative than he in accepting a text as authentic J material.

In an extensive redaction critique, the question of determining the exact text of the narrative would be very important. But the questions with which this paper deals do not require that the text be established in all its details. However, the fluctuations of literary-critical debate are sometimes unnerving, and one can be excused for desiring a little more certainty in this area.

Finally, it should be noted that in studying the Yahwist narrative it has been assumed that we are dealing with an essentially oral composition.[11] This assumption has conditioned the approach in a number of subtle ways, particularly in regard to the determination of the narrative's motives and emphases.[12]

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10 Peter Ellis, The Yahwist: The Bible's First Theologian (Notre Dame, Fides, 1968)

11 The Scandinavian school holds that the biblical traditions remained in oral form until a relatively late period. For representative statements of their position see Ivan Engnell, A Rigid Scrutiny: Critical Essays on the Old Testament, trans. & ed. J. T. Willis (Nashville, Vanderbilt University, 1969); and Eduard Nielsen, Oral Tradition (London, SCM, 1954).

12 Klaus Koch, The Growth of the Biblical Tradition, trans. S. M. Cupitt (N.Y., Scribner's, 1969) 157.

The assumption of orality has been made without prejudice to the question of whether the J narrative was originally written down or not. For the distinction between oral and written literature depends not so much on whether the material is written down or transmitted orally, as upon whether it is intended to be read or to be heard. Each form of communication has its own techniques and its own dynamics. A narrative may be written down, yet be meant for public recitation, and hence exhibit all the characteristics of oral style. In such a case, it has merely been transposed into another medium.

The basically oral nature of J is evidenced by the fact that the bulk of the material consists of speeches. Because we unconsciously translate the material into frames of reference more congenial to us, we are apt to overlook this. We tend to think of the narrative as a series of events related in third person style (then so and so did such and such). However, in the J narrative the story is normally developed by means of speeches placed in the mouths of the characters (then so and so said such and such). This is an indication of the oral nature of the narrative and is a very important consideration for a proper understanding of J.

As indicated previously, little redaction critical work has been done on Old Testament material. However, the work of Gerhard von Rad on the Yahwist source represents the beginning of such an approach. The work undertaken for this thesis largely sprang from a reading of von Rad.[13]

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13 See the works of von Rad listed previously in footnotes.

In his writings, von Rad treats the Yahwist source as
an independent literary entity. He suggests that the outlines
of the narrative bear a marked resemblance to the ancient
'credos' such as those found in Dt. 6:20-24; Dt. 26:5-9, and
Jos. 24:2-13. These testify to the existence of a genre, of
which the 'credos' represent a short form and J a greatly
expanded version. Consequently, von Rad sees the Yahwist
source as basically confessional in nature.

This study began as an attempt to draw out the implications
of this hypothesis. It seemed likely that if the Yahwist
narrative was a confession of faith, careful analysis should
reveal cultic thought patterns in the narrative. A study of
these would help in understanding the narrative. But investiga-
tion soon indicated that the spirit of this narrative was
quite different from that of the 'credos'. The resemblances
between them were only superficial. It became important,
then, to discover the literary form with which we were dealing
in order that the narrative might be more clearly understood.

The composite nature of the source created difficulties
because of the great variety of literary forms exhibited by
the source materials that went into the final narrative.
Obviously any theory as to J's literary genre had to be able
to account for the gathering together of such disparate material.
That is why this paper devotes considerable space to a study
of the development of the tradition and the historical factors
which contributed to this development. As a result of this
study, it will be argued in this paper that the Yahwist

narrative, though it incorporates cultic material, is of quite a different nature from cultic material, and that its roots lie in the ancient practice of reciting the people's history in story form — that is, in saga.

CHAPTER TWO: <u>THE TRADITION AND SOME ATTEMPTS AT EXPLAINING IT.</u>

PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

Our task is to determine the literary form of the J source, to examine its setting within the life of the people, to discern the needs and questions which it sought to satisfy, and, in general, to catch the spirit of the tale. In later chapters we shall attempt to place J firmly within its historical context, seek to determine the historical forces which contributed to its formation, and to understand the specific reasons for which it was created. But here we are concerned more narrowly with its specific literary genre and with the role of that genre in the life of the people.

We must first ask how this complex literary creation came to be. We shall examine the development of the tradition, and then examine the hypotheses of van Rad and Weiser to see how well they explain both the creation of J and its nature. Finally, we shall venture an hypothesis.

A satisfactory understanding of the Yahwist source depends largely upon an appreciation of the literary form in which it is cast. Too often, J has been treated simply as a collection of old traditions. Little attempt has been made to understand why such a collection should have been made or how it was used. Yet, considering its amazing longevity and the fact that the later traditions of the Pentateuch were formed around it, we must assume that it had an important place in the life of the

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people from the first. We cannot satisfactorily account for the J tradition until we explain the purpose for which it was created and the literary form which it represents.

Because J is a composite document, a collection of older bits and pieces of tradition, this is no easy task. It is often easier to discern the original forms of the older tradition units because of the conservatism with which they have been handled by those who passed them down. But this reluctance to alter received traditions makes it difficult to perceive the redactors' intent in collecting and arranging the material as they have. Old story units were set side by side with but brief connecting links and often with no inner orientation. The result is a somewhat disjointed collection of diverse material. The general direction of the narrative only becomes clear from an overview, and this is best achieved by listening to the narrative.

Most scholars have been content to examine the individual tradition units within the narrative. They have discovered the original significance of various blocks of material, but have failed to consider the new meaning which they took on by being incorporated into the J work. Often this new meaning is quite different from the earlier one, and yet there may be little or no change of wording within the tradition unit.[14] By and large, the old material has not been reworked; the

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14 Von Rad, Genesis, 106-107; Gunkel, op. cit., 132.

change in meaning is mainly accomplished by the new context into which the old material has been set. This context must be understood in order to grasp the new meaning which the old traditions have acquired.

What we are doing requires a considerable amount of literary abstraction. We are primarily concerned neither with the significance of the traditions prior to their incorporation into the Yahwist narrative, nor with the subsequent history of that narrative.

The material which went into the J composition already had a long history. Over the ages individual units of tradition were probably used in a variety of settings and acquired different meanings during their evolution from independent stories to members of legend cycles to incorporation into the lengthy J narrative.[15] But we are interested in this history only insofar as it sheds light on the finished product. Neither are we interested in the later history of the J tradition; that is, after it began to be expanded by additions from the parallel Northern tradition (E) and the theological elaborations of the Priestly tradition. It is quite possible that the overall significance and form of the narrative was changed considerably by these additions and that it evolved into something quite different from what it originally had been. We must precind both from the prior tradition and from

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15 James Barr, <u>Old and New in Interpretation</u> (London, SCM, 1966) 15.

the later develpment of it if we are not to misinterpret the
original significance of J.

But the literary abstraction we are required to make is
a relatively easy matter compared to the cultural leap which
we must take. If we are to appreciate the Yahwist narrative
in its original form we must attempt to tune in on a culture
some three thousand years removed from our own. The Israelite
culture of the tenth century B.C. in which J arose is quite
alien to us, moreover the evidence by which we might recon-
struct that culture and its spirit is barely adequate to the
task. The Books of Samuel help to recreate the historical
situation and tell us something of its spirit, but to a great
extent we must exercise a certain aesthetic sensitivity in
getting the feel of this ancient narrative and the times in
which it lived.

Perhaps the greatest aid to an appreciation of J is a
hearing of the narrative in its entirety. Because, as argued
previously, the narrative is oral in style, by far the best
way of gaining an appreciation of it is to listen to it.[16]
The narrative must be allowed to create its own impression
and work its own spell. As Gunkel has pointed out, oral
tradition tends to take the form of legend and this is by
nature poetic.

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[16] Muilenburg, art.cit., 7, says "a responsible and proper
articulation of the words in their linguistic patterns and in
their precise formations will reveal to us the texture and
fabric of the writer's thought, not only what it is that he
thinks, but as he thinks it."

History, which claims to inform us of what has
actually happened, is in its very nature prose,
while legend is by nature poetry, its aim being
to please, to elevate, to inspire and to move.
He who wishes to do justice to such narratives
must have some aesthetic faculty, to catch in
the telling of a story what it is and what it
purports to be.[17]

Bearing this in mind, let us examine the history of the

tradition to see if we can get a better idea of how the Yahwist

narrative was created and the nature of the traditions out of

which it was formed.

History of the Tradition

We shall begin our study of the traditions behind the

J narrative with a lengthy quotation from Peter Ellis' book

The Yahwist.

> An analysis of the component parts of the Yahwist's
> saga reveals a rich variety of source materials,
> running from a few demythologized myths in the
> primitive history to an abundant store of early
> ethnological and cultic sagas in the patriarchal
> history through hero legends and liturgical legends
> in the national history....
> In the primitive history the creation story and
> the paradise story in Gn. 2-3 and the flood story
> with its antediluvian and postdiluvian genealogies
> in Gn. 5-10 all presume some acquaintance, either
> directly or through the medium of Canaanite versions
> of the originals, with the Mesopotamian classics -
> "Enuma Elis" and the "Gilgamesh epic".
> In the patriarchal history the stories about
> Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob testify to the existence
> of many etiological sagas dealing with the origins
> of the different tribes, the origins of the different
> Israelite sanctuaries, and the origins of many place
> names in Canaan. The Joseph story is at best a tribal
> saga.
> In the national history there are preserved a

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17 Gunkel, op. cit., 10-11.

number of hero legends about Moses, particularly
in the early chapters of Exodus and in Nm. 11-22;
Some liturgical traditions, especially the passover
tradition in Ex. 7-14 and the Sinai tradition in
Ex. 32-34; and the Balaam legend in Nm. 22-24.[18]

How did such diverse material ever come to be gathered

together? Most of these tradition units have been so well

preserved that they still give clear indications that their

primitive form was the short, clear, self-contained, popular

legend which originally circulated independently.[19]

Many of these old legends were etiologies whose function

was to explain something about a place, a cultic practice,

or about tribal history. Originally these traditions were

of interest only in that area where the question they sought

to answer was alive. A geographical etiology, such as that

about the peculiar salt formations near the Dead Sea (Gn 19:26),

circulated in a certain locality; a cultic legend, such as the

one about the foundation of Bethel (Gn 28:13-19), was told

at a sanctuary; and a tribal etiology, such as the story of

Jacob's obtaining of the birthright (Gn 27:1-45), was preserved

within the tribe to whom it pertained.[20]

The legends about Moses, the Exodus, and the period in

Sinai, along with the liturgical traditions of the cult of

YHWH, were preserved among the tribes who came out of Egypt

and we may presume that they became the common property of

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18 Ellis, op. cit., 87.

19 Gunkel, op. cit., 43; Weiser, op. cit., 57.

20 Von Rad, Genesis, 17; Ellis, op. cit., 87.

the Israelite amphictyony.

The myths of the primeval history resemble those that were common throughout the ancient Near East. They would have had universal appeal and probably circulated widely from the first. By far the oldest of the traditions, these stories betray their Babylonian origins in many details, but have undoubtedly undergone considerable change through the ages. As they were passed from generation to generation they were unconsciously, but inevitably, transformed until they finally became the common product of the people. Polytheistic elements were omitted or transformed and foreign personages were replaced by Hebrew ones.[21] Probably these old myths were arranged into a sort of continuous story at an early period.

Through the ages, legend cycles were gradually formed about each of the Patriarchs as different traditions were collected. Still later, these were shaped into an epic of the Patriarchs.[22] Often parallel traditions were retained despite their variations or repetitions. This was motivated by respect for tradition and because of the pleasing effect of slightly varied repetition; a storyteller's device which lays greater emphasis on that which is repeated.[23]

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21 Gunkel, op. cit., 39, 94, 132; Buber, op. cit., 18; W. F. Albright, From the Stone Age to Christianity (Garden City, Doubleday, 1957) 268-269.

22 Cornfeld, op. cit., 351.

23 Nielsen, op. cit., 94; von Rad, Genesis, 106

Eventually the tradition complex of the primeval history was linked to that of the Patriarchal legends and the Exodus stories to form one continuous story of the origins of Israel.[24]

W. F. Albright, observing that J and E do not give independent traditions of the beginning of Israel, is of the opinion that they reflect an "official version" of the story of Israel which was known in the eleventh century.[25] Speiser also speaks of a normative version of the traditions of Israel which he designates as "T".

> As a bridge between the Pentateuchal sources and the past that these documents record, "T" unblocks the path to further study. The subject can now be viewed in truer perspective. One can understand, for example, why none of the writers who drew on "T" was free with his subject matter – a point that was by no means self-evident to the early critics: each author was bound by the data that had come down to him.[26]

This hypothetical antecedent is similar to Noth's G (gemeinsame Grundlage or common base),[27] except that Speiser wishes to avoid implications of a written source. He points out that the variations between the several Pentateuchal documents which drew upon "T" suggest that it was somewhat fluid, and this implies "a predominantly oral mode of

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24 Cornfeld, op. cit., 351; Gunkel, op. cit., 129; von Rad, OT Theology I, 4.

25 Albright, From the Stone Age, 251-252.

26 Speiser, op. cit., xxxviii.

27 Martin Noth, Überlieferungs geschichte des Pentateuch (Stuttgart, Kohlhammer, 1948) 40 ; M. Noth, The Laws in the Pentateuch, trans. D. R. Ap-Thomas (Phila., Fortress, 1967) 133.

transmission".[28] However, despite some fluidity, it seems
clear that a standard version of the traditions of Israel had
been evolved prior to the creation of the earliest of the
Pentateuchal documents.

In a later chapter we shall examine the history of the
tradition in more detail and attempt to make some clarifications
regarding the period immediately preceeding the creation of
the J narrative. For the present, the outlines of the history
of the tradition seem clear. There was an initial period
during which individual myths, legends, songs, and genealogies
circulated independently. Then various collections of similar
traditions were formed. And later these complexes of tradition
were gathered together to form a continuous narrative. Of
course, many legends were still circulating independently
down into the period when others had already been gathered
into legend cycles, but ultimately they went through the same
process of collection and amalgamation. The outcome of this
process is to be found in the J and E traditions, though the
process did not stop there, but continued on until it reached
its completion in the Pentateuch.

Positions of von Rad and Weiser
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It seems a relatively short step from the Israelite epic
of the eleventh century to the fully developed narrative of
the J source, though, as we shall see later, the process was

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28 Speiser, op. cit., xxxviii; cf. also Engnell, op. cit.,
   6, 65,

a bit more complex than appears at first sight.

Among those who have attempted to explain how J came to
be created and to understand its literary character the most
notable have been Gerhard von Rad and Artur Weiser.[29]

At the beginning of his essay on "The Problem of the
Hexateuch", von Rad insists that the Hexateuch "must be
understood as representative of a type of literature of which
we may expect to recognize the early stages, the circumstances
of composition, and the subsequent development until it reached
the greatly extended form in which it now lies before us."[30]
He proposes to understand the Hexateuch, and J in particular,
as an expansion of the short historical creed of which examples
are found in Dt. 6:20-24; 26:5-9; and Jos. 24:2-13. These
give a brief recapitulation of the principal facts of God's
redemptive activity: the beginnings of Israel, the oppression
in Egypt, the deliverance by YHWH, and his bringing Israel to
the promised land. Although these confessions of faith were
used in different cultic contexts, they exhibit a basic
similarity of content and, in his opinion, testify to a well-
established literary genre.[31]

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29 Von Rad's position is set forth at length in The Problem
of the Hexateuch, 1-78. It is also outlined in his commentary on
Genesis, 13-30, and in OT Theology I, 121-128. See also Bernhard
Anderson, Understanding the Old Testament (Englewood Cliffs,
Prentice-Hall, 1966) 165-169 and Ellis, op. cit., 26 ff. for
expositions of basically the same position. Weiser's position
is explained in his Introduction to the OT, 81-111.

30 Von Rad, Problem of the Hexateuch, 3.

31 Ibid., 3.

Von Rad feels that the J work evolved from the ancient
cultic custom of reciting the salvation-history ceremonially
at festivals. "It might ... be said that the purpose of
the Yahwist's work is to provide for his contemporaries a
more complete and fully developed presentation of the creed..."[32]
The old credos might have sufficed during the period of the
old Israelite amphictyony, but with the arousal of national
consciousness a new perspective was needed and new questions
were raised. The creeds of earlier times most likely did not
tell the "full tale of the tribes". At most, they were
concerned with those of the old tribal confederation. But
the advent of the Davidic empire led to the conception of a
"greater Israel", and consequently the old framework had to
be expanded. This the Yahwist did by bringing together ancient
and often very scattered traditions and coordinating them
around the central plan of salvation-history provided by the
creeds.

This was relatively easy in the case of traditions which
were related to the events recounted in the credos, but among
the traditions which the Yahwist incorporated were many less
easily harmonized with the credal outline. Of these, von Rad
notes:

> The interpolation of such materials strained the
> original plan almost to the bursting point, and
> resulted in a forcible broadening of its formerly

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32 Ibid., 70.

rather narrow theological basis. There are three points at which this is particularly noticeable: in the interpolation of the Sinai tradition, in the development of the patriachal tradition, and in the introductory addition of the primeval history.[33]

Von Rad considers the Sinai tradition to have been originally the festival legend of the covenant-renewal festival at Shechem; whereas he feels that Dt. 26:5-9, the earliest attainable form of the credos, to have been the legend of the feast of Weeks celebrated at Gilgal.[34] The combination of the Sinai convenant tradition with the Conquest tradition of the credos, together with the addition of the patriarchal legends and the primeval history, produced the first complete presentation of Israel's history. And, in von Rad's view, this was principally the work of the J writer. His was the first comprehensive history of salvation from the Creation to the Settlement expressing the new theological perspectives of the age of David and Solomon.

Weiser is critical of von Rad's position. He feels: "Such assumptions make the Yahwist appear again as a collector of different traditions with a more or less recognizable power of composition and theological individuality."[35] Because J is regarded merely as a literary compilation, no attempt is made to determine its _Sitz im Leben_ or to discover for whom or for what purpose it was created. As a consequence,

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33 Ibid., 53.

34 Ibid., 41-48

35 Weiser, op. cit., 85.

we are just as much in the dark as before regarding the living importance which the work had.

Von Rad viewed J as largely a collection of cultic legends long since detached from their cultic origins, but Weiser contends that it was precisely the cult which was responsible for the collection, preservation and arrangement of these traditions.[36] These were developed into a salvation-history intended for liturgical recitation at the annual covenant-renewal festival of the Israelite confederation.[37]

> We must not regard as the prototype of the Pentateuchal sources the credo spoken by a layman, but the recitation and representation of salvation-history proclaiming the nature of God and leading up to the proclamation of his will and the act of renewal of the covenant, which is mediated at the regular covenant-festival of the sacral union of the twelve tribes by a cultic person divinely commissioned to speak. Accordingly, these recitations are to be understood as a kind of lectionary, i.e. as the written records of salvation-history belonging to the union of the twelve tribes, and fostered by oral recitation and transmission.[38]

Weiser thinks that we do not do justice to the Pentateuchal sources if we place their 'story-character' in the foreground. In his opinion, the material of the sources is presented in "the decisive dynamic way, characteristic of ancient cultic thought".[39] At the basis of this presentation are the themes of history and law upon which the annual covenant-renewal festival was based. Accordingly, J and the other Pentateuchal strands should be regarded as "stages and types in the shaping

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36 Ibid., 90.

37 Ibid., 90-91.

38 Ibid., 97.

39 Ibid., 90.

of the tradition of salvation-history, which had its home in the cult of the union of the twelve tribes and maintained itself by its sacral recital at the feast of the covenant."[40]

Had J been simply the artificial creation of one who gathered together once-separate traditions and arranged them according to a preconceived plan, as von Rad maintained, it could never have acquired the 'canonical' weight which it had in later tradition. The linking together of the traditions of covenant and conquest was not the work of the Yahwist, Weiser argues, but was "handed down to him as an established datum".[41] The origins of J can only be understood in connection with the sacral union of the tribes and its changing religious and political concerns.

Weiser's thesis is in several ways more attractive than von Rad's for it attempts to define the life-setting of J and it does not rest upon the assumption that the Yahwist acted somewhat like a modern author, exercising great freedom in the selection and presentation of his material. It takes better account of the history of the tradition and is able to show how the Pentateuchal strands were a natural development of the tradition. However, both von Rad's and Weiser's positions are inadequate in several respects. Before proceeding to suggest an alternative solution, it will be well to raise some objections to their theses, for then the lines of a

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40 Ibid., 96.

41 Ibid., 89.

possible solution may become clearer.

Critique of von Rad's and Weiser's Positions

The main objections to von Rad's position have already been raised by Weiser, as we have seen. The basic problem is that von Rad envisions the J author too much like a modern theologian and writer. Although he feels that the Yahwist modeled his narrative along the lines of the traditional creeds, he assigns him considerable freedom in the selection and arrangement of his material. However, the history of the tradition, which we traced earlier, would seem to indicate that this could not have been the case. While von Rad recognizes that the Yahwist had little liberty in his treatment of ancient tradition units, he presumes that his contribution can be seen "in the method which governs the arrangement of the materials."[42] This, of course, assumes that the majority of the material which the Yahwist used lay in widely scattered units which had not been gathered together previously. If these had already been arranged into a sort of story of Israel, it is hard to see how the Yahwist could have exercised his initiative so freely, or why his opus should have been accepted as the definitive form of the tradition for later ages.

Von Rad's attempt to explain J as an elaboration of the credos also runs up against several difficulties. For example,

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42 Von Rad, Problem of the Hexateuch, 67.

he can explain the inclusion of the Sinai tradition only on the basis of the Yahwist's supposed intention to 'theologically enrich' the settlement tradition by the presentation of YHWH's demand for righteousness.[43] Furthermore, the inclusion of the patriarchal history, which is but briefly mentioned in the creeds (and not in Dt. 6), and the primeval history, which is not mentioned at all; expand the old credal framework considerably beyond its original bounds. And this material constitutes fully half of the J narrative!

Von Rad feels that the drawing together of the materials of the primeval history was entirely the work of the Yahwist ("What motive would there have been for drawing together such hitherto widely separated elements, other than that which the J writer had in mind?")[44] and that the brief mention of the patriarchs in the creeds was sufficient warrant for including the extensive sagas which lay ready to hand.[45] He admits, however, that the Yahwist had considerable difficulty in harmonizing this material with the central theme of the credos which was the redemption from Egyptian slavery and subsequent settlement in Canaan. In fact, it is not at all clear that the primeval history relates to this theme at all.

We must conclude that the Yahwist created something quite different than the credos ever envisioned, and we must ask

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43 Ibid., 54.

44 Ibid., 64.

45 Ibid., 54-63.

why we need presume that it was necessary for him to rely on the credos as the basis for his work. Are we to suppose that the knowledge of Israel's traditions was so hazy that the credos alone preserved the memory of her history?

The credos concern themselves essentially with the traditions of the national history; reference to the patriarchal period is brief and purely introductory. The creeds are quite at home within the cultic union of YHWH worshippers for whom the events of the Exodus and Settlement were central. But the concerns of J extend beyond these and take in the whole scope of Israel's history. The similarities between the credos and J are not due to J's dependence on the credos, but to the fact that both go back ultimately to the same historical events.[46]

As Weiser noted, von Rad leaves unanswered the question of for whom and for what purpose the J narrative was created. Von Rad recognized the need to understand the Hexateuch as a representative of a type of literature; but, although he attempts to discern the early stages of this genre in the credos, he nowhere attempts to define the literary form of the J work itself.

The J work cannot be considered a development of the type of literature represented by the short historical creeds for the simple reason that the examples which have come down to us represent no one literary genre. With the exception of Samuel's

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46 Ellis, op. cit., 88.

speech in I Sm. 12, and Dt. 6, which is an outline of the catechesis which a father is to give to his son; the credos have their <u>Sitz im Leben</u> in the cult. This is true of Dt.26, which is a thanksgiving proclamation to accompany the offering of first fruits; Jos. 24, which is the cult narrative of a covenant-renewal ceremony; and Pss. 78, 105, 135, and 136. But, aside from their liturgical orientation, what these credos have in common is not their literary form but their content; they are all recitations of the salvation events.

J may be considered as a development of the literary genre represented by Samuel's speech, <u>or</u> by the father's catechesis, <u>or</u> by the cult narrative of Jos. 24 - but certainly not all of these. Von Rad has apparently not recognized this, while Weiser feels J is a cult narrative. As we observed previously, he maintains that the Pentateuchal sources are the written records of the tradition of salvation-history delivered by a cultic spokesman at the annual covenant festival.[47]

Consideration of Weiser's position must center on his assertion that J preserves the tradition of salvation-history used in the cult. If J is a cult narrative, it invites comparison with Jos. 24, which is a generally accepted example of this genre.[48]

Jos. 24 exhibits great economy of expression. It is concerned with the great deeds of YHWH, and these, Exodus and Conquest, are the only events that merit more than a sentence.

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47 Weiser, <u>op</u>. <u>cit</u>., 97.

48 <u>Ibid</u>., 88.

The whole sweep of the Pentateuch and the book of Joshua is compressed into only eleven verses.

What is most striking about this narrative is the way in which the hearers are involved in it. There are indications that the assembled people experienced the events recounted as realities in which they themselves participated.[49]

> Was it not YHWH our god who brought us and our
> ancestors out of the land of Egypt, the house of
> slavery, who worked those great wonders before our
> eyes and preserved us all along the way we travelled
> and among all the peoples through whom we journeyed?
> (Jos. 24, 17)

It is as though the events of the past had happened to them! Apparently the cultic recitation, with its accompanying rites, established a relationship between the salvation events of the past and the congregation. Something more than ordinary historical remembrance is involved. The narrative is a word of YHWH, a living, powerful word which is addressed directly to the congregation - and they are expected to respond. There is a dialog here between YHWH and his people.

When we turn to J we see none of these qualities. J is a true narrative, a story, as opposed to a cult narrative which is more of a "word" or revelation. J lacks precisely that "decisive dynamic way ... of understanding the presentation of salvation-history as an actualized happening"[50] which Weiser attributes to it.

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49 Ibid., 90; Brevard S. Childs, Memory and Tradition in Israel (London, SCM, 1962) 75.

50 Weiser, op. cit., 90.

Weiser explains that the transition from revelatory address, or "word of YHWH", to narrative is observable also in the Prophets and is a normal evolutionary process.[51] However, because of the diversity of material incorporated into J and the many literary forms represented, which are still discernable, it is hard to see how it could ever have been cast in revelatory form. It lacks the elevated tone which pervades litugical compositions. Furthermore, if it continued in liturgical usage down to a very late period, as Weiser presumes, it is unlikely to have been recast into a nonliturgical form of presentation. The transition from revelatory address to narrative is more likely to have occurred when the material passed from the cultic sphere to that of oral or written literature. And this must have been prior to the creation of J.

Perhaps the most significant criticism that can be leveled against the theories of von Rad and Weiser concerns their contention that J is salvation-history; that is, the history of YHWH's redemptive activity on Israel's behalf.[52]

Undoubtedly this category fits the credos well, for they relate the great deeds of YHWH; their concern is to give him glory. A characteristic phrase which occurs in both Dt. 6 and Dt. 26 and is echoed in the Psalms is, "YHWH brought us out of Egypt with mighty hand and outstretched arm, with great

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51 Ibid., 92.

52 Ibid., 90; von Rad, Problem of Hexateuch, 2.

terror, and with signs and wonders. He brought us here and gave us this land, a land where milk and honey flow." (Dt.26: 8-9) Here the Exodus and Settlement are described as acts of YHWH, everything is seen as wrought by his mighty hand. The subject matter of salvation-history is the mighty acts of YHWH.

The subject matter of the Yahwist narrative, though superficially the same as that of the credos, is actually different. J relates basically the same events as those referred to by the credos, and it shares the same Weltanchuaang, a Weltanchuaang which sees history as guided and shaped by YHWH. But J's perspective is different from that of the credos. The credos, looking at the events of Israel's past, confess them as acts of YHWH. J, looking at the same events, recognizes the shaping hand of YHWH, but is concerned to tell the story of the people of Israel. For it, YHWH provides the divine guarantee of the validity of Israel's history. But its primary concern is with the people. The subject matter of salvation-history is the magnalia Dei, while the subject matter of the Yahwist narrative is the story of Israel.

What we are dealing with are not two opposed views of reality, but two different types of literature. J can most aptly be characterized as saga, which is a people's history related in popular story form. "It is the form in which a people thinks of its own history."[53]

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53 Finsler, Homer[3], 33, quoted by von Rad, Genesis, 31.

The distinction between salvation-history and saga is quite important. If the Yahwist source was originally a saga, then it must be understood somewhat differently than if it is a presentation of salvation-history. For the range of interest and spirit of saga is quite different from that of salvation-history. A correct determination of J's genre may well be the key to its appreciation.

In order to establish that the J document is saga it will be necessary to examine the narrative itself in some detail. But first we must indicate just what saga is and deliniate some of its characteristics.

CHAPTER THREE: SAGA AND ITS DEVELOPMENT IN ISRAEL

Nature of Saga

'Saga' is an old Norse word "which refers to a prose or more rarely a poetic narrative of historical origin in coloring."[54]   In its original and limited meaning 'saga' denotes a story-form popular in Iceland during the Middle Ages. These sagas related the life-history of a national hero or family.

It is perhaps inappropriate to use a word which properly refers to a Scandinavian story-form to denote an Israelite one as this can easily lead to confusing the distinctive characteristics of the two.[55] Nevertheless, the phenomenon of saga is found among many peoples, and, while it varies somewhat from people to people, its basic characteristics remain the same. In lieu of a better word to describe the specific Israelite story form with which we are concerned here, we shall use the word 'saga'. However, it should be borne in mind that what is being referred to is the universal phenomenon of saga, and particularly Israelite saga.

While the term 'saga' is frequently used of Old Testament material, it is generally used in a more limited sense than

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54 W. F. Albright in Gunkel, op. cit., xii.

55 Both von Rad (Genesis, 36) and Greenwood (art. cit. 418) make this objection.   The disadvantages of the term have been noted, but the advantages seem to outweigh them.

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is intended here. In Old Testament studies the individual
stories of the patriarchs which underlie Gn. 12-36, are often
referred to as sagas. These were relatively short story-units
and concerned a single individual. It is the contention of
this paper that the same forces that were at work in the creation
of these old sagas were at work in the collection and building
up of these short sagas into cycles, and that the same forces
were also at work in the composition of the much longer and
more complex narrative of the Yahwist. The J source stands
in the tradition of saga telling; what can be said of the
earlier sagas can also, by extension, be said of J, provided
that the more developed form and the wider perspectives of J
are kept in mind. The developed form of Israelite saga, which
J represents, cannot be understood without an appreciation of
the earlier stages which led up to it.

It is important to realize that the analogy being made
here between early Israelite saga and J is not made on the
basis of external form or morphology. J has a much more complex
literary structure than the relatively simple patriarchal sagas.
We have already noticed that J includes material of widely
diverse literary character.[56] This amalgamation of various
materials makes for a somewhat amorphous structure. Were we
to attempt to define the genre of the J source solely on the
basis of morphology we would be hard put to find a suitable
category. But it is questionable whether morphology has been,

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56 See p. 17 ff.

or should be, the sole criterion for defining genre. As Knierim has pointed out; function, intention, thought, kerygma and attitude of mind (<u>Geistesbeschaftgung</u>) have always played an important role in the task of determining the genre of a work.[57] It is on the basis of these factors that the present definition is made. This seems more satisfactory than to attempt to coin a new term, which in any case would have but limited usage.

Bearing in mind, then, that the word 'saga' is but a vehicle for getting at the specific literary form of J, let us examine the characteristics of saga.

Saga is the form in which a preliterate people preserves and passes on its history. Prior to the use of writing, stories about important events and people are transmitted by word of mouth. Those of special importance and interest are latched on to and preserved, others of lesser significance are quickly forgotten. Storytellers gather together individual stories about an ancestor or popular hero and work them up into a continuous narrative with a series of episodes. Often isolated or floating episodes which originally had nothing to do with the personage in question, become attached to the saga of a notable ancestor or hero. In this way lengthy sagas are formed. Still later, a number of these sagas may be collected and arranged into a sort of comprehensive narrative of a people's early history. We shall examine the development

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57 Rolf Knierim, review "What is Form Criticism?", <u>Inter-</u><u>pretation</u>, 24, (Apr. 1970) 247.

of the saga-form in more detail later.

It is important to realize that the starting point of saga is real historical persons and events.[58] In this respect it resembles history and is distinguished from more fanciful forms of story, such as the fairy tale. However, unlike modern history, saga is not a purely detached and objective report of events. Saga is, as Martin Buber so aptly puts it, "a document of the reception of what befell in the minds of those whom it befell."[59] It is often not possible to separate the people's response to the events from the report of the events itself, so closely are the two intertwined. But it is precisely in this that the value and the unique witness of saga lies -- that it preserves the impact and significance of persons and events as seen through the eyes of those who beheld them.

> Even if it is impossible to reconstitute the course
> of events themselves, it is nevertheless possible
> to recover much of the manner in which the participating
> people experienced those events.... In so far as
> the saga begins near the event, it is the outcome
> and record of this meeting.[60]

In the telling of the saga, the narrator's main object is to communicate to his listeners the vital significance of the persons and events of his story. Consequently, he often fleshes out the historical nucleus with a considerable amount of imaginative detail. These 'imaginative retellings' actually convey the significance of the events better than a purely

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58 Von Rad, Genesis, 31.

59 Buber, op. cit., 18.

60 Ibid., 16.

'factual' account could. For the main purpose of saga is to communicate the significance of events, rather than to be an objective record of them.[61] It is an interpretation of history, and this function must be reckoned with in a study of saga.

Saga also differs from modern historical writing in regard to the type of matters it relates. History treats of great public occurences, political affairs, and the deeds of men who influence the destinies of nations. In contrast, saga portrays the lives of individuals, it deals with personal and private matters.[62] It relates "the significant isolated features of what has happened, striking natural processes, conspicuous traits of character of the heroes..."[63] Even when the saga does treat of political affairs it does so in a way that attracts popular attention, and often translates them into the deeds of an individual.

> If tribes or nations are described, it is purely
> in the capacity of blood relations.... Collective
> powers are unknown: the victory of an army is the
> victory of the head of one family.[64]

It was the contention of Jolles "that the basis of saga-telling lay in a conception of the world in terms of the family."[65] The earliest sagas were essentially stories about ancestors. They originated at a time before the formation of

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61 Von Rad, _Genesis_, 32 ff.; Koch, _op. cit._, 155.

62 .Gunkel, _op. cit._, 4-5.

63 Weiser, _op. cit._, 60.

64 Koch, _op. cit._, 151.

65 _Ibid._, 151.

of national groupings when family, clan and tribal ties were
dominant. Genealogical ties were strong and the ancestor in
some ways personified those decended from him. He was a cor-
porate personality in that the story of his life epitomized
that of his people.[66] The accumulated experiences of his
family, clan, or tribe were projected onto him, often uncons-
ciously, and as a consequence the story of his life took on
more than personal significance. This is the secret of saga;
that it is a sort of collective history of a people. As von
Rad points out, the peculiar process of symbolization at
work in saga "attempts primarily to demonstrate, through the
experiences of a single individual, historical facts that
originally belonged completely to the group."[67] The crystalizing
point around which the events of the group's history is told
is the life of its great ancestor.

Usually it is the outlines of the narrative, its general
import, and striking details that are remembered.[68] These
are what the narrator attempts to communicate.

Inevitablyy the attitude of the saga-teller towards the
persons and events of his story affects his telling of it.
And he in turn is influenced by the attitudes of his compatriots.
In the telling, he may introduce subtle changes into the story

66 Ibid., 153-154; von Rad, Genesis, 39; Gunkel, op. cit.,
18-23.

67 Von Rad, Genesis, 34.

68 Charles Lohr, "Oral Techniques in the Gospel of Matthew"
CBQ, 23 (1961), esp. 425.

of which he is not even aware. Because the saga of their
ancestors is also, in some way, the story of themselves; the
narrator and his hearers tend to project themselves and their
experiences, their values and their aspirations onto the
figures of the saga. Through the ages succeeding generations
of saga-tellers shape and reshape the saga until it comes to
reflect not only the historical events at its core, but also
the accumulated response of later generations.

Thus the distances of time break down in saga. All periods
are drawn together and compressed into stories which have
highly symbolic overtones.[69] This gives it a peculiar density.
Consequently, there is no simple method for interpreting saga.
It is at one and the same time quite conservative in its pre-
servation of ancient tradition and quite creative in its
handling and interpretation of that tradition. Very old
material stands side by side with, is intertwined with, and
is overlaid by, material from later generations. In this way
saga comes to comprise "the sum total of the living historical
recollection of peoples. In it is mirrored in fact and truth
the history of a people. It is the form in which a people
thinks of its own history."[70]

A people's attitude towards its sagas is far from casual.
The saga teller and his hearers have a vital interest in that

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69 Koch, op. cit., 157.

70 Finsler, op. cit., 33.

which the saga relates. It is the story of their forebears.
It tells them who they are and where they have come from; it
relates their lineage; it is a sort of etiology of the people.
Consequently, genealogical information is a indispensible
part of saga; it is the very substance of saga.[71] By preserv-
ing the story of the people's past, of their forebears and
their doings, saga preserves the people's identity. It gives
the security of knowing their origins.

The saga puts the poeple in touch with their past. When
the saga is told the people identify themselves with the deeds
and sufferings of their ancestors and heroes.

> [Saga] aims to give the hearer an unconscious awareness
> of his own place in the world, for he is inspired, moved,
> and warned by the events, and emboldened by the praises
> sung for the hero. He is swept off his feet, and taken up
> into the events as they are described. Every saga is the
> work of a definite social group, unconsciously expressing
> its desires and ideals. It is the voice of the people.[72]

Perhaps the main purpose of saga and the reason for its creation
and preservation is that "it supplies models for behaviour and,
by that fact, gives meaning and value to life."[73]

There is a close relationship between saga and myth.
The earliest sagas often resemble myths, for myths are generally
older than sagas.[74] Both saga and myth are stories of origins,
though the kind of origins with which each is concerned are

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71 Koch, op. cit., 151; David Neiman, "The Date and Circum-
stances of the Cursing of Canaan", Biblical Motifs, ed. A. Alt-
mann (Cambridge, Harvard University, 1966) 123-124.

72 Koch, op. cit., 154; see also Nielsen, op. cit., 51.

73 Mircea Eliade, Myth and Reality, trans. W. Trask
(N.Y. Harper & Row, 1963) 2.

74 Gunkel, op. cit., 14.

different. Both also give meaning and value to life by providing models for behaviour. The difference between the two is that in myth the actors are gods, while in saga the chief actors are men.[75]

The starting point of myth seems to be in man's response to the world around him, and especially the forces of nature; whereas the origin of saga lies in men's response to human history.[76] In this respect saga resembles historical writing (<u>Historie</u>); without, however, achieving the detached, scientific attitude which modern history maintains towards its subject matter.

While saga resembles history because of its subject matter (though even here the resemblance is not too close), it is intermediary between myth and history, and is in fact closer to the former. Myth, saga, and history are all concerned with the past: in the case of myth, the primordial past; in the case of saga, the formative period of a people's history; and in the case of history, the whole chain of human events. But, unlike modern history, myth and saga regard the past as intimately bound up with the present; as in some way present. The past, whether the primordial age or the age of the Fathers, is a sort of archetype, the events of that period are enlarged to the dimensions of typical occurrences which are determinative

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75 <u>Ibid</u>., 14.

76 This is of necessity somewhat of an oversimplification, but it is sufficient for our purposes. An examination of the nature of mythological thought can be found in the book by Henri Frankfort et al., <u>The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man</u> (Chicago, University of Chicago, 1946). See also the works of Eliade cited below.

for the present.[77]

This aspect of myth is well known and has been examined extensively by Eliade.[78] But saga also shares this view, although in a somewhat modified form. Saga is aware of the intimate link between past and present, and it tends to share the view of myth that certain events of the past have a kind of archetypical significance and force. Where it differs is in the type of events which it considers to be archetypical.[79] It is, of course, true that the dimensions of these events have been heightened and expanded by the tradition. However, we are not seeking here to justify such thinking, but to elucidate it. A quotation from von Rad may help in this regard.

> In its sagas a people is concerned with itself and
> the realities in which it finds itself. It is,
> however, a view and interpretation not only of that
> which once was, but of a past event that is secretly
> present and decisive for the present. Thus, just
> as for an individual certain events or decisions of
> the past determine his whole life, so in the life
> of tribes and peoples past events have a direct
> influence on the present and mold it. It is the
> saga, much more than historical writing, that knows
> this secret contemporary character of apparently
> past events; it can let things become contemporary
> in such a way that everyone detects their importance,
> while the same events would probably have been
> overlooked by historical writing (if it can be
> thought to have existed at the time). For there
> is another history that a people makes besides the

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77 See especially Myth and Reality; Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return (N.Y., Harper & Row, 1954); The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion (N.Y., Harper & Row, 1961).

79 An example of the type of event referred to is the Exodus event which so dominated Old Testament thinking and which influenced the thought of Second Isaiah and the New Testament. This way of thinking is quite like cultic 'actualization'. cf. Childs, op. cit., 75.

externals of wars, victories, migrations and
political catastrophes. It is an inner history,
one that takes place on a higher level, a story
of inner events, experiences, and singular guidance,
of working and becoming mature in life's mysteries;
to put it simply, a history with God.[80]

This comparison of myth and saga indicates that if, as Childs has remarked, "myth served in a historicized form as a saga within the Old Testament",[81] it is also true that saga served in some sense as myth.

The complex relationship between myth and saga needs to be dealt with in considerably more detail than is possible here. For example, it appears that both are based to some extent on a cyclic notion of time and history; though this is especially true of myth which is rooted in the processes of nature, while saga represents a step away from the cyclic view and towards a more linear notion such as that found in modern historical thinking. It is clear that saga cannot be thoroughly understood until such questions are resolved. However, these questions are beyond the scope of this study and demand a complete investigation of their own. What is sketched here are at most suggestions which are intended merely to indicate in a general way the import of saga.

Development of Saga in Israel

So far we have contented ourselves with making some general observations about the nature of saga. Even in these rudimentary

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80 Von Rad, Genesis, 32.

81 Childs, op. cit., 72. What is meant is that saga served much the same function in Israel as myth did among other peoples.

observations there were indications that the saga form did not remain unchanged throughout its history. The development of the saga must be understood against the background of the intellectual, cultural, social and political development of the people who create it. These factors decisively influence its formation.[82] While it is not possible to consider all of these influences in detail here, something must be said about the main factors involved; in particular, we must examine the development of Israelite saga with some care.

It appears that as newer forms of saga are developed, older sagas are not discarded, but are preserved along with the newer ones.[83] They are then worked up into a sort of comprehensive saga which contains within it sagas representing several phases of the history of the saga form. Often the older sagas are not reworked, but take on new meaning and are transformed by being incorported into the newer saga.[84] Thus it is possible to discern within the final form of the saga the several stages which led up to it. This is true of the Yahwist saga where we find first several transformed myths, then the patriarchal sagas, a transitional form in the Joseph story, and finally the national saga which centers around the heroic figure of Moses. Later stages of the Israelite saga can be found in the stories of Joshua, the Judges, Samuel, Saul, and David.

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82 Koch, op. cit., 35; Barr, op. cit., 26.

83 Koch, op. cit., 152-153.

As we saw previously, the earliest sagas arose at a time when the world was conceived of in terms of the family, and thus at a period before more developed forms of social grouping had gained a strong hold on the people's consciousness. Myth also share this family-centered way of thinking, for they tend to picture the activities of the gods in terms of family rela-tionships.[85] But in the myths of Gn. 2:4-11 we notice that a transformation has taken place. These stories are unlike older forms of myth, they explain the origin of the world and of man and the principal facts of human destiny, but the locus of their action has been changed. The action of myth takes place in the world of the gods; the action of these transformed myths takes place in the world of men.[86] The world of the gods is not denied, occasionally it peeps through, as in Gn. 11: 5-7 where we catch a brief glimpse of YHWH musing over Babel; but overwhelmingly the concern is with the world of human events, and it is here that the activity of YHWH is located.

It is often said that the old myths have been 'historicized',[87] but this is not quite accurate for they do not relate history in any modern sense of that term. Rather, these myths have undergone a process of transformation so that they now appear in saga form. They have become more man-centered, and thus, if the term may be permitted, more secularized. This is in accord with the view-point of saga, which is primarily a story

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85 Koch, op. cit., 151, n. 5.

86 These are not so much separate localities as different ways of looking at the same reality.

87 So Childs, op. cit., 72; Weiser, op. cit., 58 ff.

of people, and may or may not indicate a shift in the world-view of those responsible for their transformation. That is, the development from myth to saga is a literary process, and whether this development was influenced by a changing world-view is problematic. What is important for our present purposes is that the focus of these 'sagaized' myths no longer centers on the activity of God, but on the fate of the men created, instructed, punished and guided by him. The difference is slight; but very significant.[88]

A similar process of transformation occurred in regard to many of the short tradition units now found scattered throughout the J narrative. Some of these small units probably existed prior to the creation of the ancestral sagas, others may have been created later, but originally existed independently. For example, various sorts of etiological story circulated, such as geological legends, etymological legends, ethnological legends, and cultic legends.[89] These were intended to explain the origins of different phenomena. At least in this respect they performed a function similar to myth. But in the Yahwist saga these legends have been woven so closely into the patriarchal sagas that their original form is often scarcely discernible.[90] The man-centered, familial point of view has won out and the old legends have become mere episodes in the life of an ancestor.

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88 This difference is the basis for the distinction between myth and saga, and also between salvation-history and saga. Confusion of the two can easily lead to misinterpretation.

89 Gunkel, op. cit., 25-36.

90 Gunkel, op. cit., 42 ff, disagrees, but see von Rad, Genesis, 17 ff.

This indicates that the saga form has supplanted the older, more mythological, form; but also that the function of the early sagas cannot have been wholly different from that of these old etiologies. Otherwise the saga could not have taken over and assimulated this old material.

As social structures evolve from family, clan and tribal groupings to national unities there is a corresponding change in the type of saga created. The sagas begin to reflect the new perspectives of the people, but the change is slow. Family sagas center around the family's ancestor and, even though clan and tribal origins are usually more complex, their stories are normally told in terms of a presumed ancestor.[91] With the emergence of nations, the sagas of the various clans and tribes within the nation are gathered together and given a sort of artificial unity so that they form a saga of the whole people. The older sagas are assimilated to a new form and transformed thereby.[92] At the same time the new sagas that are created once national consciousness is achieved are no longer about ancestors, but about national heroes and those who formed the newly emerged nation.[93] These are then incorporated into the nation's saga. Thus a nation's saga contains within it very early ancestral saga's as well as newer heroic, or national, sagas.

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91 Neiman, art. cit., 123-124; Gunkel, op. cit., 18-19.

92 Barr, op. cit., 15.

93 Von Rad, Genesis, 22.

The newer sagas bear a closer similarity to history than do the ancestral sagas, but they are by no means historical in our sense of the word. Just as in the older sagas, "political motives are again presented in personal terms".[94] And, while the corporate figure of an ancestor disappears, a new corporate, or rather collective, figure appears: 'the people'. 'The people' normally thinks, speaks, and acts as one man. However, the hero, who arises from among the people, stands over against them. Although he may sometimes, or in some ways, personify the people just as the later kings did; he is an individual, and he just as often stands in opposition to the people as he does with them.

It is difficult to tell whether these newer sagas ought to be called stories of heroes or stories of the people. Probably it is best not to attempt to make such a distinction. The saga of the hero exists because of his importance to the people, any attempt to view him independently is an injustice to the story form and to the way of thinking which produced it.

The evolution from ancestral to national saga is indicated not only by a shift from ancestral to heroic figures, but also by a change in style and outlook.

> The style changes from the concise to the elaborated.
> Whereas the oldest traditions only report essentials,
> pack the speeches with matter, and do not attempt to
> describe the inward struggles of the characters, in
> the second stage of the saga the characters express
> themselves at length.... Any of the older sagas
> originating from the time of the patriarchs which

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94 Koch, op. cit., 152 ff.

retained their vitality were carried over into the
second stage, where to some extent they adapted
themselves to the new style and the new outlook.
The patriarchs no longer appear as forefathers or
leaders of a tribe, but as representatives of Israel.
This is particularly evident in the Moses and Joshua
sagas, but also in the figure of Abraham in Genesis XX. [95]

The growing social, political and cultural unity of the
tribes of the Israelite confederation is reflected in their
sagas as we might expect. The sagas of Abraham, Isaac and
Jacob were collected and given what some regared as an artificial
continuity. [96] The Jacob saga explains the origin of the several
tribes within the confederation, while the stories about Simeon
and Levi, Reuben, and Judah relate events in tribal history,
but point towards the rise of David and are probably more
closely related to the final stage of the saga. [97] The story
of J$_o$seph is similar to an ancestral saga and may have originally
belonged to the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh. [98] However,
the Joseph story is somewhat different from the earlier sagas
in that Joseph is less a corporate figure and more of an
individual. He is more like the heroes of national saga and
his saga represents a intermediary form between the patriarchal
sagas and the national saga which immediately follows in Ex. 1.

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95 Ibid., 152-153.

96 Anderson, op. cit., 180; Ronald Clements, Abraham and
David (London, SCM, 1967) 45; John L. McKenzie, The World of
the Judges (Englewood Cliffs, Prentice-Hall, 1966) 83.

97 We shall examine these stories later.

98 B. J. van der Merwe, "Joseph as Successor of Jacob",
Studia Biblica et Semitica, The C. Vriczen dedicata, 229-270)
argues that in its original form the Joseph story related how
Joseph succeeded Jacob as patriarch of Israel. We shall also
examine this story later.

In its present place, the Joseph saga bridges the gap between the last of the patriarchs and the first national hero, Moses. That this is somewhat of a tour de force is evident to any reader.[99] The continuity between the Joseph story and the national history which follows is not great. The most obvious discontinuity is the change in style from ancestral to national saga. For all that, this discontinuity is the more instructive as it provides a clear example of how successive stages of saga have been bound together into a new and more developed saga. One might at the same time examine the linking of the primeval and patriarchal stories in Gn. 11-12.

The saga which forms the basis for the books of Exodus through Joshua exhibits the characteristics of the saga form which we have elsewhere described as 'national' and which Koch prefers to call 'rural-national'[100] In this saga there are no ancestors; corporate personalities are replaced by the collective. The "sons of Israel" appear, and, although tribes are mentioned, they do not appear as corporate figures.[101] The whole multitude of "sons of Israel" and "people of various sorts [who] joined them in great numbers" (Ex. 12:38) is referred to simply as "the people". Though Moses plays the central role in the saga, he is not the progenitor of the

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99 Von Rad, Problem of Hexateuch, 59-50; Anderson, op.cit., 186.

100 Koch, op. cit., 152 ff.

101 Noth, Exodus, 9.

people except in a spiritual sense. Nor does he personify
the people. He stands over against them as their leader, and
often in opposition to them. He is a heroic figure who seems
always to be involved in a struggle with the people he has
been ordered to lead.

The Exodus story reflects the perspectives and concerns
of the YHWH amphictyony and we must presume that it was the
creation of this confederation.[102] This saga relates the
origins of this sacral fellowship and thus provides its
etiology. Its connection with the preceeding patriarchal
sagas is at best tenuous. Nevertheless, the saga mentality
demanded a more complete story of the origins of the people
and so the traditions of the Fathers were added, just as the
primeval stories had been prefixed to the patriarchal sagas.

It is not entirely accurate to refer to the Exodus narrative
as a 'national' saga for it was the product of the Israelite
confederation and this can be called a nation only in the
loosest sense. The basis of this confederation was a religious
bond, the covenant with YHWH, and this is amply reflected in
the saga.[103] Nevertheless, while this gives the story a slightly
different character, it still must be insisted that it is a
saga.

Unlike the credos, where YHWH is the protagonist, in the

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102 The main purpose of the Exodus story is to relate how
the Israelite Confederation came into being; thus, the Sinai
covenant forms the focal point of the narrative - regardless of
the actual historical sequence of events. See Noth, Exodus, 12.

103 Thus, the guiding role of YHWH is more clearly emphasized
throughout this narrative than in the rest of the J strand.

Exodus story it is Moses, acting on YHWH's orders, who is
the chief actor. Only in a passage which probably postdates
the rest of J (Ex. 32:1-34:5)[104] does a phrase, typical of
cultic language, occur which describes YHWH as the protagonist.
In Ex. 32:11 Moses asks, "YHWH, why should your wrath blaze
out against this people of yours whom you brought out of the
land of Egypt with arm outstretched and mighty hand?" This
isolated phrase is not typical of the language of the Exodus
narrative in J. Though YHWH acts at various times throughout
the story, just as he acted throughout the patriarchal sagas,
the interest centers on the fortunes of the people. YHWH's
acts are decisive for the fortunes of the people; nonetheless,
it is their story and not his.

Thus far, we have examined the development of the saga of
Israel up to the period of the Judges. We saw that ancient
myths were transformed and appropriated to the saga; that
ancestral sagas were collected, arranged in cycles, and then
given new meaning by being related to the history of the whole
people; and that the newer heroic sagas of Moses and Joshua
were added on to the older narratives. In this way, all of
these once independent sagas came to be forged into a single
saga. The result was a long, rambling, often disjointed, but
nonetheless forward-moving narrative telling the story of the
people from the creation of man till the formation of the
tribal confederation of Israel.

104 Noth, Exodus, 246, argues that Ex. 32:1-34:5 must be
dated after the schism of Jeroboam, and hence later than the
rest of J.

We have looked at the development of Israelite tradition from two points of view: first, from the general history of tradition; and secondly, from the development of the saga-form. It would seem that Israel's traditions must have reached a state roughly corresponding to the outlines of the Yahwist narrative in the period just prior to the creation of J. However, there are indications even within the Yahwist saga itself that the picture we have drawn of the development of the Israelite saga is somewhat oversimplified. If the various traditions found in J had already been gathered together for some time we should expect them to have been joined more smoothly and to have been integrated more carefully. It is particularly in the latter part of the saga, the Exodus and Wandering accounts, that we notice a pronounced disconnectedness which indicates either that portions of the narrative have been lost (which is usually assumed),[105] or that the traditions have been newly gathered together (which is more likely the case).

In order to better understand the ways in which the Yahwist saga was different from earlier forms of the sage of Israel we must take into account various historical factors which influenced the development of this saga.

The historical period with which we are concerned is roughly that of the Judges; that is the time between the Settlement and the Kingdom of David. The history of this period is far from clear. However, there are certain general

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105 Ellis, op. cit., 32.

observations which can be made about the historical situation
that bear on the development of the saga.

If we accept at face value the account of the Conquest
found in the book of Joshua, we conclude that "all Israel"
crossed the Jordan near Gilgal, proceeded to capture Jericho,
and then in a series of victorious campaigns led by Joshua
they first conquered the south and then the northern territories.
There are some inconsistancies, however, even in the account
found in Joshua. For example, in Jos. 10:36-37 we read that
Joshua and all Israel took Hebron and killed every one in it,
yet in Jos. 15:14 we find Caleb again taking the city. When
we turn to the first chapter of Judges, we read that after
the death of Joshua the various tribes set out to capture and
occupy the territories alloted to them, but that they were
not completely successful and a number of cities remained in
alien hands. This is hardly consistent with the picture of
a general conquest of the land under Joshua which the book
of that name presents. There is every reason to believe that
the gradual occupation of the land indicated by the book of
Judges is the more accurate and that Joshua presents a quite
idealized picture.

Mendenhall has even gone so far as to suggest that there
was no large scale invasion of the land from without.[106]
Instead, he feels the monarchy and aristocracy of the Canaanite

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106 George Mendenhall, "The Hebrew Conquest of Palestine",
B.A. 25 (1962) 66-87.

city-states had become so oppressive that large numbers of people revolted and withdrew from the system. This resulted in a period of social unrest which is witnessed to by the Amarna letters. These rebels then banded together with a small band of YHWH worshippers who had escaped from Egypt and accepted their traditions of a god who delivered the oppressed and promised them a land. Once this YHWH confederation reached sufficient proportions they were able to overturn local kings and establish themselves in the land.[107]

This is not the place to enter into a critical evaluation of Mendenhall's thesis. It suffices to note McKenzie's cantion that this thesis would fail "if it were made into a universal and exclusive account of the origins and rise of Israel.[108] The settlement of the land seems to have been a complex and several-phased process. It is unwise to accept any simple explanation of the way in which this was accomplished.

At present our interest in this question is limited to the implications which the settlement has for the state of Israel's traditions. If "all Israel" entered Canaan in one thrust, we should expect that they shared a common body of traditions; but if there were several entries or a popular uprising, we might expect their traditions to be somewhat diverse.

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107 McKensie, op. cit., 95-98, gives a good summary of Mendenhall's position.

108 Ibid., 97.

While we cannot reconstruct the actual sequence of events with any great degree of certitude, it seems probable that all the tribes did not enter Canaan together. This is suggested by the lack of unity among the tribes during the era of the Judges. The stories of the Judges testify to a considerable amount of divisiveness among the tribes and even to instances of intertribal war (Jg. 12:1-6; 19:1-21:25). There was no political unity encompassing all Israel during the period of the Judges, in fact during the entire period of Israelite history political unity was only achieved during the reigns of David and Solomon. This lack of unity suggests deep-rooted causes; causes which are not immediately apparent in the traditions.[109]

Much of this disunity can be attributed to accidents of geography and the presence of unconquered Canaanite cities which separated the different sections of the country and made communication between them difficult.

> The survey of the traditions shows that Israel in the period of the Judges held its land in four distinct sections. These are Galilee, eastern Palestine, the highlands of Judah, and the highlands of Ephraim. Between Judah in the south and Ephraim in the center lay the Canaanite cities of Jerusalem and Gezer. Between Ephraim and Galilee in the north there lay the plain of Esdraelon with the Canaanite cities of Taanach (Megiddo), Ibleam, and Beth-shan. The tribes of eastern Palestine were separated from the others by the valley of the Jordan. These divisions were not fortified military frontiers which blocked all communication, but they mark out four groups of tribes, each of which lived more to itself than it did with the tribes of

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109 Ibid., 79.

the other regions.[110]

But geography alone cannot account for the isolation of Judah from the northern tribes. Politically, Judah and Israel were united for less than a century, and even then it was less a case of a single consolidated kingdom as two kingdoms ruled over by the same king.[111] In describing the reigns of David and Solomon, II Samuel says that they ruled over Israel <u>and</u> over Judah. (II Sm. 5:5 and footnote in Jerusalem Bible) A glance at the history and political structure of the Davidic and Solomonic kingdoms confirms this dualism.

According to II Sm 2 ff, David reigned at Hebron as king of Judah for seven and a half years.[112] During part of this time Saul's son Ishbaal reigned over Israel. Moreover, at this time, there was fighting between Israel and Judah. The military commander of Israel, Abner, plotted with David to win over Israel to David; and, after the assassination of Ishbaal, the elders of Israel came to David and requested him to rule over Israel. That it was a question of a rule over two nations is indicated by the fact that David's rule over Israel was conditioned by a pact (II Sm. 5:3), while there is no mention of a similar pact between him and the people of Judah. When Solomon ascended the throne no mention is made of a pact or a separate annointing, but it is said that David appointed him "as ruler of Israel <u>and</u> of Judah". (I Kg. 1:35) With the

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110 Ibid., 79

111 Ibid., 82

112 Albrecht Alt, <u>Essays on Old Testament History and Religion</u>, trans. R. A. Wilson (Oxford, Blackwell, 1966) 211.

death of Solomon and the succession of Rehoboam mention is

made of a separate acclamation as king of Israel and a pact,

but of course, Rehoboam did not acceed to the Israelites'

demands in regard to the pact and so they refused to accept

him as king and chose Jeroboam instead (I Kg. 12) From then

on, the kingdoms of Israel and Judah remained apart.

These indications, plus the various revolutionaries who

played upon regional loyalties and differences — Absalom

(II Sm. 15 ff), Sheba (II Sm. 20), and Jeroboam (I Kg. 11:26 ff) —

suggest that the political union between Judah and Israel was

not a strong one, and was made in spite of quite deep-seated

differences. The source of these differences must lie in an

earlier period.

McKenzie observes, "When Judah appears in the Samson

stories it is subject to the Philistines. In the early stories

of David, Judah is also subject to the Philistines. One may

conclude from these allusions at least that the relations of

Judah with the other tribes were not close.[113] Even earlier

than this, we notice that both Judah and the other southern

tribe of Simeon are not mentioned in the song of Deborah (Jg. 5).

This is strange if, indeed, Judah and Simeon belonged to the

same confederation as the other tribes mentioned. Rowley

argues that they could not be expected to aid in the battle

of Taanach because of their great distance from the battlefield

and the danger of leaving their homes unprotected against

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113 McKenzie, op. cit., 83.

the Canaanites.[114] Though this is possible, one wonders why other tribes, equally distant, were not similarly excused. It seems more likely, as other scholars have maintained,[115] that the ommission of any mention of Judah and Simeon in the song of Deborah indicates that they were not a party to the Israelite confederation in this early period.

It has been suggested that there was a southern amphictyony of six clans centered around the sanctuary of Hebron.[116] Because of the dominance of Judah, or perhaps because this geographical area was known as Judah,[117] these clans ultimately became known as 'the house of Judah'. Many writers believe that the peoples of this southern league did not enter Canaan at the same time as the northern, or Joseph tribes.[118] This southern league seems to have been composed of a mixed group of peoples, Judahites, Calebites, Simeonites, Jerahmeelites, Cainites and Othnielites, who entered the land from the south earlier than the Joseph tribes.

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114 H. H. Rowley, From Joseph to Joshua (London, Oxford, 1950) 103.

115 Clements, op. cit., 44-45, and n. 35.

116 Martin Noth, The History of Israel, trans. S. Godman (London, Adam and Charles Black, 1960) 181 ff; Alt, op. cit., 53-54; Clements, op. cit., 43 ff; Rowley, op. cit., 126

117 So Noth, History, 56.

118 Otto Eissfeldt, "Palestine in the Time of the Nineteenth Dynasty" Cambridge Ancient History II, 26a, (Cambridge, 1905) 24; Rowley, op. cit., 102 ff; Clements, op. cit., 41 ff; Cuthbert Simpson, The Early Traditions of Israel (Oxford, Blackwell, 1948) 33.

If this was so, it becomes clear why the south always remained somewhat isolated from the north and why there were antagonisms between them. The problem then becomes to see where their bonds of kinship lay, for there can be no doubt that they considered themselves one "flesh and blood" (II Sm 5:1).

It seems probable that although the schema by which the twelve tribes were decended from the sons of Jacob is somewhat artificial; and the decent of Jacob from Isaae and Isaac from Abraham is also somewhat contrived, nonetheless there is some truth in the consistent biblical assertion that the tribes were somehow related. However, it is not to our purpose here to examine this question further, for what we wish to do is to get behind the oversimplified presentation of the book of Joshua and see that in the early period of Israel's history there was a considerable amount of disunity and a number of fairly isolated groups of people bound together by loyalty to the god YHWH.

Some have argued that the southern tribes were not orginally worshippers of YHWH and did not accept YHWH until the time of David,[119] but Clements argues quite convincingly that Caleb was probably responsible for the introduction of YHWH worship at the old Abrahamic sanctuary of Mamre near Hebron.[120] Thus, it seems north and south shared a common faith in YHWH, though

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119 Von Rad, OT Theology I, 16; A. Jepsen, "Zur Überlieferung der Vatergestalten" WZ Leipzig 3 (1953/54) 272 ff.

120 Clements, op. cit., 39.

if the southern tribes did not experience the Exodus from
Egypt, which is probable, we should suppose that their traditions
were somewhat different from the north's.

We can draw the following general conclusions about the
traditions of Israel. The legends of the primeval days
(Gn. 2-11), being quite common throughout the Near East, were
probably told in all of the tribes, though possibly in somewhat
differing versions. The stories of the patriarchs Abraham
and Isaac belonged to the southern tribes, while those of
Jacob and Joseph belonged in the north. However, it seems
likely that the sagas of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were circu-
lated widely and combined even before the Joseph tribes returned
from Egypt. The Joseph story, which is bracketed by the Jacob
saga, belonged to the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh. The
Exodus narrative was mainly the possession of those tribes
who came out of Egypt and those who joined them in the Israelite
amphictyony. Thus, the Exodus narrative is largely northern.
However, there is reason to believe that the account of the
stay at Kadesh comes from the south.

> H. H. Rowley[121] ascribes to this Southern (Calebite)
> movement the responsibility for the introduction of
> the tradition of a stay at Kadesh into the Israelite
> account of the nation's origins. This is not impossible,
> although there is much to suggest that Kadesh was
> central to the whole tradition of Yahweh worship, so
> that both the Southern and Northern movements into
> Palestine, associated respectively with Caleb and
> Joshua, had an original link with this place. There
> are indications that Kadesh was the centre of the
> cult of Yahweh, who was venerated in pre-Israelite

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121 Rowley, op. cit., 104 ff.

times as the God of Sinai-Horeb. Thus it is
perfectly credible that both movements, even
though separated by a considerable interval of
time, should have had connections with Mount
Sinai through their common links with Kadesh.
Only the later (Northern) movement, however,
which entered Canaan under Joshua, had experienced
the Exodus from Egypt and enjoyed the leadership
of Moses. When these separate elements were
united together later through their common religious
interests, then the Exodus-Moses traditions were
accepted by all.[122]

Because the northern Exodus traditions and the Kadesh

traditions of the south were the last to be fused, we would

expect a certain roughness and sketchiness in the final narra-

tive, and indeed this is the case.

The whole period of the Judges was one of growing unity

fostered by enemy threats from without and the continuing

subjugation or expulsion of indigenous populations. This

fostered the coalescence of Israel's traditions and the eventual

creation of a national saga. There were various attempts to

promote greater unity among the tribes such as the move to

make Gideon king (Jg 8:22), the abortive attempt of Abimelech

to establish a small kingdom (Jg. 9), and the judgeship of

Samuel and his sons (I Sm. 7:15-8:1). But it was not until

the rise of Saul that Israel experienced any real political

unity. However, Saul's rather loose kingship, which was more

like an extended judgeship,[123] probably did not extend over

the southern tribes which were subject to the Philistines at

that time. Nevertheless, despite the centrifugal elements

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122 Clements, op. cit., 43.

123 Note that Saul is called a nagid (prince) and not a
melek (king).

which militated against these unifying moves, we must suppose
that they, plus the effects of the amphictyonic union, were
instrumental in the creation of a common body of traditions.
Thus, by the time that David united the northern and southern
tribes under his rule, the national saga had very nearly reached
the form which we find in J.

CHAPTER FOUR: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Although we have already adverted to the historical period
of the Davidic-Solomonic kingdom, it is important that we con-
sider some aspects of it in more detail.

After Saul's death on Mt. Gilboa (I Sm. 31), the Philis-
tines were free to exert their control over the northern tribes.
Saul's son and successor, Ishbaal, was forced to flee across
the Jordan to Mahanaim (II Sm. 2:8). From there, he ruled
rather weakly over northern Israel and carried on a long and
unsuccessful war against Judah.   Meanwhile, David ruled Judah
from Hebron.   It is probable that he was still nominally subject
to the Philistines as he had been while at Ziklag (I Sm. 27:6).

When David became king of Israel as well as Judah, the
Philistines recognized full well the potential threat which
this united kingdom posed to their control of the area and
they moved immediately to attack the fledgling kingdom by
driving a wedge between the northern and southern tribes.   In
two battles near Jerusalem, they were decisively beaten by
David and routed from the territory of the new kingdom (II Sm.
5:17-25).   With the Philistines subdued, the greatest danger
to the security of the kingdom was elimited.   Subsequently,
David defeated and gained control over Ammon, the Aramaeans,
the Amalekites, Moab and Edom (II Sm. 8:1-14, 10-12).   Further-
more, his hegomony was acknowledged by Hadadezer, king of
Zobah (II Sm. 8:2-8); and Toi, king of Hamath (II Sm. 8:9-10).
It is likely also that the powerful Hiram king of Tyre made

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an alliance with him as suggested by II Sm. 5:11. Probably
the few remaining Canaanite towns within the borders of the
new kingdom were assimilated either by force or by suasion,
although Gezer did not pass into Israelite control until the
time of Solomon (I Kgs. 9:16). This gave David control of
an area stretching from the border of Egypt in the south to
beyond Damascus in the north, and east as far as the Arabian
desert. In extent, David's was one of the larger empires of
the ancient New East.

All of this had profound consequences for the Israelites.
For the first time in their history they were in complete
possession of the land of Canaan, the land promised to their
Fathers. The ancient territorial claims recorded in Jos. 13-17
and Jgs. 1 were now fulfilled. They could live at peace,
'each man under his own vine and his own fig tree.' Only a
few short years before they had been a subject people. The
struggle to overthrow Philistine domination, begun so brilliantly
by Saul, had ended in disaster on Mt. Gilboa. David had not
only secured for them freedom within their borders, but had
also expanded these borders considerably.

This instant success was not without its problems. In
spite of David's success in conquering new territories, there
was little cohesion within his empire. This newly-won empire
needed cementing, and nowhere more than within Israel itself.
As we have seen, the ties between northern Israel and Judah
were far from close. There were still those in the north who
would have preferred a king from the family of Saul, and many

who would have preferred no king at all. The old traditions
of tribal independence died hard and there were probably many
who regarded the new kingdom as an unfortunate departure from
the traditions of the YHWH amphictyony. If this new empire
was to last, something had to be done to smooth over the
differences between Israel and Judah and to create common bonds
between them.

David was not unaware of this. The respect and honor
which he showed for Saul and his family, and for the slain
Abner, were shrewd attempts on his part not to antagonize the
north. He must have recognized that his continued rule from
the southern capital of Hebron was not pleasing to the northern
tribes. Accordingly, he soon (but not as soon as II Sm. 5
might make us believe) set about to capture the Jebusite city
of Jerusalem. This city on the border between Israel and Judah
was to be the focal point of the new and "Greater Israel".
Jerusalem was an excellent choice because, as a neutral city,
it was acceptable to both north and south. However, because
Jerusalem lacked any connection with the old traditions, it
would have difficulty securing the loyalty of the people.
The force of tradition demanded that some continuity with the
institutions of the past be established.

David remedied this lack by bringing the ark from Kiriath-
jearim where it had remained in obscurity since its capture
and return by the Philistines. Mustering the troops of Israel,
David placed the ark in Jerusalem with great ceremony (II Sm. 6).
Jerusalem was to be the new center of the amphictyony; the

religious and political center of Greater Israel.[124]

A further link with the old amphictyonic traditions was established with the appointment of Ahimelech as priest (II Sm. 8:17). Ahimelech was descended from the priests of Shiloh, long the central sanctuary of the tribal confederation.

The ark seems to have been kept in a temple at Shiloh during Samuel's time (I Sm. 1:9; 3:3), and it was natural for David to plan to build a temple to house the ark with some magnificence (II Sm. 7:2). However, this project was left to his son Solomon and it is not clear why David himself did not carry out his plan. The text indicates that some religious reason prevented him (II Sm. 7:5 ff). As it now stands, the text is more interested in the dynastic oracle which has been interwoven (perhaps not artificially) with the account of the plan for a temple.

Solomon continued the policies of his father with notable success in the material sphere, but with little new initiative or charism otherwise. David's gains were consolidated by a well organized system of administration, a careful system of defenses, an ambitious building program and a program of forced labor to implement these projects. (I Kgs. 4-10) Solomon implemented a lucrative trading enterprise (I Kgs. 9 ff) which brought him wealth with which to undertake his building program, increase his harem and live in great luxury. But, despite all his 'glory', by and large Solomon simply built upon the accomplishmen

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124 Ellis, op. cit., 70.

of his father.

The biggest problem which David and Solomon faced was the task of unifying their people and giving them a sense of national identity. The fact that the revolutionaries Absalom, Sheba and Jeroboam all sought to enlist the partisan loyalties of the north, as well as the careful maneuvers of David and Solomon to head off divisions within the kingdom, indicate the tensions which must have existed. The establishment of Jerusalem as the capital, the bringing of the ark to that city, the continuation of the amphictyonic priesthood, the building of the temple and many of the administrative structures of the kingdom were deliberate efforts to bring unity and continuity with the past to the newly-created kingdom.[125]

One further move in that direction should be noted. I Kgs. 9:25 mentions that Solomon offerred holocausts and communion sacrifices three times a year. The Chronicler amplifies this by telling us that Solomon observed the three annual feasts of Unleavened Bread, Weeks and Tabernacles as had his father David before him. (II Chr. 8:13) The accuracy of this report is at least suggested by the Yahwistic decalog. There Israel is commanded to celebrate the feast of Unleavened Bread (Ex. 34:18), of Weeks and of Ingathering or Tabernacles (Ex. 34:22) Moreover, all the menfolk must present themselves before YHWH three times a year. (Ex. 34:23) The implication is not without question, but it seems probable that it was

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125 Alt, op. cit., 215 ff; Weiser, op. cit., 108.

in the time of David and Solomon that the requirement that
all should come to Jerusalem for these three great feasts
was established.

Although these great assemblies were in some ways a
continuation of the old custom of assembling annually at the
central shrine of the amphictyony, David and Solomon would have
had special reason to promote these assemblies. These great
gatherings must have been very instrumental in fostering unity
among the people, and David and Solomon could have used them
to good advantage to secure loyalty to their reign as well.
The actions of Jeroboam testify to the power of these assemblies
to win the hearts of the people. Fearful lest the kingdom
revert to the house of David if the people continued to go
up to Jerusalem, Jeroboam established royal sanctuaries at
Bethel and Dan so that his people might assemble within their
own territory. He had golden bulls erected as symbols of
the presence of YHWH, appointed priests, and established a
dedication feast similar to the one celebrated at Jerusalem.
(I Kgs. 12:26-33) His imitation of the customs initiated by
David and Solomon is a good indication of their importance.

In an age of mass media, it is difficult for us to
appreciate the impact of such assemblies or the need for them.
They were not simply religious gatherings. They brought to-
gether people from all sections of the country, people who
normally had little or no contact with each other. At these
festivals they would come into contact with the traditions of
other clans and tribes, and with the newly-created traditions

of the monarchy. Gradually a national consciousness would emerge and with it a national body of traditions. These great festivals were perhaps the most important single means of binding the people into a national unity.

This historical study has not been without purpose. Because every saga is as much a product of its times as it is of the past which it relates, we must expect that the historical situation that came about by the uniting of Israel and Judah had its impact upon the saga tradition. Just as earlier sagas which reflected the conditions of family, clan and tribal life were drawn together and molded by the conditions that resulted from tribal confederation; so too, the advent of monarchic Israel had decisive influences on the saga. Our examination of the Davidic-Solomonic period puts us in a position to discern some of the ways in which the new situation affected the saga and gave rise to that form of it which we call the Yahwist narrative.

The salient facts which emerged from our examination were the uniting of Israel and Judah under a single king, the free and complete possession of the land of Canaan by the people of this kingdom, and their subjugation of neighboring kingdoms. In short, the creation of a Greater Israel. At the same time, we found this new nation beset by inner tensions which threatened to tear it apart as in fact they did after Solomon's death. Consequently, David and Solomon were constrained to expend considerable amounts of ingenuity and energy to overcome the divisiveness of their people and create a spirit of national

unity.

We examined the various moves made by David and Solomon to unify the people of their kingdom because it seems likely that the creation of the Yahwist saga must be associated with these moves. It seems entirely in keeping with the policies of David and Solomon that they would have seen to the composition of a saga which would serve as an instrument of national unity.

In the following chapter we will examine this possibility in detail, but first we should note that the new situation created by the Davidic monarchy would have profoundly affected the saga tradition regardless of any manipulation by David and Solomon.

The coalescence of Israel's traditions was a process that had been long under way. As we noted earlier, the primeval legends were pretty much common property, and the patriarchal traditions had probably begun to be gathered together even before the union of Israel and Judah under David. It was the newer traditions, the Exodus narrative belonging to the YHWH amphictyony in the north and the southern traditions of Kadesh and an entry into the land from there, that had not been gathered together. The isolation of Judah from the other tribes of Israel was the biggest factor in this. The advent of the united monarchy brought Israel and Judah closer together than ever before and lent moral force to the amalgamation of their tradition

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126 Gunkel, op. cit., 137-138.

These traditions had already existed in saga form in various versions, but, by being gathered together into a single saga, their significance now was orientated toward all Israel. The perspectives of the old narratives were enlarged because they were seen in the light of the whole people of Israel, north and south.

An examination of the Yahwist saga makes it clear just how this came about. This saga has at its core the old Judahite saga which Simpson calls J^1.[127] This saga was then enlarged in size and scope by the incorporation of traditions from the northern saga and specifically from the traditions of the Joseph tribes. The Joseph story was fitted into the Jacob saga in such a way that a transition between the patriarchal period and the Egyptian sojourn was formed and all of the tribes were placed in Egypt. Consequently, the Exodus story which follows is by implication the story of all the tribes, although, in fact, it was probably originally the story of the Joseph tribes only. However, the scope of the Exodus narrative had already been expanded when it was accepted by all who joined the Israelite confederation.[128] The Yahwist's use of this story is not entirely novel for it has simply been extended to include the southern tribes as well. This was not entirely artificial for the southern tribes had a tradition of an entry into the land from the area around

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127 Simpson, op. cit., 33 ff.

128 Eugene Maly, The World of David and Solomon (Englewood Cliffs, Prentice-Hall, 1966) 14.

Kadesh.[129]   Thus, it appears that the southern traditions

of a stay at Kadesh and a conquest of the south led by Caleb

were worked into the Exodus narrative in such a way that a

unified story of the nation's origins was formed.[130]

The result was the story with which we are all familiar:

all Israel was descended from Abraham through Isaac and Jacob,

then Joseph was sold into Egypt and was followed by his brothers,

the fathers of the tribes of Israel, from thence their descend-

ents came up from Egypt under the leadership of Moses,

covenanted with YHWH at Sinai, and eventually entered the land

from the east after an abortive attempt in the south. In

the general outlines of this story any hint of mixed ancestry,

any hint that all did not share the same history, any hint

that the complete possession of the land was not expected

from the first have all been passed over.

This, of course, is entirely consistant with the nature

of saga. Saga is not interested in the complexities of history,

the twists and turns of events that have led up to the present,

It views the past from the perspective of the present, and

hence its retelling of the past is shaped by the present

situation. It is to be expected, then, that the conception

of a greater Israel would completely permeate the saga of

Israel after the rise of the united kingdom and that the various

traditions of north and south would be knit into a single story.

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129 Rowley, op. cit., 105 ff.

130 Ibid., 105 ff.

The Yahwist saga is a normal development of the tradition of saga in Israel. It is a saga reflecting the conditions of a united Israel which has finally achieved nationhood. It is composed from the traditions of the several peoples making up this new nation. It's concern is to tell the story of the people of Israel; a people we regard as of mixed ancestry and history, but which the Yahwist looking at them from the perspective of his own day sees as having common bonds and background.

There is no reason to conclude that the J source is anything other than a saga. Its antecendents are all in the saga tradition and it carried forward this tradition. There is no evidence that it represents a departure from that tradition. The continual references to YHWH as the god who has helped and guided this people are entirely consistent with the saga-form and are not evidence of a different literary genre. The Israelites conceived of themselves as having been chosen and led by YHWH. This conviction gave divine sanction to their history, it validated it as it were. So the story of these people is also the story of their being chosen and led by YHWH, for that is the way they saw things and that is the way they told their story. It would be a mistake, however, to regard the J narrative as primarily a confession of faith, a theology, or a history of the acts of YHWH. It is only secondary and indirectly any of these things. The Yahwist saga tells us how the Israelites conceived their history, it does not try to tell us how they conceived their god.

CHAPTER FIVE: PURPOSE AND SITZ IM LEBEN

In the preceeding chapters our concern was to indicate the continuity between the Yahwist narrative and earlier stages of Israelite saga. We maintained that J stands in the saga tradition and that it is a highly developed saga. Since the proof of this ultimately lies in the text itself, a more complete demonstration must await our examination of the narrative in the next chapter.

But we have first to dig more deeply into the character of this narrative; to examine it in its specifics; to try to discover its role in the historical situation for which it was fashioned, and which fashioned it. We must attempt to discern the situations in which this saga was meant to be told, for these too had a share in forming it. In a word, we must try to grasp this saga as a living thing, for only then will we truly understand its message.

To do this we must draw upon several different types of evidence. Our study of the nature of saga indicated the general function of saga in the life of a people. We may expect the specific function of J to be consistent with this. We shall review this function briefly so that we can focus our attention on the J saga with this in mind. But this alone will not tell us what we need to know about J. To un-cover the purpose of this saga we must rely on the clues which the narrative itself provides. In addition, we may

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suppose that there will be indications within the historical situation of the need which this narrative might have fulfilled. If we find that the saga answers to these needs we may safely assume that it was created for that purpose.

In many ways the purpose of the saga is tied up with the Sitz im Leben in which it was designed to be told. Although we need not assume that this saga was intended to be narrated only on specific occasions and in specific settings, it seems likely that it was, though this would not preclude its use at other times and in other circumstances. In the light of the function which we discern for this saga, it will be possible to suggest a Sitz im Leben. However, it must be realized that any conclusions as to its setting in life are quite conjectural, because we do not know enough about the custom of saga telling to answer this question with any great certitude. Nonetheless, we hope that the suggestion we make has a certain plausibility.

From what has been said thus far it should be evident that we do not regared the Yahwist saga as a purely accidental creation. It is not simply another stage in the development of the saga. While we have shown that the composition of a saga having the general features of the J narrative was entirely to be expected given the historical situation that developed in Israel under David and Solomon, the Yahwist saga is something more than a normal development of the tradition. It is rather a quite clever development of the saga tradition, and so we must conclude that in J we have a carefully planned

composition which was intended for a specific purpose and probably for certain occasions.

This deliberate creation of a saga to meet the needs of a certain situation represented a new twist in the tradition of saga.[131] It was not entirely inconsistent with the past for the saga had always changed with the times. But saga had always been a 'grass roots' affair, never before had there been a central authority with the power to oversee the composition of the saga and to lend its influence to the proclamation of the saga. While this royal patronage was responsible for the preservation of the Yahwist saga, it was also responsible ultimately for the death of the saga-form. For once the saga can no longer develop and grow naturally, once it is fixed in one 'official' version, it ceases to live. It no longer expresses the voice of the people and it no longer reflects the times. It becomes a frozen record. For our purpose this is entirely fortuitous. Because the saga has been frozen at a certain point, we can relate it to a distinct historical period. We need worry little about later developments because, by and large, they seem to have had little effect on the substance of the Yahwist saga. As we have it now, the Yahwist saga is a document of the Davidic-Solomonic period or shortly thereafter.

This seems so obvious from internal evidence that we have not thought it necessary to specifically argue the dating of this source. It has always been the general consensus of opinion that J originated in the south about the time of

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Solomon's reign,[132] and since everything we shall say about
the purpose and Sitz im Leben of this work points to the
same conclusion, it is not necessary to consider in detail
the various reasons for this dating. The Yahwist saga is
so stamped by the influence of the united monarchy that it
could hardly have been created at any other time.

Purpose of the Yahwist Saga

As we saw earlier, saga is the story of a people's past
as they see it and tell it. It arises quite naturally from
their desire to preserve the stories of their ancestors and
heroes. These are eventually woven into a continuous story
of the people's origins. The saga which results tells them
where they have come from and what they have gone through;
it tells them who they are. By preserving the memory of
their past, the saga reveals their identity.

But saga is not simply a record of a people's past. In
its saga, a people is not concerned with the past for its
own sake. Their saga is important to them because of what
it tells them about themselves in their present situation,
for it tells them how they got there. Because of this,
the old traditions are continually being sifted and recast
so that their relevance to the present is all the more obvious.
This is greatly facilitated by the fluidness of oral trans-
mission. As a people changes and grows, so does its saga.
New traditions are added and the saga takes on new perspectives.
These perspectives reflect the new situation the people finds

itself in. The old stories elucidate their situation by
showing its roots in the past and thus its continuity with
their past. This is particularly important in traditional
societies which look to the past to supply models for the
present. In these societies the legitimacy of institutions
and customs depends upon divine sanction and the practice of
the Fathers. By preserving the record of these, the saga
provides the warranty for present practices and institutions.

These two functions are actually different aspects of
the same thing. For, the identity of a people depends on
their having a common ancestry or heritage, and similarly
the validity of their customs and institutions is dependent
on their continuity with this heritage. The purpose of the
saga is to relate the past so that it illumines the present;
to reveal the continuities of lineage, of destiny, of customs
and of institutions which make this people what it is. The
saga has a normative character as well; for whoever is not
related to this people is foreign, is outside the pale, and
whatever has no roots in its past is not legitimate, it is
novel and lacks substance.

It is clear that the saga must change as the people changes
and as the outwared circumstances of their life change. If
the saga is to serve its function, it must be able to show
the connections between the tradition and the present, and so
it must be re-interpreted to bring out the lines of continuity.
This does not involve a basic change in the tradition, which
would be unthinkable, but that the tradition is viewed in a

new perspective and retold accordingly.

It must be emphasized that the creation of the Yahwist saga did not involve any basic changes in the old saga material.[133] As far as we can tell, the redactor-author accomplished his task by combining northern and southern traditions into a single saga, by a careful selection of his material, and by recasting the old stories so as to point out specific things which he wished to emphasize.

Recent studies in redaction criticism have indicated the important function that structure had as a means of indicating key passages.[134] On the basis of some preliminary research, the present writer feels sure that structural and other stylistic techniques were a major means whereby the Yahwist author was able to shape the saga according to the needs of his particular purpose without altering the old traditions in a way that would be unacceptable to his contemporaries. But, consideration of these lies beyond the scope of this essay and we must content ourselves with a brief examination of some of the more obvious indications of the Yahwist's purpose.

As we have repeatedly indicated, the uniqueness of the Yahwist saga lies in its complete unification of traditions from the north with those of the south. This is the most

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133 Noth, _Laws in the Pentateuch_, 133.

134 See the very interesting article of Charles Lohr, _art. cit._, 403-435.

obvious and important indication of its purpose. By amalgamating traditions of the northern tribes, chiefly the Joseph tribes, with the saga of Judah; the saga shows how the roots of their brotherhood in the Davidic kingdom go back to their common ancestry and their common history, and hence, their common destiny. Throughout, the saga treats them as a single people. It simply does not recognize any ancestral or historical background for a separation of the two tribal groups. There is in this conception a strong plea for the legitimacy of the new union achieved under David. Thus, the saga lends moral force to the Davidic monarchy. Its presentation of the tradition undercuts any arguments that the united monarchy was not a legitimate continuation of the old Israelite traditions.

This saga must have been a powerful argument against those who opposed the establishment of the united kingdom and against those who advocated the secession of the northern tribes. These people could hardly appeal to the Yahwist version of the tradition as justification for their positions. This is undoubtedly why the northern kingdom was compelled to compose its own version of the saga (E) once it seceded from the Davidic kingdom.

Concomitant with the need to show the traditional basis for the union of all the tribes into a national state was the need to legitimate the claim of the house of David to be the rightful rulers of this nation. Because David was the one who had created this nation, the legitimacy of his rule and

the legitimacy of such a nation were inevitably bound up with each other. To argue the one, was also to argue the other. It was encumbent upon the Davidic dynasty to show that Israel and Judah belonged together and that Judah, and hence the house of David, had the right to leadership.

As we shall see, there is abundant support for these claims in the Yahwist saga. For this reason it seems quite likely that this saga was created in court circles influenced by the royal ideology to promote the cause of the Davidic dynasty. Its purpose was to legitimate the Davidic-Solomonic kingdom by showing how this kingdom was the fulfillment of the destiny implicit in Israel's traditions, a destiny, more-over, which was ordained by YHWH.[135]

Since it is normal for saga to reflect the current situation, one might suppose that the direction the Yahwist saga took was an inevitable consequence of the emergence of the Davidic kingdom and that no polemical purpose need be implied. This might be true, save that a number of historical factors argue otherwise.

Koch has pointed out that saga follows the general pattern of change "slowly and hesitantly, and always after a period of time has elapsed."[136] This is because saga, being the 'voice of the people', normally expresses the group-conscious-ness of the people and this is only gradually able to soak in

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135 Clements, op. cit., 85.

136 Koch, op. cit., 35.

the new situation and re-adjust its conception of the past accordingly. But it is doubtful if the conception of a united Israel was ever able to take a firm hold on the popular imagination. Our examination of the period of David and Solomon revealed too many devisive tendencies and too many instances of the northern tribes' willingness to bolt from the kingdom for us to assume that the notion of a Greater Israel became deeply ingrained in the people's consciousness. No doubt there were some, perhaps many, who accepted this idea, and the circle responsible for the creation of the Yahwist saga was obviously among them.[137] But this was not a universally held conception and it behooved these people to communicate their conviction to others. One of the vehicles by which they did this was the Yahwist saga. In doing so, they were turning an old literary form to partisan purposes.

Regardless of exactly when the Yahwist saga was composed, it must be associated with the various moves of David and Solomon to assert their right to rule over all Israel and to bring a sense of unity to their realm.[138] In function, the Yahwist saga may be compared with the history of the ark in I Sm. 4-6 and II Sm. 6, the story of David's rise in I Sm. 16 to II Sm. 5 and the Succession history of II Sm. 9 to I Kgs. 2. These documents evidence to the need to show the legitimacy of the new institutions of the monarchy;[139]

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137 Weiser, op. cit., 110.

138 Ibid., 96, 108.

139 Ellis, op. cit., 70.

the rightfulness of David's claim to kingship and Solomon's
right to succeed him.[140] With the possible exception of the
last (though this is by no means certain),[141] these are the
themes of the J saga.

It remains for us to see how the Yahwist saga accomplished
its purpose. While we cannot undertake an exhaustive examina-
tion of the text, the following examples will show how this
was done and serve to prove our contention that the saga was
designed for this purpose.

The earliest clear indication of the Yahwist's purpose
appears in the Abraham story. By means of geneaologies, the
line of just men had been traced through the primeval legends
from Adam to Abraham. Now, in a specially composed link-
passage, the call of Abraham is related.

> YHWH said to Abram, 'Leave your country, your family
> and your father's house, for the land I will show
> you. I will make you a great nation, I will bless
> you and make your name so famous that it will be
> used as a blessing. I will bless those who bless you:
> I will curse those who slight you. All the tribes of
> the earth shall be blessed in you! (Gn. 12:1-3)

There is a threefold promise here which becomes the
dominant motive of the whole of the Yahwist's work:[142] Abraham
will be given a land, he will become a great nation, and in
him all the tribes of the earth shall be blessed. This
promise is repeated to each of the patriarchs and at important

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140 R. N. Whybray, The Succession Narrative (London, SCM,
1968) 51-52.

141 Ellis, op. cit., 189.

142 Von Rad, Problem of the Hexateuch, 67; Clements, op.cit.,15.

moments in the subsequent narrative. (cf Gn. 18:18; 22:18; 26:14; Ex. 2:24; 32:13; 33:1; Nm. 32:11.)

In his brilliant monograph on the Davidic covenant, Ronald Clements concludes that this promise is based on the covenant between YHWH and Abraham mentioned in Gn. 15.[143] He traces this covenant back to an old tradition entitling Abraham and his descendants to possession of the land around Hebron.[144] Then he shows how, through the elevation of Abraham to be the ancestor of Judah and then all Israel, this tradition was elaborated into a claim to the whole land of Canaan.[145]

As the ancient tradition is formulated in Gn. 12 it clearly points to the Davidic empire, for it was only under David that the Israelites gained complete possession of their land, became a great nation, and were able to extend their 'blessing' to the surrounding vassal peoples.

Similarly, Clements points out that Gn. 15:7-12 "describes the promise to Abraham and his descendants of the land of 'the Kenites, the Kenizzites and the Kadmonites', which was undoubtedly in the South of Canaan. A later editor has enlarged this original promise to cover the extent of the Davidic empire, and the territory of all the peoples of Canaan, so that it falls into line with the Yahwist's presentation

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143 Clements, op. cit., 16.

144 Ibid., 23 ff.

145 Ibid., 35 ff.

in which the promise to the patriarch was a foretelling of the rise of the Israelite empire."[146]

Mendenhall had argued that "The tradition of the covenant with Abraham became the pattern of a covenant between Yahweh and David,[147] but Clements adds that the Yahwist's account of the covenant with Abraham has also been influenced by the form of the Davidic covenant.[148] Thus, the two would have been more clearly related in the minds of the hearers. The covenant with Abraham and the threefold promise given him point directly to the Davidic kingdom.

> The Yahwist's purpose was to show the divine providence
> which brought into being the Davidic kingdom, by which
> Israel became a nation, and took possession of the land
> of Canaan. The relevance of this scheme of promise
> and fulfillment to the emergence of the Davidic-
> Solomonic empire is apparent, even though the historian
> did not carry the story of his people up to this era,
> and concluded originally with a brief statement of the
> conquest. By using the ancient historical traditions
> of his people the Yahwist was seeking to interpret the
> divine significance of his own age, and was endeavouring
> to make plain the hidden purpose of God that had been
> manifested through it. The rise of Israel was thus
> directly related to the promise of God to its ancestors.[149]

The Yahwist has made the land-promise the central theme of his work. From his programatic statement of the promise with its concomitant aspects of nationhood and blessing to the peoples in Gn. 12, to its fulfillment in the time of David,

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146 Ibid., 21.

147 George Mendenhall, "Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition" BA 17, (1954) 72.

148 Clements, op. cit., 55.

149 Ibid., 15-16.

his narrative moves inevitably, although often by a circuitous route. We normally associate the fulfillment of the land-promise with the conquest under Joshua. But it seems clear that Israelites only gained a limited possession of the land at that time.[150] A number of writers have observed that the tribal territorial claims mentioned in Joshua and Judges evidence to the fact that the tribes considered themselves to have a right to territories which, up until the time of David, remained in enemy hands.[151] These territorial claims seem to have been very important during the latter period of the Judges when their fulfillment was somewhat within reach. But it was David who was able to fulfill these hopes and to fulfill them even beyond the dreams of former ages. Small wonder then, that the land promise should be brought to the fore in the Yahwist saga, for the chief claim that the Davidic monarchy could make was to have fulfilled the promises to the fathers.

The second indication of the Yahwist's purpose which we will examine is an interesting series of texts which apparently have no special purpose. The first of these tells of the rape of Dinah and the violent revenge taken by her brothers Simeon and Levi. (Gn. 34:1-31) The second relates how Reuben slept with Bilhah his father's concubine. (Gn. 35:22) The

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150 See the arguments given earlier on page 56 ff.

151 Alt, op. cit., 222-223; Ellis, op. cit., 193; von Rad, Problem of the Hexateuch, 73; Genesis, 29.

third is the story of Judah and Tamar which tells of the
birth of Perez and Zerah. (Gn. 38:1-30)

These passages appear to be stray bits of tradition which
have found their way into the narrative by accident. They
are unrelated to their context and do not contribute to the
development of the story in any appreciable way. But, their
significance becomes apparent when we turn to Jacob's blessing
in Gn. 49. There we see that Reuben is deprived of his right
of primogeniture because of his transgression with his father's
concubine. Likewise, Simeon and Levi, the second and third-
born are deprived of their positions of pre-eminence and
fated to dispersion because of their malicious revenge on
Shechem. Thus, Judah, the fourth in line, inherited the right
of leadership by default. By discrediting the elder sons of
Jacob, Judah is singled out for leadership, and this prepares
the way for the account of the birth of David's ancestor
Perez. (cf. Ru. 4:18-22; I Chr. 2:5-15) Although the Yahwist
gives no indication of the significance of Perez' birth, his
hearers would be well aware that David was descended from
Perez and would realize that he was in the line of those whose
right to rule went back to Judah.

McKenzie mentions that "The Judah of this passage (Gn. 38:
1-30) can scarcely be the same figure as the Judah who is
the son of Jacob and one of the brothers of the Joseph stories."[152]
This indicates that this tradition comes from a different source

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152 McKenzie, op. cit., 83.

than the Joseph stories. And, since these three passages are closely associated, it seems likely that the Simeon and Levi story and the Reuben incident are also from some other source than their immediate literary context. We conclude that these passages have been incorporated into the narrative by the Yahwist because they are part of the basis for David's claim to leadership over the tribes of Israel. Their position in the text, right at the beginning of the Joseph story, is no mere accident either as we shall see shortly.

The Yahwist's skill in accomplishing his purpose can best be seen in his treatment of the Joseph story. Here he was dealing with a northern tradition which probably belonged to the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh. He could not omit this story because it provided a necessary transition between the patriarchal stories, which took place in Canaan, and the Exodus story which began in Egypt. But this story provided him with a rather difficult problem, for it related how Joseph was chosen by Jacob as his successor and how this leadership was passed on to Ephraim. In an article to which we have previously alluded in the footnotes,[153] van der Merwe argues that the kingly coat with long sleeves (Gn. 37:3-4), Joseph's dream of his father, mother and brothers bowing before him (Gn.37:5-11), and his role at his father's burial (Gn. 50:1-14) all indicate that Joseph was appointed and acknowledged as Jacob's successor. Furthermore, in adopting

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153 Cf. Chapter III, p. 51, n. 98.

Ephraim and Manasseh as his own sons, Jacob placed the younger Ephraim ahead of Manasseh giving him the right of succession.

This tradition was hardly consistant with the Yahwist's purpose which was to support David's right to leadership, yet he obviously could not alter the tradition in any radical way, particularly as members of the Joseph tribes were among his hearers. His solution was to play down the original significance of the story and counter it by some slight additions of his own. Thus, right at the beginning of the story he insisted upon Judah's right to the prerogatives of the first-born in the passages which we just examined. He points out how Judah saved Joseph's life (Gn. 37:26-27), although the E tradition insists that it was Reuben (Gn. 37:21-22). And, he gives Judah a leadership role, as well as showing his concern for the young Benjamin. (Gn.43 ff.) Finally, it is no accident that just after relating the blessing of Ephraim and Manasseh the Yahwist includes the famous blessing of Gn. 49. For in this poem it is Judah, and not Joseph who is celebrated as Jacob's successor.

Albright points out that this poem contains much earlier material, but in its present form is to be dated to about the time of the Yahwist. However, he is uncertain of its source.[154] We may note that the chief emphasis in this poem is on the tribe of Joseph (Gn. 49:22-26) and it probably was a northern

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154 Albright, Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan, 33.

tradition. It seems likely that the Yahwist is responsible for adding some verses to the Judah section of the poem so that Judah is quite clearly named as the one "to whom the peoples shall render obedience." (Gn.49:10)

So we see that by clever handling of material and some slight recasting of traditions, the Yahwist was able to use material that was even antithetical to his purpose. Probably his work was more far-reaching than we have observed, nonetheless these observations give some indication of his method and his intent.

Skipping now to the end of the saga, we shall look at some poems that are quite similar in form and age to the blessing of Jacob, the oracles of Balaam. (Nm. 24) First, we should note that there is disagreement as to what source these should be assigned. We are here concerned only with Nm. 24:2-25 which Ellis accepts as J material. Albright, however, maintains that they are "essentially E"[155] while Noth maintains that 24:2-19 are J, while 20-24 are "obvious additions."[156] Since the latter verses are not of interest to us we shall not worry about them. As for the rest, we would like to suggest a solution similar to the one we proposed for the blessing of Jacob. That is, the "essentially E" character of these oracles derives from the fact that they come ultimately from the north. But, just as Gn.49, they have

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155 Ibid., 33.

156 Martin Noth, Numbers, trans. J. D. Martin (Phila, Westminster, 1968) 171.

been reworked by the Yahwist to further his purposes.

Evidence of this is the fact that the verses of the oracles which point forward to David echo those of the blessing of Jacob which also point to David, and these are the same verses which we suggested were interpolated by the Yahwist! (Gn.49:9=Nm.24:9a, Gn.49:10=Nm.24:17a+b) Furthermore, Nu.24:9b echoes the blessing of Abraham (Gn.12:3a) which we have already noted as foretelling the rise of David. Quite specific references to David are contained in the oracles of the defeat of Moab and Edom. (Nm.24:17c-19) In fact, these are perhaps the clearest allusions to David in the whole of the Yahwist saga.

There are a number of other indications of the Yahwist's purpose which we could examine if space permitted, but we shall just look at one more briefly.

It will be noted that our observations have not touched on the main part of the Exodus narrative. It is not surprising that there are few allusions to the Davidic monarchy in this section of the saga for this is mainly a northern tradition. But, in reading the Exodus narrative, one cannot help but be puzzled by the significance of the 'murmuring in the wilderness' motif which appears as early as Ex.15:23-25 and recurs throught the remainder of the narrative until it reaches a climax in Nm14.

In a very interesting study,[157] George Coats insists that

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157 George Coats, Rebellion in the Wilderness (Nashville, Abingdon, 1968)

these murmuring episodes are a unified and self-contained
system which has been secondarily imposed on the narrative
and that they bear unmistakable signs of the style of J.[158]
This murmuring tradition has the following character:

> (1) The whole people of Israel murmur against their
> leader Moses and, through him, Yahweh. (2) The
> murmuring consistently challenges Moses to explain
> his reasons for bringing the people out of Egypt.
> It is significant here that the murmuring never
> focuses its attention on the crises of hunger and
> thirst, (3) In a single climax the challenge becomes
> an overt movement to reject Moses (and Yahweh) and return
> to Egypt. This movement is in fact a rejection of the
> basic tenets of Israel's election. (4) Moreover, it
> is only in this climax that Yahweh's response to the
> murmuring plays an essential role. The people who
> have murmured against Moses and Yahweh must die in the
> wilderness without seeing the promised land. This is
> a rejection of their rights as Yahweh's chosen people,
> the final principle of Israel's election theology.
> (5) The rejection is absolute. Neither this generation
> nor their off-spring shall have another chance to become
> the heirs to the election faith. The single exception
> lies in Caleb and his descendants. Since $C_a$leb appears
> as the chief representative of the tribe of Judah, the
> exception gives the murmuring tradition a decidedly
> pro-Judean flavor.[159]

Coats concludes that the murmuring tradition is a polemic
directed against the northern cult, that its purpose was to
show that northern rights to election were forfeited, and
that in place of that election, a new election was now had
in Jerusalem through the Davidic heir.[160] This means that
this theme is to be associated with the episode of the golden
calf (Ex.32-34,5) and dated after the time of the schism of

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158 _Ibid._, 249-250.

159 _Ibid._, 250-251.

160 _Ibid._, 251.

Jeroboam.

Are we to regard these passages as secondary additions
to the Yahwist saga, or are we to regard the Yahwist saga
as a post-Solomonic composition? This is a difficult question
to answer, and the present writer is undecided. However, it
seems possible that while the golden calf story must be
dated after the division of the kingdom, the murmuring motif
need not be. Even during the reign of David, the northern
tribes were a rebellious people as witnessed by the revolts
of Absalom and Sheba. These revolts could easily have been
the impetus for the interpolation of the murmuring tradition.
Moreover, the assertion that the election of the northern
tribes was voided and that election came solely through Judah
may be seen as an attempt to replace the old concept of
election with the new one whereby the election of the people
derives from the election of their king.[161] Thus, this
material may have been inserted into the Exodus narrative by
the Yahwist to show that apart from David there was no election,
and that rebellion against YHWH's annointed was rebellion
against YHWH. If this is so, then we have here one more
instance of the Yahwist's method of recasting old material
for his purposes, for it is unlikely that the material of the
murmuring tradition was created by him out of whole cloth.
By and large, the Yahwist seems to have been able to accomplish
his purpose by simply selecting and reshaping old traditions.

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161 Clements, op. cit., 59.

These observations make it quite clear what the purpose
of this saga was. The old traditions of the tribes were
gathered and shaped in a national saga. A saga which served
as a legitimation of the Davidic kingdom, one that was very
much needed.

Though such a function was not wholly contrary to the
nature of saga, it did represent a turning-point in the history
of the saga-form, a turning which led to the eventual death of
the form.

Sitz im Leben of the Yahwist Saga

We must now try to discover the most likely occasions
on which this saga might have been narrated. We have already
seen that saga is by nature a public document and it is
highly unlikely that it was intended for private perusal.
Furthermore, the purpose of the Yahwist saga militates against
this, for it would have been intended for the widest audience
possible. Its success depended upon it being heard and accepted
by as many in Israel as could be reached.

Gunkel supposed that the old sagas were told "In the
leisure of a winter evening [as] the family sits about the
hearth."[162] While this may have been true of the earlier
sagas, it is very improbable that the Yahwist saga was narrated
in this way. The Yahwist saga was an official document and
its length argues against such an informal setting. It would

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162 Gunkel, op. cit., 41.

have taken the better part of a day to recite!

We must probably look to some great public gathering
as the setting for this saga. Obviously the most desirable
occasion would be one at which people from all parts of the
country would be present.

It now becomes apparent why earlier we examined the
possibilities that the practice of assembling in Jerusalem
for the three annual festivals goes back to the time of David
and Solomon. These great assemblies would have been an ideal
time for the recitation of the Yahwist saga. At no other
time would so many people have been gathered together or
would the spirit of unity been so high. We must remember
that these festivals were a continuation of the old custom
of gathering at the central sanctuary to reaffirm the bonds
of loyalty to YHWH and to each other. These ideals were
probably just as much a part of the festivals in Jerusalem,
though the royal covenant ideology placed them on a slightly
different basis. The Yahwist saga provided the foundation
and, in part, the legitimation for this new ideology and by
being associated with the religious festivals gained a sort
of religous sanction. This was, perhaps, made more evident
by the setting in which it was narrated, or the manner in
which it was told.

While this reconstruction of the _Sitz_ _im_ _Leben_ of the
Yahwist saga rests on a number of probabilities and possibili-
ties, considering the limitations of the evidence we have to
work from, it seems a satisfying suggestion. It must be

realized, however, that it is no more than that.

It should be evident by now that our earlier insistence
that J was not a cultic document rests upon a very fine
distinction, and we do not want to blunt that distinction
in the least, for it is essential for an understanding of
the saga. The distinction which we draw between religious
and secular, between cultic and noncultic was undoubtedly
less finely drawn in those days, if it was drawn at all.
Quite probably an Israelite of the 10th century B.C. would
have considered his saga sacred, just as he did the cult
narrative whose purpose was to actualize the tradition.
Nonetheless, there is a difference between the two, and he
would not have considered them sacred in the same way. It
is primarily for the purposes of our own understanding, then,
that we make a distinction between the two and insist that
the Yahwist saga is not a religious document or a theological
document in our sense of those terms. Its primary purpose
was to legitimate the Davidic kingdom and we do not consider
this to be a religious purpose. Once we accustom ourselves
to looking at things with the eyes of an ancient Israelite —
but not before — we shall realize that this is a meaningless
distinction. To make this point quite clear, we might observe
that the Priestly scribes, who were responsbile for the final
edition of the Pentateuch nearly five hundred years later,
no longer looked at the Yahwist narrative with the same eyes
as their forefathers in the days of David and Solomon — and
we are very much their heirs.

CHAPTER SIX: OUTLINES OF THE YAHWIST SAGA

This chapter could easily be the longest of this paper, and, hopefully, will form the basis for a future dissertation, but our present purposes require only a brief survey and we shall try to limit ourselves to that. We wish to show that an examination of the Yahwist narrative supports our contention that it is a saga. Identification of the central themes of the work will reveal its saga character, and recognition of its saga character will aid in understanding the narrative. If the narrative can be more adequately explained and explicated than heretofore on the assumption that it is a saga, then this is a good indication that it is, indeed, a saga.

It is not simply for convenience or brevity that we confine our attention to the general outlines of this narrative. Because of the diversity of material gathered into this work and its complex literary history, it is very difficult to distinguish the overall significance of the final narrative. If we turn our attention too exclusively to individual passages, we may easily miss the forest for the trees. Either we shall be led to believe that the J source is simply a hodge podge of bits and pieces of tradition, or we may be led to identify the concerns of a single passage as those of the whole work. In order to discover the literary form of a work such as this we must discern the integration given to the material as a whole. The only sure indications of this integration are the

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outlines of the narrative, its overall concerns, and the general direction in which the narrative moves.

This requires a somewhat different type of analysis than is usual. Furthermore, in the case of the Yahwist narrative, this analysis must be based on the recognition that this tale was probably delivered orally. Therefore, the analysis must concentrate on the 'flow' of the narrative. The kind of minute examination of the text that is often done completely misses the overall significance of the narrative because it concentrates on its static aspects. But these narratives were composed for hearing and not as subjects for detailed scholarly analysis. For their message to be heard, they must be allowed to function naturally, and not under microscopic laboratory conditions. It is true, of course, that we cannot re-create the conditions under which these tales were originally told, and, moreover, it is questionable whether we have the ability today to understand and appreciate these old literary forms. But we must at least make an approach in that direction if we are to have any success whatever in interpreting these narratives.

It is certainly premature to propose a comprehensive program of analysis that might be capable of getting at the things we have mentioned. The techniques for the kind of study necessary are only now being developed.[163] But a preliminary step in such a study is a determination of the

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163 See the articles of Muilenburg and Greenwood already cited.

overall meaning of a narrative. We shall attempt to determine this in the case of the Yahwist narrative, for then we shall be better able to judge its literary form.

We have already indicated that it is the general direction, the 'flow' of the narrative, which is the best indication of its basic meaning. We have also called this aspect of the narrative its outlines, but this is perhaps too static a concept. What we mean is the way the various parts of the narrative are hung together, the way they are connected and organized into a structure. The way they flow into each other, or rather, the way they flow from one to the next.

This 'flow' is most apparent when hearing the narrative. The insights one gets when hearing the narrative are quite different than one gets when reading it. The hearer is in a sense more passive; he is at the mercy of the one who tells the tale. He cannot pause and reflect on the narrative, he cannot go back and reread and so make new connections; he must take the narrative as it comes from the mouth of the narrator. All of this must be borne in mind by the one who composes an oral narrative. He must compose his narrative in such a way that his emphases and the connections which he wishes drawn are apparent to the hearer. There are a great many techniques for this, but we cannot examine them here.[164]

Because we cannot make a detailed examination of the narrative based on the oral techniques used by its author,

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164 See Lohr, _art. cit._,

our observations about the 'flow' of the narrative cannot
be very precise. Thus, they may appear to be rather sweeping;
or, more likely, they will simply appear vague. For this
the writer must ask his readers' indulgence. It is expected
that the validity of these observations can be borne out by
more detailed study in the future, for the present they must
rest mainly upon the conviction which they arouse in one who
listens attentively to the narrative.

This is a quite objective method of investigation provided
one lets the narrative speak for itself. After all, the
composer did not suppose that his hearers would be familiar
with all the devices which he used to convey his message.
These devices 'worked' regardless of the hearers' knowledge
of them. We must simply let them 'work' on us. If we get a
certain message from the narrative, we must suppose that its
author intended us to get that message.

Of course, the original hearers of this saga had a certain
advantage over us because they knew what to expect, just as
the child who asks to hear Jack and the Beanstalk knows what
to expect, and will be quick to point out if we do not tell
the story 'right'. For our part, there is no way round this.
We are better off if we do not know what to expect; if we let
the narrative surprise us. These surprises can be very instructive,
for it is in such instances that the voice of the author breaks
through our preconceptions.

Our first problem with the Yahwist narrative is that we
are unsure of its extent, and therefore of its conclusion.

The consensus text which we are using ends with oracles of Balaam in Nm. 24:2-25. While this is a possible conclusion, it seems an unlikely one. It is possible because, as we saw, these oracles contain very clear allusions to David; nevertheless, they end very abruptly. From the development of the saga which we observed, it would seem likely that the sagas of the Judges, of Samuel, of Saul and of David were attached to the great saga of Israel. But these have been so thoroughly reworked by the Deuteronomist that there is no way of telling if this was so on literary grounds. Consequently, we must limit our attention to what is generally accepted as J material, and this ends rather abruptly with the oracles of Balaam. We cannot, then, rely on the conclusion to provide the key to the work, as is so often the case.

Perhaps, then, the beginning of the narrative can provide the clue we need. Here we are sure of our ground since it is universally agreed by those who accept the documentary hypothesis that J begins in Gn. 2:4b. Now the thing that strikes one about the Yahwist account of creation is that it is so exclusively man-centered. The first order of business is the creation of man and he is the center of interest from then on. Now, we cannot attribute all the details of the creation story to the Yahwist and we should be running the risk of looking too closely at the trees if we attempted to draw too many conclusions from this passage. But there are two things which draw our attention in this story for the

simple reason that they will remain as constants through the rest of the narrative. The first is that the center of interest is man. And the second is that man is "fashioned" by YHWH. This "fashioning" of man must be taken in the widest possible sense, for it includes all of the activity of YHWH on man's behalf throughout history. But notice that we said man is fashioned by YHWH, and not that YHWH fashioned man, for the center of interest is man, and this quickly narrows down to the men of Israel.

As we listen to the stories of the primeval history and try to make some sense of them, we notice that although the stories are somewhat disparate they move forward rather quickly. The stories of paradise, the fall, and Cain and Abel are rather long, but we must suppose that this was the state in which the Yahwist found them and he could not very well abbreviate them even if he wished to. Immediately after the Cain and Abel story the genealogical focus of the narrative becomes apparent and what follows is little more than an extended genealogy interrupted, or rather expanded, by short episodes.[165] Looking back, we can see that the real interest of the paradise fall, and Cain and Abel stories was their genealogical information, and closely connected with that, their etiological information. They explain where man came from, and why there are such things as sin, sexual desire and clothes.

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165 We use the word 'genealogical' here, as elsewhere, in a very broad sense. It means any sort of information about ancestors and the descent or lineage of a people.

With the Cain and Abel story we see too that there are those who find favour with YHWH and those who do not. This disjunction continues as a theme throughout the genealogies of the primeval history and is elaborated by episodes of the flood and the tower of Babel. From the call of Abraham on the narrative concerns itself pretty much with those who have found favour with YHWH; that is, the Israelites. Although the narrowing down process does continue: Isaac rather than Ishmael, Jacob rather than Essau. These stories are etiological too, for they explain why Israel is favoured rather than her neighbors the Edomites, Ishmaelites, Babylonians, and Canaanites. The primeval stories turn out to be a preface to the patriarchal period which they lead right into. Speiser remarks that the call of Abraham "is received without any prior warning."[166] But with this we cannot agree. It is true that the narratives of the patriarchal history are quite different from those of the primeval history, and the join between them does not smooth over the transition very much; but this difference is due to the fact that they represent different stages of the development of the literary form. In the overall plan of the narrative the one leads into the other despite the roughness of the connection.[167]

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166 Speiser, op. cit., Liii.

167 Note that von Rad assumes that the Yahwist provided a genealogical link between the primeval and the patriarchal histories. Genesis, 150.

The narrative takes only about 150 verses before it gets down to its subject: the history of Abraham and his descendents. The patriarchal history takes up about 800 verses, while the national history takes up another 600 or so. Obviously then, the primeval history was not of major interest. An overview of the primeval stories reveals that the interest was never in universal history for its own sake. The interest was in where the Israelites had come from; and hence the importance of the genealogies and the elimination of peoples process.[168] The primeval history served merely to prepare the way for the story of Israel, which began with the call of Abraham. Thus, although the transition to the patriarchal history might be abrupt, it was entirely to be expected.

We might note also that there seems to be an alternation between episodes about those who earned YHWH's favour, and those who did not. Thus, the way is prepared for the call of Abraham by the story of the tower of Babel.

There appear to be parallels between the fashioning of Adam and the call of Abraham. In both cases there is a quite direct act on the part of YHWH. In both cases it is a formative act. In both cases the man must respond, must himself act, must carry out the initiative begun by YHWH. There seems to be a concern to show that Israel was especially created, or called, by YHWH, the same god who created man, and thus that Israel's history had divine sanction. It was, nevertheless, a

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168 Childs, op. cit., 78.

a human history; a history carried out by men.

In the previous chapter we noted the programatic character of the threefold promise to Abraham. The themes of a people, a land, and blessing to the nations run throughout the patriarchal history with emphasis on them in descending order.

The main concern of the patriarchal stories is not so much the patriarchs themselves as whether or not they will have an heir and who their successor shall be. This concern is dramatized by the theme of barrenness which runs through the stories of Sarah, Rebecca and Rachel. In each case it is YHWH who 'open the womb' of the barren one and is responsible for the birth of the child who will be the ancestor of the Israelites. Then too, there is the question of which son shall succeed the father and carry on the line of Israel: Ishmael or Isaac, Esau or Jacob. The main concern of these stories, then, is with the genealogy of Israel.

A second concern of these stories is with the land-promise. It is told how Abraham passed through the land, establishing altars at important sanctuaries and thus laying claim to it in YHWH's name. But his possession of the land was threatened when a famine drove him into Egypt, and he jeopardized his right to it when he offered Lot his choice of land. Similarly, Isaac was driven into Philistine territory by a famine[169], and

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169 The story of Isaac's stay among the Philistines seems to be an anachronism because the Philistines do not appear to have entered the land until much later. However, we are not concerned with the historical accuracy of the narrative here, we are simply taking it at face value.

Jacob left the land twice; once when he fled from Esau, and again when he and his sons went down into Egypt because of a bad famine. In each case the promise of the land is thrown into relief by being placed in jeopardy.

The theme of blessing to the nations is much less clearly defined in these stories, though there seem to be some -occurrences of it. The episode of Abraham's defeat of the four kings and his rescue of Lot and the people and possessions of the king of Sodom may be an example of this, but it is more likely that the central interest in the story is its reference to Jerusalem. Other instances of Abraham's blessing may be his plea for the Sodomites and the fact that Lot was saved. Contrariwise, a plague comes upon the Egyptians because they have wronged Abraham, and Abimelech wishes to make a covenant with Isaac because he has "YHWH's blessing". Like-wise, Laban is blessed on Jacob's account and Egypt prospers under Joseph's leadership.

As the patriarchal narratives unfold, we find time and time again that the episodes are concerned with the succession of generations or with the possession of the land, and occasionally with the effect that these Israelites have on those around them. The narratives more forward, they rarely stand still. There is very little interest in the patriarchs for their own sakes. It is their significance to the people of Israel that is important, and their stories are told in the light of this.

When we move on to the Joseph story we are on less clear ground. The transition from the Jacob story to the Joseph

story is smooth, but the Joseph story is a quite different
kind of story from the saga of Jacob which surrounds it.
The Joseph story is considerably more prolix than the concise
sagas of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It is, therefore, easy
to lose sight of the direction of the narrative. That is,
the way this particular story furthers the story of the
whole Yahwist narrative.

The flow of the narrative becomes apparent when we hear
that the great famine has affected Jacob and his sons as
well. After a great deal of travel back and forth between
Canaan and Egypt, and a considerable amount of 'not getting
down to the point'; the story finally relates how Jacob and
his sons went down into Egypt, as the hearers of the saga
undoubtedly knew they would. The possession of the land is
once again in jeopardy.

If we ask ourselves why this story is so rambling, the
answer is to be found in the fact that we are dealing with
a much later story than the patriarchal sagas which immediately
proceed it. As we have it now, the Joseph story continues
the story of Israel, but it does it in its own way. It
delights in telling the stories of how Joseph rose from
slavery and jail to become viceroy of Egypt, his clever
agricultural policy, and the tricks he resorted to in order
to induce his father and brothers to come to Egypt. There
is almost a delight in the story for its own sake, a dalliance
which almost loses sight of the story line.

This is why it is best to keep our distance from these
stories. We must listen to them and let them have their

say, but we mus t not lose sight of the way they follow one
another and continue the story from one phase to the next.

In spite of the transition and preparation provided by
the Joseph story, the national history begins quite abruptly.
The brief notice "Then there came to power in Egypt a new
king who knew nothing of Joseph" (Ex. 1:8) serves to bridge
several centuries and to introduce the narrative that follows.
By now, however, we have become accustomed to such rough
transitions. We recognize that the continuity is intentional,
while the disjointedness is due to the nature of the compser's
materials. Actually, the disjointedness is less obvious when
hearing the narrative, for the impetus of the narrative makes
up for any lack of smoothness.

The story of Moses' birth, his childhood at the court of
Pharaoh, and his flight to Midian sets the stage for the
national history. The story of his 'call' by YHWH leads into
the account of the Exodus. The call of Moses evokes memories
of the call of Abraham and the creation of Adam which initiated
the patriarchal and primeval histories respectively. We seem
to have here a device by which the saga asserts the divine
sanction for the subsequent historical events.

Although, the call of Moses prepares the way for the
Exodus story, the narrative is interrupted by the rather long
account of the plagues which leads nowhere. Supposedly the
plagues are to induce Pharaoh to let the Israelites go. But
it is only the last plague, which bears little connection
with the earlier ones, that impells him to allow them to depart.

Noth observes, "The story of the plagues has no real purpose; it ends with Moses' final departure from Pharaoh without any change in the situation."[170] However, while the plague story does not contribute to the development of the narrative, it serves to heighten the drama of the departure from Egypt which ends with the Egyptians lying dead on the shore of the Red Sea. We can well imagine the Israelites revelling in the story of how their god humbled the mighty Egyptians.

From the crossing of the Red Sea on, the national history sounds pretty much like a travelogue. The whole thrust of this part of the narrative is on the movement toward the promised land, just as the thrust of the patriarchal narratives was on the genealogical succession. The episodes which occur merely flesh out the itinerary.

A rather significant exception is the episode at Sinai. Von Rad[171] and other have observed that the Sinai events seem to have been interpolated into the earlier Exodus account. Certainly the arrival at Sinai comes upon us rather unexpectedly even though there had been predictions of it as far back as the call of Moses. (Ex. 3:18) The Sinai events do not seem to contribute to the development of the narrative in any appreciable way because the Israelites move on from Sinai after the covenant-giving with their situation very little changed. It seems that the significance of the Sinai episode must be inferred from its position in the narrative rather than from the contribution it makes to the development of the story. The Sinai episode stands exactly in the center of the

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170 Noth, Exodus, 68.

171 Von Rad, Problem of the Hexateuch, 53 ff.; Genesis, 20.

Exodus-Wandering account, and it is here that the Hebrew story normally reaches its climax. It seems, then, that the account of the Sinai has been placed just here because of its importance. But when we ask who has done this, we must ask for whom this story was important. The answer must be that it was important to the members of the YHWH amphictyony from whom the Yahwist inherited most of the Exodus account. The Yahwist himself would have little reason to include this episode, for it contributed little to his story, and for him the election of the people of Israel could be traced all the way back to the time of Abraham, if not to Adam.

We have come to relegate the conquest of the land to the time of Joshua, but if we listen to the Yahwist narrative attentively, we observe that the conquest began even earlier. After a series of incidents, the Israelites moved to the borders of Canaan where they made an abortive attempt to capture the Judean highlands. The significance of this account and its connection with the murmuring motif we have already examined. But we must not overlook the fact that the narrative recounts the capture of Hormah, the Amorite kingdom of Sihon and the kingdom of Og of Bashan. Finally, the narrative ends with a prophecy of the defeat of Moab and Edom. Since it is unlikely that the narrative originally ended here, it is probable that the rest of the conquest was also related.

In the light of this, we can see that the possession of the land was very much a part of the Exodus-Wandering narrative —

more so than we are accustomed to thinking. Taking an overview of the whole Yahwist narrative, the Exodus-Wandering section is best seen as a return to the promised land, rather than a whole new beginning for this would be to view it too much in isolation. Thus, the Exodus cannot be taken as the key to the whole of the Yahwist narrative as von Rad would do. The Exodus-Wandering account continues the three-fold theme of a people, a land, and blessing to the nations which runs through the entire narrative, but is most clearly enunciated in the call of Abraham.

The aspect of the land is most prominant in the Exodus stories; while the formation of a people plays a secondary role. This is because the formation of a people is pretty much of an accomplished fact by the time the Exodus narrative begins. The third aspect of the central theme is to be seen in the great numbers of "people of all sorts' who joined the Israelites as they left Egypt, the share in Israel's blessing offered to Hobab, and, contrariwise, in the fate of the Amalekites who attacked YHWH's people.

We can conclude from our observations that the Yahwist narrative is a much more close-knit story than might at first appear. Its unity lies in the way many diverse stories have been linked together to form one continuous story; the story of Israel. These people regarded themselves as a people 'called' by their god; called to become a great people, to possess a land, and to confer blessing on 'the surrounding nations. This three-fold theme runs through the whole

narrative, joining it together and giving it its thrust. If we ask what literary form is concerned with such things; the answer is that it is saga. Saga tells the story of a people's origins and of its history. It relates how they have come to their present situation and helps them understand themselves. This is precisely what the Yahwist saga seeks to do.

Our examination of the Yahwist narrative has been quite general, and was intended to be so. We wished to grasp the continuities of the story; its 'flow'. We could not do this by looking too closely at details. Though, once the general direction of the narrative has been discerned, it is possible to do so. However, we have left that for another time. It may seem that our analysis has contributed nothing new or important to observations already made. It has, at least served to filter out some unwarranted conclusions and to focus attention on those aspects of the narrative which deserve more attention than they have received. Hopefully, they will receive more attention in the future.

CHAPTER SEVEN: <u>CONCLUSION</u>

We have tried to take a fresh look at the J source. In order to understand it properly, it seems necessary to discover what type of literature it is, how it was used, and the historical context of its creation. To put it more simply; it is necessary to see it as a living thing functioning in its own environment.

It was our contention that the Yahwist narrative stood within Israel's saga tradition and that its spirit, its concerns, and its function were those of saga. However, our investigation indicated that this saga represented a unique turn in the saga tradition.

Saga is normally a spontaneous production; it arises from a people's desire to preserve the memories of their past. Because saga is a memory, and because it is transmitted orally, it is a flexible, living thing. The freedom oral tradition allows, and the interaction between the saga teller and his audience conspire to make saga a democratic institution. It expresses the voice of the people; it represents the past as they see it.

But the creation of the Yahwist saga coincided with the rise of the monarchy in Israel, and it seems likely that it was composed under the influence of the royal court and to further its purposes. The effect of the royal interest was to guarantee the preservation of this saga in its 'official'

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version. However, once the saga became subject to monarchial control, and once it was fixed and unable to evolve freely, it ceased to be a living expression of the life of the people.

Because the Yahwist saga remained relatively unchanged, although added to from time to time, it provides a valuable testimony to the life and thought of the Davidic-Solomonic era. It also provides a reflection of many previous eras as well; though here the scholar must proceed very carefully. We cannot 'read' the testimony correctly unless we understand the literary form in which it is couched. This is why our main effort has been to define the literary form of this composition.

This is a very preliminary undertaking, but it does open the way for further research and suggests a number of studies that could be made. For one thing, very little is known about saga, and about Israelite saga in particular. As we have already suggested, it would be very fruitful to examine the relationship between saga and myth. It would be very useful also to have a better understanding of the dynamics of oral transmission and the techniques used by composers of oral literature. Once we have a grasp of these things we will be in a better position to interpret the Yahwist narrative and other similar literary pieces.

Our conclusions as to the form and purpose of the Yahwist source led to some interesting complications for Pentateuchal studies. If J is a saga, as we have claimed, then we must not be too quick to read a 'religious' message into what it is

saying. While religious thought is reflected throughout the narrative, we must realize that it is reflected, or better 'refracted', and not presented directly. We regard it as characteristic of Israelite religion that the activity of YHWH is located squarely within the sphere of human events and that there was very little speculation about a non-historical world -- a world of the gods, or of YHWH. But, may this not be because the chief document upon which our ideas of Old Testament religion are based, the Pentateuch, is at heart a saga, and it is the nature of such literature to speak precisely in this way? There are indications in other parts of the Old Testament of a more mythological conception of the YHWH religion, and this may indeed have been more common among the people, at least during their earlier stages. This possibility should at least be considered in any study of the religion of ancient Israel.

Another implication of our study concerns the development of the Pentateuchal tradition. However we identify it, the final text of the Pentateuch is a quite different document than the Yahwist saga. A considerable evolution has taken place, one that could yield valuable insights for a history of Israel's religion. But, we must recognize that this development has taken place by means of accretions to the basic narrative. The basic narrative still remains largely intact. This fact means that the finished product cannot be a complete departure from the original. The Yahwist saga contributes a distinct character to the final Pentateuch.

This should not be overlooked. It has been customary to speak of the Pentateuch as a 'salvation-history'. This term is in need of careful re-appraisal, at least as regards its application to the Pentateuch. In the light of our examination of the Yahwist saga, we would tentatively suggest that the Pentateuch could be thought of as a 'theologized saga'. That is, a saga interpreted theologically and overlaid with material designed to indicate this theological significance more clearly.

We indicated the possibility that early Israelite religion was more mythological than has generally been realized. And we pointed out that the Yahwist saga should not be taken as a statement of the religious faith of the 10th century. But, we should also point out that this saga probably influenced the religious faith of later generations. If the faith of Israel has an 'historical' cast, somewhat of a misnomer, it is probably due to the adoption of this old saga by the Priestly scribes of later centuries. In this way, the Yahwist saga became the father of three great traditions: the Jewish, the Christian, and the Moslem.

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