

## THE ELOHIST SOURCE

### INTRODUCTION: THE PERSONS BEHIND THE STORY

It's often so easy to become lost in the truly captivating mystery of these Bible stories. For the faithful and skeptical alike, fixating on the veracity of a *narrative's plot elements* while overlooking its *narrator's historical motivations* is the most common of interpretive stumbling blocks. For example, when many students of the Bible observed the very first two chapters of Genesis feature two different creation narratives, they applied more literalist interpretive methods to answer how these distinct traditions could both be literal accounts (i.e. historically true). Proposed theories included:

1. *Elohim*/"God" in chapter 1 and *Yahweh*/"LORD" in chapter 2 are two different creators (the former being a plural Hebraism, suggested to reference "the angels"); ergo the creation stories in these chapters record the separate creative acts of separate creators.
2. Genesis starts "in the beginning" with a series of creative acts chronicled in six days and concludes by God resting on the "seventh day"; ergo the following narrative (after God rested) is another of the separate creative acts of the same Creator.
3. The first chapter lists the creation of plants, then aquatic, flying and land animals, then people (i.e. humankind, generally); ergo chapter two introduces the first human parents (i.e. Adam & Eve) in a more detailed version of two separate accounts of the same Creation.

Ironically, such literalist interpretations with the goal of defending the veracity of the Bible as an historical document often provide a satisfying yet indoctrinating alternative to uncovering the simple truths in history regarding the separate authors of these narrative traditions and the unique peoples they typify. Mastering the collective significance of these Scriptures is therefore founded in *knowing what individual authors originally intended to communicate*, regardless of the historicity or logical synchronism of one communication to the next within their present canonical arrangement. More pointedly, whether or not God(s) created anything and regardless of how or in what sequence Creation(s) may have taken place, upon prying into the Bible's first contents the reader is presented with different narratives representative of different peoples who are a veritable part of history. Rather than focusing efforts on either disproving or harmonizing such Creation and subsequent stories, let us learn of these stories' creators! It must be stressed: understanding the Holy Bible is borne first of familiarizing with its contents, then identifying its authors, and finally *probing the motivations behind their distinct and original compositions*.

### A NOTE ON DISTINGUISHING "E" & "P" FROM "J" IN GENESIS

The first book in the Bible, *Genesis* (Greek for “a becoming”; i.e. “beginning”), truly is an excellent place in which to begin a thorough investigation of the Bible, as it lends unique opportunities to distinguish its three primary source documents (“E”, “J” & “P”). As it happened, the creation narrative in chapter 2 (“J”/Yahwist) was written before chapter 1 (“P”/Priestly), and both the Priestly and the oldest (“E”/Elohists) authors consistently refer to God as “Elohim” or “El” prior to the accounts of the revealing of God’s name to Moses as “Yahweh”, early into the book of Exodus. Therefore despite the characteristic references to *Elohim* in Genesis 1, the *Elohists* source does not actually surface until Genesis 20. What this means is the present canonical arrangement and chronology of the stories as related in Genesis is misleading because its most ancient material “E” has no creation account, while its two creation stories of “J” and “P” are presented with the latter tradition foremost. Thus, the compositional order of its parts is completely reversed in this compilation, with chapter 20 being written before chapter 2, being written before chapter 1.

Furthermore what this means is while it may be easy enough to distinguish within the 50 chapters of Genesis the uniquely characteristic usage of “Yahweh” by the Yahwist, it is not quite this simple to distinguish the Elohist from the Priestly material therein as they *both refer to Elohim instead of Yahweh* until Exodus 6 where the Priestly author divulges an important piece of information:

{P} Elohim spoke to Moses and said to him, “I am Yahweh; and I appeared to **Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as Almighty El**, {Heb. *El Shaddai*} **but [by] My name, Yahweh, I did not make Myself known to them.**”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Exodus 6:2,3

Note a vivid example of the literalist attempts on the part of some Bible students to force logical consistency of verses such as these in an effort to defend the veracity of the Bible as an historical document. In the 1998 edition of “*The Scriptures*” English translation of the Bible by the *Institute for Scripture Research*, Exodus 6:3 reads (emphasis added):

*“And I appeared to Abraham, to Yitshaq, and to Ya'aqob, as El Shaddai.  
And by My Name, יהוה, was I not known to them?”*

Compare with the *American Standard Version* of 1901:

*“And I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, as God Almighty;  
but by my name JEHOVAH I was not known to them.”*

Note that “Jehovah” & “YHWH/YHVH” are common transliterations of the four-letter name יהוה {*Yahweh*}.

According to the publisher’s website, “*This is a literal translation of the Bible in English. This translation differs significantly from most common English translations in that it has ... restored the Name of the Most High (YHWH) throughout.*” Thus, by restoring the name of Yahweh throughout in the stated vision of, “*preserving the Hebraic mind-set of the original writers,*” this Messianic translation effort has instead singularly preserved the mind-set of the J author by altering the subsequent P passage to reflect accordingly. This serves as a modern-day example of the

Favoring the more ancient and Northern Israelite “E” tradition, here in the late-8<sup>th</sup> to mid-7<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E. “P” writes of the Patriarchs having *no knowledge of the name of Yahweh*, yet the Southern Judahite “J” author had painted a much different picture:

{J} **Yahweh appeared to Abram** and said, “To your seed I will give this land.” So **he built an altar there to Yahweh** who had appeared to him. Then he proceeded from there to the mountain on the east of Bethel; and there **he built an altar to Yahweh and called upon the name of Yahweh**.

In keeping with Abraham (thus renamed in P), note this J-inspired insertion:

{J} **Abraham called the name of that place Yahweh Will Provide**, {Heb. *Yahweh-Jireh*} **as it is said to this day**, “In the mount of Yahweh it will be provided.”<sup>2</sup>

Therefore it may be observed the onomatological “names-game” in sorting these literary traditions proves quite relevant when faced with these contrary depictions of Abraham *calling upon the name of Yahweh* and naming a mountain after Yahweh — the locale claimed to be as such historically remembered *to this day* (i.e. the day the text was authored). In plain terms: a story in Genesis with references to “Yahweh” is likely to be either J or a J-inspired insertion, as this name’s usage is at odds with both the E and subsequent P rhetorical styles. So it remains: how can one peel back the literary layers to that Northern Israelite and most ancient of textual kernels?

## NOTES ON DISTINGUISHING “E”

Perhaps the easiest identifying characteristic of the Elohist material is that it (like the Yahwist) was written in a more archaic form of ancient Hebrew. Both E and J were written before the Assyrian Captivity of Israel, and their writing style reflects this antiquity as various Biblical Hebrew scholars have discovered and demonstrated.<sup>3</sup> With this understanding in place, there is enough information to put a distinctive face on the E material within Genesis noting linguistic identifiers: “E” in Genesis is that which refers to God as “Elohim,” written in a more classical form of 9<sup>th</sup> or early 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E. Hebrew.

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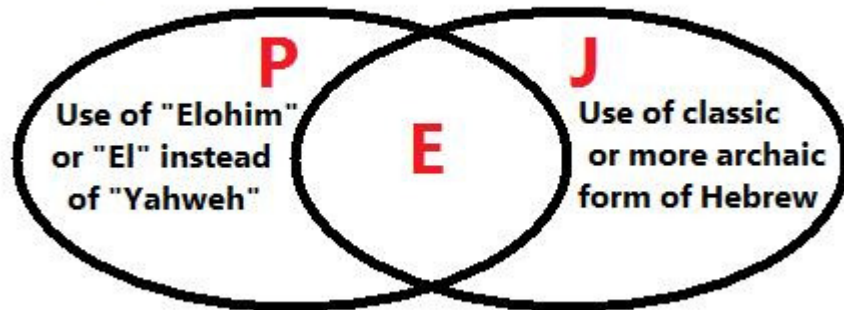
same type of biases which inspired the ancient scribal emendations performed on E, as it was synopsized in Judah to coincide with latter and favored J material.

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 12:7,8 & 22:14

<sup>3</sup> For research on the archaic nature of J & E in respect to P & D, along with other identifying syntax, consult R. E. Friedman, *The Bible With Sources Revealed: A New View Into the Five Books of Moses*, Collection of Evidence (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 2003).

For further research on distinguishing E from the supplementary layers of JEP, consult Tzemah L. Yoreh, *The First Book of God* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010).

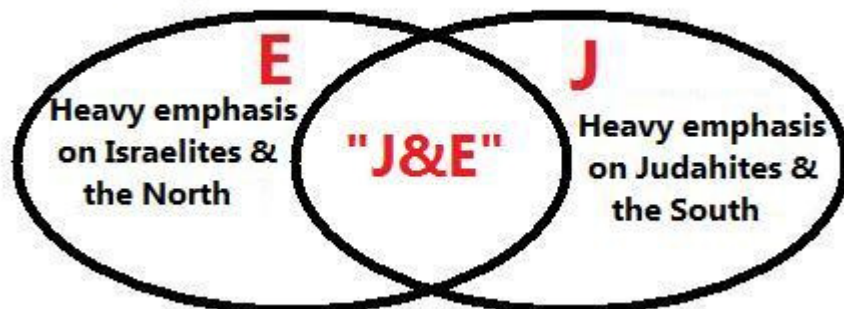
### Linguistic Characterizations of "E" within Genesis



While this may be a good measuring rod with which to isolate E in Genesis, it doesn't help in Exodus or Numbers (where E, J & P all make references to Yahweh). Furthermore, few are equipped with knowledge of the nuances between more classic and latter forms of Hebrew; therefore, other methods of discernment must be employed to fine tune the identification of E within the Scriptures. The investigative Bible student has the good fortune of many such methods which work together in bringing these once-distinct compositions back into focus.

For example, how could one go about distinguishing E from J within the book of Numbers, since both were written in archaic Hebrew and both now refer to God as "Yahweh"? What are some of their other unique features? It must be remembered: *"E" became anciently synopsized with "J" material after the fall of Israel in 722 B.C.E. to produce the quasi-historical text of "J&E"*. In the introduction to the Old Testament it was also outlined that these texts originated from different peoples, with different rhetorical concerns. Thus, these texts bear not only linguistic nuances but also ideological peculiarities: *"E" focuses itself with Northern Syrian & Israelite/Ephraimite traditions and "J" focuses itself with Southern Canaan & Judahite/Davidic traditions.*

### Ideological Distinctions Between "E" and "J"



Textual examples of such distinctions between Northern E and the subsequent Judahizing elements it was synopsized with will be examined at length in this chapter. Yet perhaps the most powerful tool of discerning E from its neighboring texts within the Bible has yet to be mentioned. It must also be remembered: these literary sources each originated from different

authors, with different writing styles and linear plot developments. Individuals compose words in their own unique ways.<sup>4</sup> Disassembling E from J from P in Genesis and studying them separately will engender a strong *familiarity with each author's vocabulary, repeating thematic devices, and logical flow of storyline*. In other words, the careful student will notice where the continuity of one author's unique story stops and picks up again amidst interleaving material written by other hands, and it will become evident that the ancient redactors who pieced these sources together into Genesis, Exodus and Numbers often exercised extraordinary care in preserving as much of each original document *as logical consistency would allow*. Nevertheless as will be demonstrated, E, being the most ancient document and ultimately preserved in the alien nation of Judah, suffered the most significant redaction as it evolved into the compilations of "J&E" and finally "P&J&E".

## REMNANTS OF GENUINE NORTHERN TEXTUAL TRADITIONS

### JACOB FOUNDS BETH-EL (THE HOUSE OF EL)

As the introduction to the Old Testament indicated, the central administration of Judah along with its dynasty of Davidic kings was seated at Jerusalem, in which would also be established the cultic seat of power represented by a temple known as "the House of Yahweh". Yet just a few miles north was another famous city within Israelite territory known as Bethel, which means "the House of El". Situated so closely though in separate nations, these two cities would become centers of rival religious tradition – Bethel being a Northern sanctuary and Jerusalem being the Southern alternative. In the above reference from Southern J, an account was just witnessed of *Abraham calling upon the name of Yahweh at the mountain on the east of Bethel*. While it is curious P informs: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob knew God as *Almighty El* (and not by the name of "Yahweh"), it becomes ever more curious to consider all the origin-stories of the Northern *House of El* as preserved in Genesis. Concerning this triple-tradition of Bethel (E, J & P), note first the Priestly version:

{P} Then **Elohim appeared to Jacob** and He blessed him. Elohim said to him,  
"Your name is Jacob;  
Your name shall no longer be called Jacob,  
But Israel shall be your name."

Thus He called his name Israel. **Elohim also said to him,**  
**"I am Almighty El** {Heb. *El Shaddai*};

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<sup>4</sup> The unique way people compose words not only can be used to distinguish E, J, P, and D, but also can be presently witnessed in a simple comparison between the four canonical gospels in the New Testament. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John each relay a biography of Jesus Christ (often with similar scenes and dialog), and variations in their vocabulary, writing style, and emphases express the individuality of the authors who wrote these gospels and the communities they represented. Compositions bear the unique and identifiable "fingerprints" of the hand that scribed them, and such nuances may also be seen distinguishing deuteo-Isaiah from its original passages or typifying the genuine and deuteo-Pauline epistles.

Be fruitful and multiply;  
A nation and a company of nations shall come into being from you,  
And kings shall come forth from your loins.  
The land which I gave to Abraham and Isaac,  
I will give it to you,  
And I will give the land to your seed after you.”

Then **Elohim went up from him in the place where He had spoken with him. Jacob set up a pillar in the place where He had spoken with him, a pillar of stone**, and he poured out a drink offering on it; **he also poured oil on it. So Jacob named the place where Elohim had spoken with him, the House of El** {Heb. *Beth-El*}.<sup>5</sup>

Here is a good example of the concise writing style, unique vocabulary and ideological concerns of the Priestly author. In just a few lines beginning with Genesis 35:9, this passage recapitulates and further synthesizes multiple Northern E stories with some exceptionable J influences from its combined J&E source document, namely *Genesis 28:10-22 {JE}; 31:11-13 {E}; 32:25-33 {E}; 35:1-8 {E}*. Note how the first of these stories which P is literarily dependent upon – in its present and surviving form – is neither altogether E nor J:

{E} & {J} Then Jacob ... came to a certain place and spent the night there, because the sun had set; and he took one of the stones of the place and put it under his head, and lay down in that place. He had a dream, and behold, a ladder was set on the earth with its top reaching to heaven; **and behold, the angels of Elohim were ascending and descending on it. [And behold, Yahweh stood beside him {or “above it”} and said, “I am Yahweh, the Elohim of your father Abraham and the Elohim of Isaac; the land on which you lie, I will give it to you and to your seed. Your seed will also be like the dust of the earth, and you will break through to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and in you and in your seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you.” Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, “Surely Yahweh is in this place, and I did not know it.”]** He was afraid and said, “How awesome is this place! **This is none other than the house of Elohim**, and this is the gate of heaven.”

So Jacob rose early in the morning, and **took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on its top. He called the name of that place the House of El** {Heb. *Beth-El*}. Then Jacob made a vow, saying, “**If Elohim will be with me** and will keep me on this journey that I go, and will give me bread to eat and garments to wear, and I return to my father’s house in peace, **[then Yahweh will be my Elohim.]** {then} This stone, which I have set up as a pillar, **will be Elohim’s house**, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You.”<sup>6</sup>

In the passage above, the black text is indicative of ancient Northern E, and the [bracketed red] text features interleaving from the J document (or J-inspired insertions). Here is the well-known dream, *Jacob’s Ladder*, depicting *the angels of Elohim* ascending and descending between heaven and earth. Jacob then exclaims, “*This is none other than the house of Elohim!*” (a literary allusion to Bethel, the House of El). Despite P saying Elohim appeared to Jacob at Bethel

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<sup>5</sup> From Genesis 35:9-15

<sup>6</sup> From Genesis 28:10-22

saying, “*I am Almighty El...*,” in classic J-fashion the latter inserted material begins with Yahweh who says to Jacob, “*I am Yahweh...*” and ends with Jacob exclaiming, “*Surely Yahweh is in this place, and I did not know it!*” The irony is that, according to the P author, Jacob indeed never knew “Yahweh” was in Bethel (for he knew only of “El”), yet this Northern source text bearing signs of Southern redaction now depicts Jacob avowing, “*Yahweh will be my Elohim.*”

In simpler terms: both the Priestly recapitulation (P) and Judahized Elohist (JE) feature the same plot elements:

1. God appears and is announced to Jacob.
2. Jacob is promised (1) many descendants and (2) land for those descendants.
3. Jacob erects a stone pillar and anoints it with oil.
4. Jacob names the place where God spoke to him: *the House of El* (Bethel).

Whereas the Priestly summary says God announced himself as “Almighty El”, the Yahwist tradition says God announced himself as “Yahweh”. Therefore, despite the appeals of the Priestly author towards a more original Northern Elohist tradition, that tradition when combined with the Yahwist would have the reader believe that Jacob (the Northern founding father) understood the “El” of Bethel to be Yahweh. However, what does the reader find in the subsequent *string of Elohist stories* from which the Priestly passage also concisely summarized?

- **31<sup>st</sup> Chapter** – The “*angel of Elohim*” says to Jacob, “*I am the El [of] Bethel, where you anointed a pillar, where you made a vow to Me.*”<sup>7</sup>
- **32<sup>nd</sup> Chapter** – Jacob wrestles a man who blesses him and gives him a new name: “*He Strives with El*” (Heb. *Israel*) because “*you have striven with Elohim and with men.*”

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<sup>7</sup> From Genesis 31:11-13

Note in verse 13 after the angel of Elohim says, “*I am the El [of] Bethel,*” he continues, “*Leave this land, and return to the land of your birth.*” Despite this chapter being full of continual references to “Elohim”, verse 3 stands out in stark contrast:

*Then Yahweh said to Jacob, “Return to the land of your fathers and to your relatives, and I will be with you.”*

Not only does this represent a repetition in plot (God twice telling Jacob to return to his homeland), but here, quite distinct from the dominant use of “Elohim” in this Elohist chapter, it is “Yahweh” doing the speaking. Furthermore, the phrase, “*I will be with you,*” is an example of thematic recursion, carrying over from the aforementioned J insertions in Genesis 28, where Yahweh says to Jacob, “*I am with you,*” (verse 15).

Another phenomenon in chapter 31 much like this (repetition in plot & changing reference to God) is verse 49. Such examples are littered throughout the ancient E texts and demonstrate: not only were Northern & Southern textual traditions combined, but they were done so in a manner such that (at least to some noticeable degree) their unique literary features were preserved. In other words, where two versions of a story co-existed, one was not entirely excised into oblivion, nor was its vocabulary altogether changed to “blend” with the dominant text such that it could no longer be distinguished by a careful reader.

Jacob then names the place “*the Face of El*” {Heb. *Peniel*} because “*I have seen Elohim face to face.*”

- **33<sup>rd</sup> Chapter** – Jacob erects an altar and calls it “*El, the Elohim of Israel*” (Heb. *El-Elohe-Israel*).
- **35<sup>th</sup> Chapter** – “*Elohim*” says to Jacob, “*Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there, and make an altar there to El, who appeared to you.*” Jacob then says to his household and people, “*Put away the foreign elohim {i.e. “gods”} which are among you, and let us arise and go up to Bethel, and I will make an altar there to El, who has been with me in the way which I have gone.*” So Jacob built an altar at Bethel and called it “*the El of Bethel*” because “*there Elohim had revealed Himself to him.*”

These Elohist stories could not paint a much more consistent picture. Nevertheless, because the initial Bethel account in chapter 28 presently includes a Yahwist intervention, complete with Jacob avowing, “*Yahweh will be my Elohim,*” the northern account of Jacob (who is now called Israel) naming an altar, “*El, the Elohim of Israel*” becomes buried underneath the literary fusion that this “El” of “Israel” and “El” of “Bethel” is the same Yahweh that Jacob swore would become his Elohim. Furthermore the fact that Jacob, throughout his journey and household’s safe return to Bethel, never acknowledges this “Yahweh”, but only “El” (a tradition which the Priestly author supports) is likewise overlooked in the shadow of post-Assyrian Captivity Judahizing literary influences, usurping the original northern tradition. Only upon separating these stories and examining each of their authors’ unique historical motivations can their full meaning be known, after millennia of obscurity.

## **THE HOUSEHOLD OF JACOB FROM OUT OF SYRIA (THE TEN TRIBES OF ISRAEL)**

In tracing the Elohist document, between Jacob’s first visit to Bethel (when he anointed the stone pillar and made a vow) and his return and dedication to the El of Bethel with a great household and entourage, Jacob had been living in the far northern region of Aram (i.e. Syria), with the house of Laban the Aramean. During this time, Jacob acquires two wives (Laban’s daughters), and between these two women Leah & Rachel and their two maids Zilpah & Bilhah, Jacob ultimately fathers the renowned *House of Israel* (i.e. the *Ten Tribes of Israel*). Note from the original Elohist document the nativities of the following seven sons:

{E} & {**[J]**} {**1**} Bilhah conceived and bore Jacob a son.

Then Rachel said, “Elohim has **judged me** {Heb. *danani*}, and has indeed heard my voice and has given me a son.” Therefore she named him Dan {i.e. “Judge”}.

{**2**} Rachel’s maid Bilhah conceived again and bore Jacob a second son.

So Rachel said, “With **wrestlings** {Heb. *naftule*} of Elohim **I have wrestled** {Heb. *niftalti*} with my sister, [and] I have indeed prevailed.”

And she named him Naphtali {i.e. “My Wrestling”}.



{3} Zilpah bore Jacob a son.  
 Then Leah said, “With **fortune** {Heb. *gad*}!”  
 So she named him Gad {i.e. “Fortune”}.

{4} Leah’s maid Zilpah bore Jacob a second son.  
 Then Leah said, “With **my happiness** {Heb. *ashri*}! For women will call me **happy** {Heb. *ashruni*}.”  
 So she named him Asher {i.e. “Happy”}.

{5} Leah ... conceived and bore Jacob a **[fifth]** son.  
 Then Leah said, “Elohim has given me **my wages** {Heb. *sekari*} because I gave my maid to my husband.”  
 So she named him Issachar {i.e. “Man of Wages”}.

{6} Leah conceived again and bore a **[sixth]** son to Jacob.  
 Then Leah said, “Elohim has **endowed me** {Heb. *zabadani*} with a good **gift** {Heb. *zebed*};  
**[now my husband will dwell with me** {Heb. *yizbeleni*}, **because I have borne him six sons.]**”  
 So she named him Zebulun {i.e. “Dowry/Gift” or “**Dwelling**”}.

{7} Then Elohim remembered Rachel, and Elohim gave heed to her and opened her womb.  
 So she conceived and bore a son and said, “Elohim has **taken away** {Heb. *asaf*} my reproach.”  
 She named him Joseph {i.e. “Taking”} [...] <sup>8</sup>

The literary consistency between these seven Elohist nativities is striking. Not only does Elohim figure throughout, but the structure of the story is always the same: (1) a woman bares a son, (2) makes a statement with a *Hebrew etymological allusion* to the son’s name, and (3) names the son accordingly. Indeed, the only shift from this structure appears in the account of the birth of Zebulun, which offers two different (and, thus, redundant) etymological explanations for the meaning of his name. Such Yahwist influences are styled in **[bracketed red]**; however, an extraordinary literary shift happens in this chapter, with the very next words of Joseph’s nativity. Note the full and present account:

{E} & {**[J]**} Then Elohim remembered Rachel, and Elohim gave heed to her and opened her womb.  
 So she conceived and bore a son and said, “Elohim has **taken away** {Heb. *asaf*} my reproach.”  
 She named him Joseph {i.e. “Taking” or “**Adding**”}, **[saying, “May Yahweh **add** {Heb. *yosef*} to me another son.]**”

As with the Bethel origin-story in Genesis 28, this Elohist account at mid-sentence in Genesis 30:24 bears all the signs of being emended with rival J material.

SIGNS OF EMENDATION	ELOHIST (E)	YAHWIST (J)
(1) Multiple Names for God	the chapter 30 nativities have only invoked Elohim	Joseph’s nativity now also invokes Yahweh
(2) Broken Textual Structure	before verse 24, the chapter is chiefly Elohist and always	after verse 24, the chapter is chiefly Yahwist and always

<sup>8</sup> Taken from Genesis 30:5-24a

	references Elohim	references Yahweh
	the chapter 30 nativities have always made an etymological statement, then named the son	Joseph's nativity now makes an etymological statement, after the naming of the son
(3) Redundancy in Plot	Joseph's etymology with reference to God is now given twice	
(4) Linguistic & Ideological Oppositions	the Elohist etymology derives Joseph's name from a root word meaning "to take"	the Yahwist etymology derives Joseph's name from a root word meaning "to add"

Remarkably and in dramatic fashion, the alternate Yahwist origin-account of the famed northern house of Joseph suggests the exact opposite etymological derivation of his name:

"Elohim has <b>taken away</b> " Heb. root עָסַף { 'sf }	" <b>May Yahweh add</b> " Heb. root יָסַף { ysf }
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Joseph will be discussed in more detail. Important to note now is that Joseph was the most famous of these sons of Israel and, as such, his nativity has not gone unmentioned in the Yahwist literary tradition. Furthermore, Joseph would go on to father two sons (41:50-52), each founding a tribe of Israel in his own right: Ephraim & Manasseh. (Remember: the entire nation of Israel would later be called "the house of Joseph" and "Ephraim" by the administrative scribes of the nation of Judah.) With Joseph's alternate nativity identified as Yahwist, the following four more nativities need to be also:

{J} {1} Leah conceived and bore a son and named him Reuben {i.e. "Look a Son"}, for she said, "Because Yahweh has looked {Heb. *raah*} upon my affliction; surely now my husband will love me."

{2} Then she conceived again and bore a son and said, "Because Yahweh has heard {Heb. *shama*} that I am hated, He has therefore given me this [son] also." So she named him Simeon {i.e. "Hearing"}.

{3} She conceived again and bore a son and said, "Now this time my husband will become attached {Heb. *yilaveh*} to me, because I have borne him three sons." Therefore he was named Levi {i.e. "Attached"}.

{4} And she conceived again and bore a son and said, "This time I will praise {Heb. *odeh*} Yahweh." Therefore she named him Judah {i.e. "Praised"}.<sup>9</sup>

(Note: an etymological relationship between "Yahweh" and "Judah" is here also implied.)<sup>10</sup> Immediately before the seven northern nativities as presently arranged, these four sons are

<sup>9</sup> Taken from Genesis 29:32-35

<sup>10</sup> Just as the root word for praise (הָדָה) may be etymologically compared with the proper noun Yehudah/Judah (יהודה), so too the name of the Southern tribal deity YHWH/Yahweh/Jehovah (יהוה). Here, the Yahwist author connects the expression "I will praise Yahweh" especially with the tribe of Judah. This becomes particularly noticeable when contrasted with the earlier (although canonically positioned later) Elohist nativities, where Leah is depicted invoking "Elohim" instead of "Yahweh". Thus, the namesake of "Jehudah" is likened to "Jehovah" (as even the modern linguistic contraction "Iewe/Jew" may now denote either "one of Judah" or "one of Yahweh" (i.e. a Yahwist)! Such shifts in associative emphasis between Elohim and Yahweh become evident throughout a

introduced by the Yahwist hand, and their characteristic writing style parallels not only the clearly Yahwist intervention in Joseph’s nativity but also the other redundant etymology given for Zebulun:

<b>Leah &amp; Levi (native in J)</b>	<b>Leah &amp; Zebulun (J insertion in E)</b>
“Now this time my husband will become <b>attached</b> {Heb. <i>yilaveh</i> } to me, because I have borne him three sons.”	[“now my husband will <b> dwell with me</b> {Heb. <i>yizbeleni</i> }, because I have borne him six sons.”]

It must also be observed that Reuben, though listed as the firstborn of Leah in the J material, is also mentioned in the E nativities (30:14-16) and, as will be shown, figures prominently in the E document. Therefore it appears the E account of Reuben’s birth has been full eclipsed with a J account, which also now introduces three additional sons: *Simeon, Levi and Judah*. Furthermore sometime after Jacob leaves the house of Laban in Aram and he’s on the road to Ephrath or Bethlehem, a nativity is given in E (35:16-20) of a final son: *Benjamin*.<sup>11</sup> With this information a complete list of all known nativities of each tribe (as given by both E & J) can be constructed:

<b>Nativities of Ten Tribes of Israel (E)</b>	<b>Nativities in Southern-Originated Text (J)</b>
<b>1.</b> Reuben [reconstructed]	Reuben
-	Simeon, Levi, Judah
<b>2.</b> Dan	-
<b>3.</b> Naphtali	-
<b>4.</b> Gad	-
<b>5.</b> Asher	-
<b>6.</b> Issachar	-

comparative study of the Elohist, Yahwist and Priestly sources. In the following chapter on the YAHWIST SOURCE the so-called, “mark of Cain” (the Kenite Yahwist associative likening of Cain with Yahweh) will be outlined in detail.

<sup>11</sup> Despite the E text relating the youngest son Benjamin’s birth in Canaan on the road to Ephrath (Bethlehem), a P text a few verses later summarizes JE differently:

*Now there were twelve sons of Jacob—the sons of Leah: Reuben, Jacob’s firstborn, then Simeon and Levi and Judah and Issachar and Zebulun; the sons of Rachel: Joseph and **Benjamin**; and the sons of Bilhah, Rachel’s maid: Dan and Naphtali; and the sons of Zilpah, Leah’s maid: Gad and Asher. These are the sons of Jacob **who were born to him in Paddan-aram**. {Genesis 35:22b-26}*

Here the Priestly recapitulation refers to twelve sons of Jacob who were all born in *Paddan-aram* (i.e. Syria), including Benjamin. The earlier passage referring to Benjamin’s birth in Canaan also includes an obscure tradition in verse 18: “{Rachel} named him *Ben-oni*; but his father called him *Benjamin*.” While *Ben-oni* (son of “oni”) has sometimes been translated, “Son of My Sorrow,” this is speculative as the rare Hebrew word bears the most striking resemblance to the city of “On” (Heliopolis) in Egypt, where later in E Benjamin’s elder brother Joseph would acquire his wife (the mother of Ephraim & Manasseh). Furthermore this chapter is particularly disheveled, with assorted interleaving between E, J, and P that may be asynchronous to their original source tradition.

For research on the possible connection between *Ben-oni* and *On*, consult Greenberg, Gary, *101 Myths of the Bible: How Ancient Scribes Invented Biblical History*, Myth #67; Benjamin was born in Canaan (Naperville: Sourcebooks, Inc., 2000).

7. Zebulun	Zebulun [reconstructed]
8 & 9. Joseph = Ephraim & Manasseh	Joseph [reconstructed]
10. Benjamin	-

What immediately stands out from this list is that the northern Elohist source featured the nativities of not just any ten tribes, but specifically *the ten tribes representing the northern territory and Nation of Israel*. The Yahwist tradition then introduces three tribes: Simeon (engulfed within Judahite territory), Levi (priests of Yahweh which had no territory), and Judah, thus representing *the southern territory and Nation of Judah!* The lines have thus been drawn:



A picture begins to come into focus suggesting an earlier Northern literary tradition with Leah bearing only three sons (Reuben: “*look, a son,*” Issachar: “*man of wages...because I gave my*

*maid to my husband,*” and Zebulun: a “*gift,*” since a third son granted one more than her maid had borne).<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless the Southern literary tradition inserts three more sons immediately after Reuben, including the gratuitous exclamation concerning Zebulun: “*I have borne him six sons.*” As fate would have it, an even more ancient textual source in the Bible has survived to corroborate the original Elohist tradition.

The book of Judges contains some of the oldest material written in the Bible, much of it composed in the North (i.e. Israel), arguably around the same time as E. The original content of Northern or “*Proto*”-Judges suffered significant redaction at the hands of a Southern author as it was ultimately pieced together with J’s expansive Davidic epic and other sources to form what scholars call the greater *Deuteronomistic History* of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings. However, Judges also contains the peculiar victory hymn of Deborah and Barak, usually called the *Song of Deborah* (*Judges 5:2-31*), featuring language and content so archaic that some scholars have suggested these poetic lines comprise the oldest scripture in the entire Bible.<sup>13</sup> This song also happens to contain the oldest accounting of the tribes of Israel:

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<sup>12</sup> Aside from the way Jacob’s wives invoke either “Elohim” (E) or “Yahweh” (J) as they name their sons, the exclamations they make involving the names also reveal the original source tradition they came from. For example, in Genesis 30 (E) both Leah and Rachel invoke “Elohim”; however in the previous chapter (J), after the birth of Judah, Leah exclaims: “*This time I will praise Yahweh,*” (despite Judah’s nativity being inserted before her now subsequent invocations of Elohim).

Even more revealing is Rachel’s exclamation in Genesis 30, after her maid gives birth to Naphtali: “*With wrestlings of Elohim I have wrestled with my sister, [and] I have indeed prevailed.*” This is significant because at this point in the story Rachel has borne no children of her own, but her maid has just borne her a second son. According to the original Elohist tradition, at this point Leah has only given birth to Reuben (not Simeon, Levi, and Judah), therefore Rachel has “indeed prevailed” because she has given Abraham a second son, while Leah has only given one. The expression, “*I have indeed prevailed,*” makes little sense in light of the J insertion now suggesting Leah has already borne four sons.

This phenomenon of an original meaning intended by the Elohist being obscured by latter J material continues in chapter 30, where Leah’s maid also bears Abraham two sons. Subsequently, Leah gives birth to her second son exclaiming: “*Elohim has given me my wages because I gave my maid to my husband.*” Again, this expression only makes sense in the original Elohist context of Leah having given birth to two sons (i.e. “*my wages*”). Thus, Elohim has repaid her for the two sons her maid was just depicted having previously borne her. Likewise when Leah gives birth to a third son she refers to him as, “*a gift,*” (as opposed to a wage) because this third son exceeded the number her maid had borne. Due to the J insertion, by this point these are now regarded as Leah’s fifth and sixth sons. Furthermore, here also appears the redundant J exclamation, offering an alternate meaning from “a gift” while adding an expression reminiscent of the previous J chapter: “*...because I have borne him six sons.*”

<sup>13</sup> For example, the *Song of Deborah* in chapter 5 of the originally northern book of Judges has been called one of, “*The oldest substantial compositions preserved in the Hebrew Bible.*” Furthermore, that it contains: “*Valid historical data for a reconstruction of the initial phases of Israelite history.*”

Goedicke, Hans and Roberts, J. J. M. (editors), *Unity and Diversity: Essays in the History, Literature, and Religion of the Ancient Near East*, "Early Israelite History in Light of Early Israelite Poetry" by Freedman, David Noel, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975).

The Ten Tribes of the Confederation of Israel according to the ancient Hymn of Deborah				
Ephraim	Benjamin	Machir (Manasseh)	Zebulun	Issachar
Reuben	Gilead (Gad) <sup>14</sup>	Dan	Asher	Naphtali

Likewise conspicuously absent from this hymn are: *Simeon, Levi, and Judah!* It is therefore no coincidence that the same ten tribes representing the territory of the northern Nation of Israel appear (tightly listed together in verses 12-18) with the only other notable people mentioned thereafter being: the kings of Canaan, the inhabitants of a certain place “*utterly cursed*” by Yahweh “*because they did not come to the help of Yahweh against the warriors,*” and Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite. Where does Judah fit into this picture of the Kenite, the cursed, and the kings of Canaan?

Nevertheless careful research into genuine northern traditions as preserved in the Elohist source confirms Judah was fit into the wider Judeo-Israelite picture created by the synopsis of E & J textual tradition after the fall of the Kingdom of Israel in 722 B.C.E. and resulting integration into Judahite society. Not only did the territory of Judah and its inhabitants become literally and literarily grafted with Israel as two additional brother-tribes (Judah & Simeon), but the priesthood of Judah’s national God, Yahweh, also became “attached” as a brother (Levi).

With a growing understanding that *neither Yahweh nor Judah originally factored into these early northern stories* (let alone Jerusalem), an unadulterated scene of Jacob returning to the renowned northern sanctuary of Bethel with a great household born of North Syria is allowed to communicate its more complete and intended meaning. In Genesis 35, one finds the Patriarch Israel guiding his family, who would become none other than the *Ten Tribes of the Nation Israel*, to purify themselves from foreign gods and acknowledge none other than *El of Bethel, the Elohim of Israel*. This scene therefore reflects the historical circumstances surrounding Elohist authorship in 9<sup>th</sup> or early 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E. Israel, when these northern ten tribes had their own customs and traditions centering on Bethel, while the ever-distinct nation of Judah developed its

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<sup>14</sup> Manasseh is uniquely recorded as fathering only one son: *Machir*. Manasseh is also uniquely coupled with Machir in an Elohist portion of Genesis (verse 50:23):

*Joseph saw the third generation of Ephraim’s sons; also the sons of Machir, the son of Manasseh, were born on Joseph’s knees.*

**Machir** is therefore an early reference to the tribe of Manasseh.

**Gilead** is usually a regional reference to the Transjordan (east of the Jordan River), as the Song of Deborah reads: “*Gilead dwelt across the Jordan.*” The Israelite tribes later claimed to have lived in Gilead were: *Reuben, Gad, and half of the tribe of Manasseh*. Therefore the similar names “Gad” & “Gilead” are often found coupled together, and with Machir and Reuben listed earlier in the Song, “Gilead” is likely a regional reference to Gad (and perhaps the other half of the tribe of Manasseh that also dwelt east of the Jordan).

See also *Deuteronomy 3:12-16 & 1 Chronicles 7:14*.

own centering on Jerusalem. El was with Jacob-Israel in the northern way that he went, or as that great Patriarch said to his father-in-law Laban the Aramean:

{E} If the Elohim of my father, the Elohim of Abraham, and the fear of Isaac, had not been for me, surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed.<sup>15</sup>

## JOSEPH GOES TO EGYPT

Having considered the Elohist tradition of Israel coming from Syria, the traditions regarding how Israel came to sojourn in Egypt must also be examined. As Genesis continues, Joseph plays the central role: finding himself in Egypt without his father or brothers, and therein fathering the famed northern tribes of Ephraim & Manasseh. Many discerning readers have noticed certain peculiarities regarding the Biblical account of how Joseph came to Egypt. For example, *who took or sold Joseph to Egypt?*

“Midianites” then Ishmaelites	“Medanites”	Ishmaelites
Then some <u>Midianite traders</u> passed by, so they pulled [him] up and lifted Joseph out of the pit, and <u>sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites</u> for twenty [shekels] of silver. <u>Thus they brought Joseph into Egypt.</u>	Meanwhile, the <u>Medanites sold him in Egypt to Potiphar</u> , Pharaoh’s officer, the captain of the bodyguard.	Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt; and <u>Potiphar</u> , an Egyptian officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the bodyguard, <u>bought him from the hand of the Ishmaelites, who had taken him down there.</u> <sup>16</sup>

Did the Midianites sell Joseph to the Ishmaelites, who then took Joseph to Egypt (37:28)? Did the Medanites sell Joseph to Potiphar in Egypt (37:36), or did the Ishmaelites take Joseph to Egypt and sell him to Potiphar (39:1)? While these questions have puzzled many students of the Bible and various literalist interpretations have been offered to harmonize the text, one simple possibility often goes without any consideration: *do these verses represent different literary traditions?* To this end, chapter 37 bears many striking signs such as characteristic redundancy in plot:

Reuben Spares Joseph’s Life (E) [&J?]	Judah Spares Joseph’s Life (J)
(21) Reuben <b>rescued {Joseph} out of their hands</b> and said, “ <b>Let us not take his life</b> {lit. “ <i>smite his soul</i> ”}.”	(26-27a) Judah said to his brothers, “ <b>What profit is it for us to kill our brother</b> and cover up his blood? Come and <b>let us sell him to the Ishmaelites</b> and <b>not lay our hands on him.</b> ”
(22) Reuben said to them, “ <b>Shed no blood. Throw him into this pit</b> but <b>do not lay hands on him.</b> ”—that he might <b>rescue him out of their hands.</b>	

Amidst these and other redundancies, one finds Reuben (who also figures in Elohist tradition) saying, “*Throw him into this pit but do not lay hands on him.*” On the other hand, Judah (a

<sup>15</sup> Genesis 31:42a

<sup>16</sup> Respectively: Genesis 37:28; 37:36; 39:1

strictly Yahwist brother) says, “*Let us sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him.*” It can hardly be coincidence that 39:1 (saying Ishmaelites sold Joseph to Potiphar) is within a Yahwist portion of scripture, and here in chapter 37 it is Judah who convinces his brothers to sell Joseph to the Ishmaelites. Conversely, after Reuben suggests throwing Joseph into a pit, it is the Midianites/Medanites who pull Joseph out of a pit and sell him to Potiphar in 37:36! Upon reflection of such observations, a reconstructive attempt on this portion of text can be made. For either their father’s favoritism toward Joseph (E) or Joseph’s symbolic dreams (J), his envious brothers grew to hate him, and so it followed:

{E} & {**[J]**} Joseph went after his brothers. And they saw him from a distance and before he came close to them, they plotted against him to put him to death. **[They said to one another, “Behold, this master of dreams comes! Now then, come and let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits; and we will say, ‘A wild beast devoured him.’ Then let us see what will become of his dreams!”]** But Reuben heard and rescued him out of their hands and said, “Let us not take his life.” Reuben further said to them, “Shed no blood. Throw him into this pit that is in the wilderness, but do not lay hands on him”—that he might rescue him out of their hands, to restore him to his father. **[So it came about, when Joseph came to his brothers, that they stripped Joseph of his tunic, the varicolored tunic that was on him;]** and they took him and threw him into the pit. Now the pit was empty, without any water in it.

Then they sat down to eat bread. **[And as they raised their eyes and looked, behold, a caravan of Ishmaelites was coming from Gilead ... to Egypt. Judah said to his brothers, “What profit is it for us to kill our brother and cover up his blood? Come and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him, for he is our brother, our flesh.” And his brothers listened.]** Then some Midianite traders passed by, so they pulled up and lifted Joseph out of the pit, **[and {they} sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites for twenty [shekels] of silver.]** Thus they brought Joseph into Egypt.

Now Reuben returned to the pit, and behold, Joseph was not in the pit; so he tore his garments. He returned to his brothers and said, “The boy is not [there]; as for me, where am I to go?” **[So they took Joseph’s tunic, and slaughtered a male goat and dipped the tunic in the blood; and they sent the varicolored tunic and brought it to their father and said, “We found this.” ... Then he said, “It is my son’s tunic. A wild beast has devoured him!” So Jacob tore his clothes.]** ... Meanwhile, the Medanites sold him in Egypt to Potiphar.<sup>17</sup>

In the passage above, the black text (E) and **[bracketed red]** text (J) may each be read as *two distinct yet complete accounts*, narrating how Joseph ultimately arrived in Egypt. Indeed, both a northern and a southern literary tradition appear to have been anciently synopsisized with the formation of the JE document, each formerly comprised of its own differing yet full line of plot elements:

<b>Plot Elements</b>	<b>Original E Version</b>	<b>Alternate J Version</b>
Joseph’s brothers conspire to murder him.	<i>They plotted against him to put him to death.</i>	<b><i>“Let us kill him, throw him into one of the pits, and say, ‘A wild beast devoured him.’”</i></b>
One brother spares Joseph’s life by proposing an alternative plan.	<i>Reuben rescued him and said, “Let us not take his life.” ... “Shed no blood. Throw him into this pit” (that</i>	<b><i>Judah said, “What profit is it for us to kill our brother and cover up his blood? Come and let us sell him to</i></b>

<sup>17</sup> Taken from Genesis 37:17-36



	<i>he might restore him to his father).</i>	<i>the Ishmaelites.”</i>
The alternative plan is accepted and executed.	<i>They took him and threw him into the pit.</i>	<i>His brothers listened and {they} sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites.</i>
A tragic conclusion follows the brothers’ actions.	<i>Midianite traders lifted Joseph out of the pit. They brought Joseph into Egypt. Reuben returned to the pit, and tore his garments. Medanites sold him in Egypt.</i>	<i>They took Joseph’s tunic, dipped in blood, brought it to their father and said, “We found this.” Then he said, “A wild beast has devoured him!” So Jacob tore his clothes.</i>

Not only did these two sources independently relate a full story of Joseph falling into Egyptian hands, but their unique plot elements demonstrate a natural continuity following their respective E or J writing styles and themes. For example, all the characters in the E version were formerly introduced by the Elohist (likely where one also finds the nativities of both “*Medan and Midian*”),<sup>18</sup> whereas the novel character of Judah was seen introduced only in a J nativity. Furthermore it was also in J that Joseph dreams, “*the sun and the moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me,*”<sup>19</sup> thus portraying not only Joseph’s parents but also the full complement of the novel J family totaling eleven other brothers. Without a single mention of “Yahweh”, many other literary themes found in this Judahite version repeat throughout Genesis, identifying it with the J material.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Genesis 25:1-4

This account of Abraham taking another wife and fathering six sons is curious for several reasons. Observably, the passage is neither J nor P because those sources both present Abraham as very old (P says 100 years) by the time Isaac is born earlier in the story, and they likewise depict Abraham and Sarah laughing at the notion of having a son. Seeing as how Isaac was presented as a miraculous son of late life, it hardly makes sense J or P would later and so briskly record Abraham going on to father six more sons.

Furthermore, this passage appears between the end of the Abraham cycle and the beginning of the Jacob cycle within the Elohist document (after Abraham is promised many descendants and before Jacob is introduced). Among the texts which occupy the space between these two events (*Genesis 23-27*), this passage is the only one that doesn’t resemble J or P. Therefore, this record of Abraham’s additional sons appears to be the only bridge connecting the Abraham & Jacob traditions in E, and it just so happens to introduce the nativities of both “Medan” and “Midian,” who both uniquely appear later in the Elohist story of Joseph being taken to Egypt.

<sup>19</sup> From Genesis 37:9

<sup>20</sup> For example according to the Yahwist version, the brothers: “*Sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites for twenty [shekels] of silver.*” This “*twenty of silver*” figure is not arbitrary. It recurs in what must be the Yahwist continuing account of ten of Joseph’s brothers going to Egypt and Joseph retaining one of them to send the other nine back, each with his own measure of silver. Later when the nine return with their youngest brother Benjamin, Joseph now gives all eleven their own measure of silver. Thus, Joseph returns “twenty of silver”, hinting at the figure they sold him for.

Similarly according to the Yahwist version, the brothers had deceived their father Jacob into believing Joseph was dead (by dipping his tunic in the blood of a goat). Earlier in the same source, Jacob will be seen deceiving his father Isaac into believing he is Esau (by wearing the skin of a goat). Such continuity of recurring imagery and nuance in plot can be a powerful tool to identify mixed sources within passages.

However the most notable observation which can now be drawn from these two literary threads having been unraveled is that the Northern Elohist depicted the firstborn Reuben as the savior of Joseph (still desiring to return Joseph alive), while the Yahwist subsequently presented Judah as the one who convinced his brothers to spare Joseph's life. Thus, the Southern pen has introduced the character Judah as an integral part of Israel's history, suggesting the House of Joseph (Ephraim & Manasseh) owes its very existence and Exodus tradition to Judah. Inserted here is the first *notion of a Judahite savior of Israel* – one which would echo throughout the Bible into the New Testament.

### **THE HOUSEHOLD OF JOSEPH FROM OUT OF EGYPT (EPHRAIM & MANASSEH)**

As the Elohist story in Genesis continues, Joseph is imprisoned in the house of the captain of the bodyguard (a jail), taking care of those confined therein. At one point Joseph says, "*I was in fact kidnapped {lit. "stolen"} from the land of the Hebrews, and even here I have done nothing that they should have put me into the pit.*"<sup>21</sup> Note how this follows the Elohist version of Medianites taking Joseph from the pit; in the Yahwist version, Joseph was not stolen – his brothers sold him! From the pit of his brothers to the pit of the Egyptians, Joseph eventually finds great success and respect in Egypt, garnering the Pharaoh's attention to his gift of interpreting dreams:

{E} So Pharaoh said to Joseph, "**Since Elohim has informed you of all this**, there is no one so discerning and wise as you are. **You shall be over my house**, and according to your command all my people shall do homage; **only in the throne I will be greater than you.**"<sup>22</sup>

This theme of a Hebrew prisoner, Joseph, becoming second in command over Pharaoh's household and all the people of Egypt is curiously mirrored in the latter J account of a Hebrew slave, Moses the Levite, being found as a baby by the Pharaoh's daughter and raised as her son. Just as *Moses* (i.e. "*Mose*") was the Egyptian name bestowed on the baby by the Pharaoh's daughter, an earlier Pharaoh here in E likewise gives Joseph a new Egyptian name: *Zaphenath-paneah*. However an even more revealing parallel between the stories of Joseph in Genesis and Moses in Exodus needs to be addressed – *they both marry the daughter of a priest*:

{E} Pharaoh named Joseph Zaphenath-paneah; and he gave him Asenath, the daughter of **Potiphera priest of On** {i.e. *Heliopolis*}, as his wife.

{JE} **The priest of Midian** ... **Reuel** ... gave his daughter Zipporah to Moses.  
... Moses was pasturing the flock of **Jethro** his father-in-law, **the priest of Midian**.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Genesis 40:15

<sup>22</sup> Genesis 41:39,40

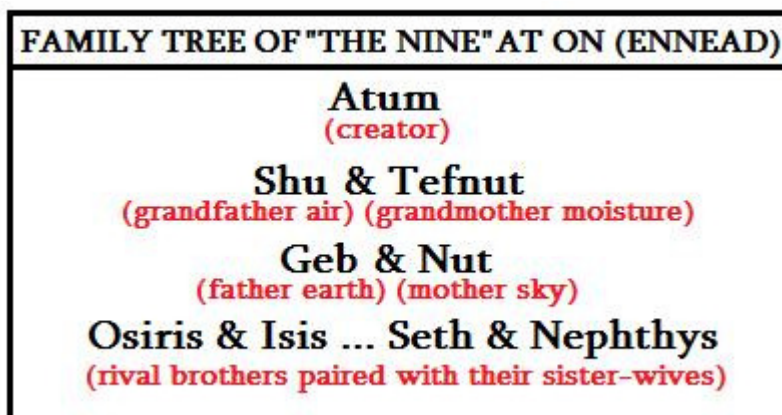
<sup>23</sup> Respectively: Genesis 41:45; from Exodus 2:16,18,21; Exodus 3:1

Curiously, the Exodus accounts call this father-in-law priest of Midian both “Reuel” and “Jethro”, a phenomenon indicative that one reference is likely E while the other is J. The ancient book of Judges offers yet a third tradition:

The sons of the **Kenite, Moses’ father-in-law**, went up with the sons of Judah, to the wilderness of Judah; and they lived with the people. ... Heber the Kenite had separated himself from **the Kenites**, from **the sons of Hobab the father-in-law of Moses**.<sup>24</sup>

Whether his name was Hobab, Reuel or Jethro, the claim in Judges that he fathered the Kenites cohabitating with Judah is notable. The complex nature of sorting these multiple traditions concerning Moses’ father-in-law is compounded with the fact that in Exodus, immediately after Moses marries his daughter, the Elohist text loses its namesake’s distinguishing mark of referring to God as “Elohim”. Simply put, after Moses becomes the son-in-law of this Kenite/Priest Hobab/Reuel/Jethro, “*Yahweh*” (instead of “*Elohim*”) begins communicating with him in all three textual traditions of E, J & P. Thereafter, this already elusive kernel of northern E tradition is textually wedded with J in such a way that it becomes even more challenging to separate.

While certain texts in Exodus suggest Moses discovered Yahweh after marrying the daughter of a certain priest, one may well wonder about the significance of the original Elohist story in Genesis of Joseph marrying the daughter of Potiphara, the Egyptian *priest of On*. “*On*” or “*Aven*” (as Bible translations variously spell it), is the same city the Greeks would later call Heliopolis and was one of the most ancient cities in Lower Egypt. Heliopolis also happens to be well known for originating a particularly famous Egyptian priestly tradition called the *Ennead* (or “*Nine Gods*” of the *Heliopolitan pantheon*).



With Joseph being described as “*lord of the land*” of Egypt<sup>25</sup> and marrying into an Egyptian priestly family, an historical parallel can be drawn as possible inspiration for these textual

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<sup>24</sup> From Judges 1:16 & 4:11; see also Numbers 10:29.

<sup>25</sup> See Genesis 42:30,33

traditions. As outlined in the introduction, the Hyksos (like Jacob's household) were also of North Syrian origin, and upon sojourning into the Nile Delta region, they gained control of Lower Egypt. These so-called Asiatics became Egyptianized, adopting and equating specifically the deity *Seth* from the local pantheon with their patron deity. Furthermore, their occupation and ultimate expulsion by King Ahmose I from Egypt around 1550 B.C.E. has been described as the only "chain of *historical* events that can accommodate" the Exodus tradition and the "only foreign mass-migration, an exodus from ancient Egypt, for which there is any evidence at all in the archaeological records."<sup>26</sup>

The nativities of the two sons of Joseph and Asenath (the Egyptian priest's daughter) are exclusively found in the Elohist:

{E} Two sons were born to Joseph, whom Asenath, the daughter of Potiphra priest of On, bore to him.

{1} Joseph named the firstborn Manasseh {i.e. "causing to forget"},  
"For Elohim has **made me forget** {Heb. *nashani*} all my trouble and all my father's household."

{2} He named the second Ephraim {i.e. "doubly fruitful"},  
"For Elohim has **made me fruitful** {Heb. *hifrani*} in the land of my affliction."<sup>27</sup>

An account of Jacob favoring Joseph by conferring his special birthright blessing on both Ephraim and Manasseh is also found in the Elohist:<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> [original emphasis] Redford, Donald B., *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times*, p. 412 (Princeton University Press, 1992). See notes on the Exodus and the Hyksos in the previous introduction to the Old Testament (MOSES: THE ORIGINAL SYNOPTIC POBLEM).

<sup>27</sup> Genesis 41:50b-52

<sup>28</sup> During the course of the synopsized JE Joseph cycle (Genesis 37-50), Joseph's brothers travel to Egypt along with their father Jacob. This literal depiction of Jacob in Egypt (i.e. *Israel in Egypt*) is representative of the Hyksos forerunners of Israel, having sojourned and ruled as kings in Lower Egypt. In E, Jacob dies after blessing Joseph (Ephraim & Manasseh). Joseph then dies in the very last verses of Genesis, having made the sons of Israel swear, "Elohim will surely visit you, and you shall carry my bones up from here." In the opening passages of Exodus it reads:

*Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. He said to his people, "Behold, the people of the sons of Israel are more and mightier than we." {Exodus 1:8,9}*

Curiously, despite the Israelites being "more and mightier" than the Egyptians, the Egyptians immediately enslave the Israelites. After 430 years of bondage (according to P), the Israelites hastily leave Egypt, and the text reads:

*Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, for he had made the sons of Israel solemnly swear, saying, "Elohim will surely visit you, and you shall carry my bones from here with you." {Exodus 13:19}*

These depictions not only represent the Northern tradition of the House of Joseph having come from Egypt, but also the historical situation of the Hyksos having populated and ruled Lower Egypt before their expulsion. Rather than Israel being in bondage for some 400 years in Egypt, history reveals it was the Egyptians who subsequently ruled

{E} “The Elohim before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked,  
The Elohim who has been my shepherd all my life to this day,  
The angel who has redeemed me from all evil,  
Bless the lads;  
And **may my name be called on in them**,  
And the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac;  
And **may they grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth.**”

“{Manasseh} also will become a people and he also will be great. However, his younger brother {Ephraim} shall be greater than he, and **his seed shall become a fullness of nations.**” He blessed them that day, saying,

“By you Israel will pronounce blessing, saying,  
‘May Elohim make you like Ephraim and Manasseh!’”<sup>29</sup>

Here near the end of Genesis in Northern-inspired texts, the practice of birthright blessing (in which a favored son, usually the firstborn, receives a double-portion of inheritance), is emphatically pronounced on Joseph, “*I am about to die...I give you one portion more than your brothers.*”<sup>30</sup> Earlier in the same chapter another Priestly recapitulation explains Joseph’s birthright:

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over Canaan for 400 years, after they expelled the Asiatic rulers from their borders (c. 1550-1150 B.C.E.). Therefore, it is in this context that the Canaanite people of Judah figure into the Yahwist and latter amalgamated written tradition as having also been under Egyptian bondage with the House of Joseph. Great care must be taken in distinguishing E from this synopsis of Joseph cycle, leading up to the Exodus traditions.

<sup>29</sup> From Genesis 48:15,16,19,20

<sup>30</sup> From Genesis 48:21,22

The expression, “*I give you one portion more than your brothers,*” not only reflects the Northern tradition that Joseph received Israel’s birthright double-blessing, but also communicates a double-reference in Hebrew. The word here translated “portion” חֶקֶךְ {*shekem*} is exactly the same as the famous North Israelite city Shechem, where the Judahite royal texts would later claim the first king of North Israel ruled from:

*Then Jeroboam built Shechem in the hill country of Ephraim, and lived in it. {1 Kings 12:25}*

Not only was King Jeroboam said to be an Ephraimite (a son of Joseph; 1 Kings 11:26), but here he’s depicted living in the hill country of Ephraim at Shechem (in the territory of Joseph). The very same verse continues: “*And {Jeroboam} went out from there and built Penuel.*” Just few verses later, Jeroboam is pictured instituting the “sin” of the golden calves at Bethel & Dan and visiting the altar at Bethel. Recognizing the pseudo-historical, anti-Israelite nature of this latter Judahite royal propaganda reveals the story of Jeroboam is framed amidst traditionally Northern cities and places of worship. It is not coincidence that the aforementioned Elohist written tradition depicted Jacob being given the name Israel at the place he called, “*Penuel,*” and later building the altar at the place he called, “*Bethel!*” Similarly, Jacob is now depicted blessing Joseph with the double-inheritance (conferred upon Ephraim & Manasseh) by giving him one “*shekem*” more than his brothers.

Not surprisingly in a Genesis story unique to the J document (chapter 34), the sons of Jacob are cast in a very unfavorable light concerning the city of a prince also named Shechem, the son of Hamor (a Canaanite). Here the uniquely southern tribes Simeon & Levi are depicted killing Shechem and all the males among his people. Then it is claimed they took the foreign females:

{P} Then Jacob said to Joseph, “**Almighty El** {i.e. *El Shaddai*} **appeared to me at Luz** in the land of Canaan and blessed me, and He said to me, ‘Behold, **I will make you fruitful and numerous, and I will make you a company of peoples**, and will give this land to your seed after you for an everlasting possession.’ Now your two sons, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt, are mine; **Ephraim and Manasseh shall be mine, as Reuben and Simeon are.** But your offspring that you have begotten after them shall be yours; **they shall be called by the name of their brothers in their inheritance.**”<sup>31</sup>

With typical vocabulary and brevity while tying everything together from the original appearance of “El” at Bethel (Luz), the Priestly author explains that the double-portion of Joseph’s birthright blessing was conferred such that his two sons, Ephraim & Manasseh, would be *recognized as distinct tribes of Israel in their own right* (i.e. birthright), “*as Reuben and Simeon are.*” This reference to Simeon is therefore representative of the amalgamation of Northern and Southern textual traditions. Furthermore, the insertion of this Priestly summation concerning Ephraim & Manasseh in the midst of an older Elohist text has caused a peculiar break in plot structure: only two verses after Jacob adopts Ephraim & Manasseh as distinct tribes in P (48:5,6)... he doesn’t yet know who they are in E (48:8)! Such aberrations of character reference (without former introduction) and broken or repetitious storyline are often signs of redaction and shift in authorship, and learning to recognize them is vital for proper interpretation.

Case in point, the very next chapter features a rather lengthy poem (49:1-27) in which Jacob blesses twelve sons: *Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Zebulun, Issachar, Dan, Gad, Asher, Naphtali, Joseph and Benjamin.* The scene of patriarchal blessing is here presented (despite Jacob having already blessed Joseph in the immediately preceding Elohist material), complete with the mention of the three chiefly southern Yahwist tribes of Simeon, Levi, and Judah. Note carefully how the firstborn Reuben is maligned—along with the additional brothers Simeon & Levi—*making room for Judah to receive the special birthright privileges:*

“**Reuben**, you are my firstborn;  
My might and the beginning of my strength,  
Preeminence in dignity and preeminence in power.

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**Jacob’s sons** came upon the slain and **looted the city.** *They took their flocks and their herds and their donkeys, and that which was in the city and that which was in the field; and they **captured** and looted all their wealth and **all their little ones and their wives, even all that [was] in the houses.*** [Genesis 34:27-29]

Nevertheless just a few verses before this J chapter, the Elohist says: “*Now Jacob came safely to the city of Shechem and camped before the city. He bought the piece of land where he had pitched his tent from the hand of the sons of Hamor, Shechem’s father.*” E says the land was peacefully bought; then J says the city was murderously looted. It may be repeatedly observed how such subtle references to North Israelite traditions (e.g. the cities Shechem & Bethel) will read positively in the ancient Elohist material, while notoriously negative in the Yahwist and expansive Judahite texts.

<sup>31</sup> Genesis 48:3-6

Recklessness as water, **you shall not have preeminence**,  
Because you went up to your father's bed;  
Then you defiled [it]—he went up to my couch.

**“Simeon and Levi** are brothers.  
Let my soul not enter into their council;  
**Let not my glory be united with their assembly**;  
Because in their anger they slew a man.  
Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce.  
**I will divide them in Jacob**,  
And scatter them in Israel.

**“Judah, your brothers shall praise you**;  
Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies;  
**Your father's sons shall bow down to you**.  
**The scepter shall not depart from Judah**,  
**Nor the ruler's staff from between his feet**,  
Until he comes to Shiloh,  
And to him [shall be] the obedience of the peoples.<sup>32</sup>

Curiously, immediately after describing Reuben as, “*Preeminence in dignity and preeminence in power*,” the text makes a very indignant reversal: “*you shall not have preeminence...because you went up to your father's bed; then you defiled.*” Likewise Jacob says of Simeon & Levi, “*Let not my glory be united with their assembly because in their anger they slew a man.*” It will be recognized by now as no coincidence that this poem's ultimately negative assessment of Reuben (one of the original Ten Tribes), and purely negative assessment of Simeon & Levi, are both elaborated in consecutive passages following the traditionally Yahwist text:

{J} Two of Jacob's sons, **Simeon and Levi**, each took his sword and came upon the city unawares, and killed every male. Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, “You have brought trouble on me ... the Canaanites and the Perizzites ... will gather together against me and smite me and I will be destroyed, I and my household.”

... It came about while Israel was dwelling in that land, that **Reuben** went and lay with Bilhah his father's concubine, and Israel heard [of it].<sup>33</sup>

Therefore this latter tradition, by maligning Reuben as depraved with Simeon & Levi as murderers, has cleared the path for a Judahite claim of preeminence.<sup>34</sup> The poem then makes a

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<sup>32</sup> From Genesis 49:3-10

<sup>33</sup> From Genesis 34:25,30; 35:22

<sup>34</sup> The firstborn son Reuben (one of the original *Ten Tribes of Israel*, appearing favorably in E tradition) needed to be maligned by the J author, whose concern was presenting Judah as the preeminent son with the birthright. However, because J also features the literary inclusion of the sons Simeon & Levi (born after Reuben yet before Judah), they also needed to be demoted. This was done so in Genesis 34 (J), while simultaneously tarnishing the memory of the North Israelite Shechem tradition with murder and despoilment. Furthermore, explanation was

statement quite opposite from Joseph's dream depicting his brothers bowing down to him – now the sons of Israel will bow down to Judah! Thus, immediately after Jacob blesses Ephraim & Manasseh (giving Joseph the birthright), the present arrangement of scripture in Genesis features *Judah receiving the birthright to rule over Israel*, reflecting the growing political situation and sentiment of Judah in the place and time these Northern textual traditions were being compromised. In the shadow of southern tradition and royal Judahite propaganda, the aforementioned and following blessings on Joseph would be almost entirely disregarded:

**Joseph** is a fruitful son.  
The archers bitterly attacked him,  
And shot [at him] and harassed him;  
But his bow remained firm,  
From the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob  
**(From there is the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel)**,  
From the **El** of your father who helps you,  
And with **Shaddai** who blesses you.

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needed regarding why neither of the phantom tribes of Simeon nor Levi held any significant territorial claims in the nation of Judah. Thus, Judah was positioned to receive the birthright, as Jacob pronounced the consequences of Simeon & Levi's violence: "*Let not my glory be united with their assembly / ... I will divide them in Jacob, / And scatter them in Israel.*" (Contrast a post-Babylonian Captivity priestly source (*1 Chronicles 5:1,2*) favoring the E tradition of Joseph over Judah, despite Reuben having lost his birthright.)

Therefore concerning all three sons unique to the southern literary tradition it is important to observe: **Levi** is depicted as the tribe of priests (i.e. Levites, divided among the other tribes and given no territorial inheritance), while the territory of **Simeon** was entirely engulfed within the territory of Judah, as part of **Judah**. This is significant because it demonstrates from an earlier stage in the history of Israel & Judah how the nation of "Israel" comprised the Ten Tribes of Israel, while the nation of "Judah" comprised strictly Judah (scattered with various Canaanites). This distinction begins to explain why the people of Judah (although later grafted into a collective Israelite family tree known as the *Twelve Tribes of Israel*) originally never called themselves—nor were known as—"Israel". Consider for example the Judahite royal text promoting the propaganda that *Israel had anciently separated from Judah*:

*I will surely tear the kingdom from you {Solomon}, and will give it to your servant {Jeroboam}. However, I will not tear away all the kingdom, [but] I will give one tribe to your son {Rehoboam}. ... Solomon appointed {Jeroboam} over all the forced labor of the house of Joseph. ... {The prophet Ahijah} said to Jeroboam, "Take for yourself **ten pieces**; for thus says Yahweh, the Elohim of Israel, 'Behold, I will tear the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon and give you ten tribes ... But to his son I will give one tribe, that My servant David may have a lamp always before Me in Jerusalem, the city where I have chosen for Myself to put My name.'" ... **All Israel** sent and called {Jeroboam} to the assembly and made him **king over all Israel**. None but the tribe of Judah followed the house of David. {From 1 Kings 11:11,13,28,31,36; 12:20}*

Note that while "ten tribes" or "ten pieces" (i.e. described as "all Israel") followed King Jeroboam, only "one tribe" (i.e. "none but the tribe of Judah") followed Solomon's son. One may well ask where a Simeon Tribe (along with all the Canaanite women Simeon & Levi purportedly captured, according to J) fits into this picture, as ten-plus-one equals but eleven! So it may be observed that there were always two distinct nations, known as the ten tribes of "Israel" and the tribe of "Judah". After the fall of Israel in 722 B.C.E., these two peoples and their traditions were integrated, and they became collectively known as the *Twelve Tribes of Israel*. In other words, once Judah began calling itself by the name "Israel", it was taught that Israel (to the north) had separated itself from the dynasty of King David the son of Judah (who had been given this birthright to rule over "all Israel").



The blessings of your father  
Have surpassed the blessings of my ancestors  
Up to the desire of the everlasting hills;  
May they be on the head of Joseph,  
And on the crown of the head of **the one distinguished among his brothers.**<sup>35</sup>

## ABRAHAM & ISAAC: PART I THE DUBIOUS NATIVITY OF ISAAC

Having distinguished and outlined much of the northern Elohist tradition in Genesis concerning the Israelite Patriarch Jacob-Israel (found within chapters 28-48), the earliest part of the E document must also be examined, beginning with Abraham in chapter 20. The previous scriptural examples were showcased first, not only to serve as an introductory guide for acknowledging and identifying all three primary source traditions found within Genesis, but also to introduce some interpretive methods of detecting the varying layers of redaction and emendation written around the original Elohist textual kernel. The E stories centering on Isaac (the Biblical father of Jacob, as presently compiled) have suffered more elusive and extensive forms of emendation; therefore, their examination was deferred in order that it might follow in light of the previous examples.

This examination of the E document began with a late clarification offered by the P author that God “*appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as El Shaddai*” (and not as Yahweh). However, a J text inserted into E depicted Yahweh appearing to Jacob and saying, “*I am Yahweh, the Elohim of your father Abraham and the Elohim of Isaac.*” Jacob is then found in an E passage referring to “*the Elohim of my father, the Elohim of Abraham, and the fear of Isaac.*” Introducing those different textual traditions concerning the use of “Yahweh” versus “Elohim” & “El” now affords a more careful investigation into these different Patriarchs: who was the Elohim of Abraham & what was the fear of Isaac? The first surviving Elohist passage begins as follows:

{E} Now Abraham ... sojourned in Gerar. Abraham said of Sarah his wife, “**She is my sister.**” So Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah.<sup>36</sup>

Had the Elohist written about where Abraham came from or who his father and mother were, such material was excised into oblivion. Aside from information in other source traditions, one discernable piece of evidence is that Abraham’s name translates to “*Exalted Father*” or “*Chief of Many*” (despite having no sons at this point in the story). Nevertheless, this abrupt beginning of E text in Genesis 20 immediately highlights an interesting Biblical phenomenon. As it turns out,

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<sup>35</sup> From Genesis 49:22-26

<sup>36</sup> From Genesis 20:1,2

there are two other stories remarkably like this one (both in J text) – one concerning Abraham and one concerning Isaac:

Genesis 12:11-20 (J)	Genesis 20:1-18 (E)	Genesis 26:6-11 (J)
In <b>Egypt</b> , Abraham claims his wife Sarah is his sister.	In <b>Gerar</b> , Abraham claims his wife Sarah is his sister.	In <b>Gerar</b> , Isaac claims his wife Rebekah is his sister.
<b>Pharaoh</b> , the king of Egypt, took Sarah for his wife.	<b>Abimelech</b> , the king of Gerar, took Sarah.	<b>Abimelech</b> , king of the Philistines, discovers the truth.
(1) Pharaoh gives Abraham <i>sheep, oxen, donkeys, male and female servants, female donkeys and camels.</i> (2) <b>Yahweh</b> plagues Pharaoh and his household, and Abraham and Sarah leave Egypt prosperous.	(1) <b>Elohim</b> threatens with death Abimelech and his household who become sick and barren. (2) Abimelech returns Sarah and gives Abraham <i>sheep, oxen, male and female servants, his choice of land to live on, and a thousand pieces of silver.</i>	(1) Abimelech commands his people to not touch Isaac or Rebekah under penalty of death. (2) <b>Yahweh</b> blesses Isaac with <i>great wealth, possessions of flocks and herds, and a great household.</i>

While J offers these twin alternate stories, replacing Elohim with Yahweh and utilizing all of the characters from the E version (Abraham & Isaac in chapter 12; Abimelech of Gerar in chapter 26), this original Israelite story in chapter 20 remains by far the most interesting and mysterious. Apparent signs of textual emendation are present as the Elohist story continues:

{E} & {[J]} But Elohim came to Abimelech in a dream of the night, and said to him, “Behold, you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is married.” [Now Abimelech had not come near her;] and he said, “Lord {Heb. *adonai*}, will **You slay a nation, even [though] righteous?** Did he not himself say to me, ‘She is my sister’? And she herself said, ‘He is my brother.’ **In the integrity of my heart and the innocence of my palms I have done this.**” Then Elohim said to him in the dream, “**Yes, I know that in the integrity of your heart you have done this, [and I also restrained you from sinning against Me; therefore I did not let you touch her.]** Now therefore, restore the man’s wife, for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you will live. But if you do not restore [her], know that **you shall surely die, you and all who are yours.**”<sup>37</sup>

Many Bible readers have noted the particular nature of God’s threat against Abimelech. First, one may marvel why God is threatening him at all (along with his entire household) while the text depicts God not only acknowledging, “*I know you have done this in the integrity of your heart,*” but further, “*I also restrained you from sinning against Me.*” Second, what exactly has befallen not only Abimelech but also his “*righteous nation*”? Something has been left unspoken which the reader cannot reconstruct until the very end of the story:

{E} & {[J]} Abraham prayed to Elohim, and **Elohim healed Abimelech and his wife and his maids, so that they bore [children]. [For Yahweh had closed fast all the wombs of the household of Abimelech because of Sarah, Abraham’s wife.]**<sup>38</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Genesis 20:3-7

<sup>38</sup> Genesis 20:17,18

Note the redundant J-inspired postscript at the end of chapter 20, likely inserted to clarify the ambiguous reference to Abimelech’s wife and maids. Now the story starts to gain focus: Abimelech was sick or injured, and he apparently kept Sarah long enough to discover his other women had become barren. As for Sarah, immediately after Abimelech returns her, the following text says she conceived and bore a son named Isaac!

In light of the previous examination of the J & E nativities of the sons of Israel, the nativity of Isaac as given in Genesis 21:1-7 will be noticeably irregular. This passage features Elohist characteristics, Yahwist redundancies, and Priestly references, as it appears to be a synopsis of all three source traditions:

<p><b><u>FRAGMENTED ELOHIST NATIVITY:</u></b>          {E} Sarah said, “Elohim has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh for me.”</p>	<p><b><u>CONTINUATION OF PRIESTLY STORY:</u></b>          {P} ...at the appointed time of which Elohim had spoken to him. ... Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as Elohim had commanded him. Abraham was one hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him.</p>
<p><b><u>REDUNDANT YAHWISTIC TEXTS:</u></b>          {J} Yahweh took note of Sarah as He had said.          {J} Yahweh did for Sarah as He had spoken...</p>	

A reconstruction of the original Elohist text is now impossible; however, an E nativity of Isaac conceivably may have read in familiar fashion:

<Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son.>

<Then> Sarah said, “Elohim has made **laughter** {Heb. *tzechoq*} for me; everyone who hears **will laugh** {Heb. *yitzchaq*} for me.”

<So she named him **Isaac**. {i.e. “Laughter”}>

Whatever the E text may have originally read, parts of it have clearly been omitted to make room for latter J & P source traditions. Textual omissions might also explain the ambiguously unspoken account in E of what happened to Abimelech, along with his wife and maids. Before the subject of textual emendation in Genesis 20 & 21 (and the motives behind it) can be wholly examined, two stories in preceding chapters must be addressed: *the nativity of Ishmael the firstborn son of Abraham* (J); *the “laughable” promise of a second son* (J & P).

Concerning Ishmael, a J account of his nativity is found in chapter 16. Sarah had borne Abraham no heirs saying, “*Yahweh has prevented me from bearing.*” So she gives her Egyptian maid Hagar to Abraham to be his wife. Hagar conceives and Sarah says a wrong has been done to her, having become lowered in the eyes of Hagar. So Sarah drives the maid away by treating her harshly. Then *the angel of Yahweh* tells Hagar to return to Sarah, promising to greatly

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multiply her seed and saying she will give birth to a son and name him *Ishmael*. Finally, Hagar “called the name of Yahweh: you, *El My Seer* {Heb. *El Roi*}”.<sup>39</sup>

Immediately hereafter the text shifts to P, and a typically Priestly introduction begins chapter 17: “When Abram was ninety-nine years old, Yahweh appeared to Abram and said to him, I am Almighty El {i.e. *El Shaddai*}.” His name is changed from *Abram* to *Abraham* with the promise of becoming the father of a multitude of nations, along with land for many descendants. Elohim then institutes a covenant with the ritual of *circumcision*. Furthermore, Elohim promises Abraham a son by his wife Sarah to which: “Abraham fell on his face and laughed.” Elohim promises Ishmael will become a great nation and “beget twelve princes ... but My covenant I will establish with Isaac.”<sup>40</sup>

Careful textual comparison reveals this P text picks up again in chapter 21 concerning Isaac’s nativity “at the appointed time of which Elohim had spoken to him,” complete with Isaac’s circumcision “when he was eight days old.” Characteristically concerned with appointed times, years, and priestly rituals, the Priestly textual tradition also supplies an explanation for Isaac’s name. However, J text also continues into chapter 21 after its own explanation! Compare both latter traditions:

Genesis 18 (J) – Sarah Laughs at Yahweh	Genesis 17 (P) – Abraham Laughs at Elohim
<p><b>Yahweh</b> appeared to {Abraham} ... and said “I will surely return to you when the time revives next year; and behold, Sarah will have a son.” Sarah was listening. Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; Sarah was past the manner of women. <b>Sarah laughed within herself</b>, saying, “After I have become old, shall I have pleasure?” Yahweh said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh, saying ‘Shall I surely bear, when I am old?’” Sarah denied [it]; and He said, “You did laugh.”</p>	<p><b>Elohim</b> said to Abraham, “I will give you a son by {Sarah}.” Then <b>Abraham fell on his face and laughed</b>, and said in his heart, “<u>Will a child be born to a man one hundred years old? And will Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear?</u>” And Abraham said to Elohim, “Oh that Ishmael might live before You!” But Elohim said, “No, but Sarah will bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac ... whom Sarah will bear to you at this season next year.”<sup>41</sup></p>

Notice despite chapter 17 (P) supplying the specific ages of Abraham and Sarah, chapter 18 (J; written earlier, although now placed later) gives what appears at present to be a completely unnecessary clarification: “Now Abraham and Sarah were old.” So it appears P has offered an alternative version to Sarah’s secret laughter revealed by Yahweh, as now it is Abraham who is depicted laughing outwardly at the promise of Elohim. While the older J story appears to have been recast by P, the oldest original and now fragmentary Elohist nativity of Isaac had been compromised much more significantly.

<sup>39</sup> From Genesis 16:1,2,4-14

<sup>40</sup> From Genesis 17

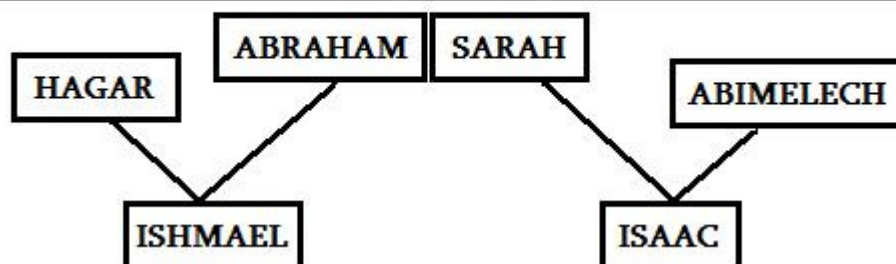
<sup>41</sup> Respectively from: Genesis 18:1,10-15; Genesis 17:15-21

After reading all this latter textual tradition (now prefacing the original Elohist account in Genesis), it becomes easy to neglect a simple observation: *in the original Elohist account, Abraham and Sarah are not old!* According to Genesis 20, Abraham leads the people of Gerar to believe Sarah is his sister, “*Because I thought, surely there is no fear of Elohim in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife.*”<sup>42</sup> Many Bible readers have marveled at the notion that none other than: “*Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah,*” when previous chapters describe her as 90 years old (P) and laughing to herself, “*Shall I have pleasure?*” (J). Furthermore, despite P portraying Abraham on his face laughing at the suggestion of: “*a child born to a man 100 years old,*” a passage characteristic of neither J nor P still later says:

{E?} Now Abraham took another wife, and her name was Keturah. She bore to him Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak and Shuah.<sup>43</sup>

Why would an aged Abraham, after fathering this unbelievable miracle baby promised by God, go on to have six more sons by another woman? Seeing as how Abraham and Sarah were not advanced in age, the question remains: *what is the laughter regarding Isaac in E?* The Yahwist would later present Isaac’s laughable conception as miraculous; however, in the original Elohist nativity it was dubious. This is why the early E text is fragmented and ambiguous. Pieces of E simply could not be synopsized with the favored J material, as their distinct claims concerning Isaac were irreconcilable. *In the original Elohist document, King Abimelech is Isaac’s father.*

#### **ABRAHAM & SARAH'S DIVIDED HOUSEHOLD ACCORDING TO E**



In E Sarah’s exclamation, “*Elohim has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh for me,*” is in reference to how she became pregnant after Abimelech took her, on account of her husband claiming she was his sister. Therefore after Abraham obtained an heir by the maid Hagar, Sarah too has borne a son, but this one is not Abraham’s due to his own actions! With Abraham and Sarah living on the choice Philistine land which Abimelech offered to Abraham, the people around them will surely *laugh at their situation on account of Sarah.* Indeed, not only does Abimelech provide his land for them to live anywhere they wished, giving sheep, oxen, and male & female servants, he also says to Sarah, “*I have given your brother a thousand pieces of*

<sup>42</sup> From Genesis 20:11

<sup>43</sup> Genesis 25:1,2

*silver; behold, it is for you a covering of the eyes before all who are with you, and before all men you are cleared.”<sup>44</sup>*

The emended story as it presently exists in Genesis claims *Abimelech hadn't even touched Sarah*. However, why then would Elohim have threatened him with death while causing all his other women to become barren, and why would Abimelech later give Abraham so much property? Now the original Elohist story is allowed to make the sense that it originally intended, with Abimelech compelled to return Sarah while providing property and silver on account of her carrying his offspring! Note how the continuing Elohist story unfolds:

{E} Now Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, **mocking** {Heb. *metzacheq*}.<sup>45</sup>

The word here translated “mocking” קִטְצָה comes from the same ancient Hebrew root “to laugh” קִטַּץ {*tzachaq*} as the name *Isaac* קִיטָץ. Therefore the Elohist depicts Abraham’s heir laughing (i.e. mocking) regarding his mother’s illegitimate son, just as Sarah exclaimed everyone would laugh on account of her. Also it may be observed once again (as with Reuben, Jacob’s firstborn), an original Elohist account of the nativity of another firstborn patriarch (Ishmael) has been full-eclipsed by the aforementioned Yahwist account. In other words, while both Reuben and the unnamed “son of Hagar” figure prominently in the E document, their character introductions have been excised in favor of latter J material now prefacing the fragmentary E traditions in the present Biblical synopsis. Note the echoing similarities in Genesis between the J version of Ishmael’s nativity and the original surviving E account of Hagar’s departure to a well of water in the wilderness:

<b>Hagar and the Angel of Elohim (E) 21:9-19</b>	<b>Hagar and the Angel of Yahweh (J) 16:4-13</b>
{Sarah} said to Abraham, “ <b>Drive out this maid and her son, for the son of this maid shall not be an heir with <u>my son Isaac.</u></b> ”	Sarai said to Abram, “May the wrong done me be upon you.” ... So Sarai <b>treated {Hagar} harshly, and she fled from her presence.</b>
She wandered in the <b>wilderness</b> . <u>The angel of Elohim</u> called to Hagar, “What is the matter with you, Hagar?” Then Elohim opened her eyes and she saw <b>a well of water.</b>	<u>The angel of Yahweh</u> found her by a <b>spring of water in the wilderness</b> . He said, “Hagar, Sarai’s maid, where have you come from and where are you going?” Therefore <b>the well</b> was called Beer-lahai-roi.
<u>The angel of Elohim</u> said... “ <b>I will make a great nation of him.</b> ”	<u>The angel of Yahweh</u> said to her, “ <b>I will greatly multiply your seed</b> ... you shall call his name Ishmael.”

Consider the irony of the situation presented in E: Sarah’s son is not Abraham’s, and Abraham’s son is not Sarah’s. For the sake of her only son Isaac, Sarah wants the maid and her son to leave because he, “*Shall not be an heir with my son Isaac;*” however, the boy she wishes driven out is Abraham’s only legitimate son! Note carefully the revealing account of Abraham’s distress over the situation:

<sup>44</sup> Genesis 20:16

<sup>45</sup> Genesis 21:9

{E} The matter was very grievous in Abraham's sight **because of his son**. But Elohim said to Abraham, “Do not let it be grievous in your sight because of the lad and your maid; whatever Sarah tells you, listen to her, for **through Isaac your seed will be called**. And of the son of the maid I will make a nation also, **because he is your seed**.”<sup>46</sup>

Here the surviving Elohist text provides a most important and overlooked piece of information by which the reader is *literally being told Isaac is not Abraham’s seed*. Elohim tells Abraham that although the nameless son of the maid is indeed his seed – *his seed will be “called” Isaac*. Here the literal Hebrew script reads, “*Because by Isaac seed for you will be called.*”

כִּי	בְּיִצְחָק	יְקָרָא	לְךָ	זֵרַע
because	in/according-to/by Yitzchaq	be-called/addressed	(in-regard)-to/for you	seed

## ABRAHAM & ISAAC, PART II THE DUBIOUS DEATH & RESURRECTION OF ISAAC

After Abraham sent Hagar his Egyptian maid away into the wilderness with his son who was saved by a water well,<sup>47</sup> the Elohist story continues with another seemingly ambiguous account. Abraham has a contention with Abimelech over a certain well which the king’s servants had seized. Abimelech (along with Phicol, the commander of his army) say to Abraham:

“Elohim is with you in all that you do; now therefore, **swear to me here by Elohim that you will not deal falsely with me or with my offspring or with my posterity**, but according to the kindness that I have shown to you, you shall show to me and to the land in which you have sojournd.” **Abraham said, “I swear it.”**<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Genesis 21:11-13

<sup>47</sup> Note in J Hagar is now Sarah’s maid, but in E she was Abraham’s.

J story in Genesis 16: “{Sarah} had an Egyptian maid whose name was Hagar,” said to Abraham, “Please go in to **my maid**,” and “took Hagar the Egyptian, **her maid**, and gave her to her husband as his wife.” When Sarah objects, “I gave **my maid** into your bosom, but I was despised in her eyes,” Abraham responds, “Behold, **your maid** is in your hand; do to her what is good in your sight.” Later the angel of Yahweh tells Hagar, “Return to **your mistress**, and submit yourself under her hands.”

E story in Genesis 21: After Isaac is born Sarah objects and must tell Abraham, “Drive out **this maid** and her son, for the son of **this maid** shall not be an heir with my son Isaac.” Then Elohim says to Abraham, “Do not let it be grievous in your sight because of the lad and **your maid**.” (Later it is the angel of Elohim who speaks to Hagar.)

These mirroring stories represent separate literary traditions concerning Hagar leaving Abraham & Sarah which were later compiled into one story, creating the subtle phenomenon of Hagar switching hands. Many so-called Bible contradictions within Genesis, Exodus, and Numbers are a product of independent sources and later texts being synopsisized outside of what had been their originally intended and logical contexts.

<sup>48</sup> From Genesis 21:22b-24

This emphatic expression of Abimelech's concern for his progeny is noteworthy. The words here translated "offspring" & "posterity" *both appear only three times* in the entire Hebrew Bible and always together as such (*Genesis 21:23; Job 18:19; Isaiah 14:22*). Therefore, the author has carefully chosen the words to reflect Abimelech's now apparent desire for the wellbeing of Isaac. Due in part to the scarcity of this Hebrew expression, it has been translated variously:

- ...me, nor with my **son**, nor with my **son's son**... {*King James Version*; 1611}
- ...me, nor my **posterity**, nor my **stock**... {*Douay-Rheims Revision*; 1750}
- ...me, or to my **continuator**, or to my **successor**... {*Young's Literal Translation*; 1898}
- ...me, nor by mine **offspring**, nor by my **descendants**... {*Rotherham's Emphasized Bible*; 1902}

Again, there is an ambiguous reference to a well, the significance of which is unspoken except that Abraham demonstrates: "*I dug this well.*" So the two men make a covenant concerning (1) Abimelech's posterity and (2) Abraham's well: "*Therefore he called that place Beersheba {Well of an Oath}, because there the two of them took an oath.*"<sup>49</sup> Just as the Elohist material in chapter 20 (concerning Abimelech taking Abraham's wife) ended with a J-inspired postscript, this largely Elohist chapter (after Abraham swears concerning Abimelech's offspring) ends with another characteristically J insertion, claiming at Beersheba Abraham, "*Called on the name of Yahweh, the Everlasting El {Heb. Yahweh El Olam}.*"<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless, the Elohist story continues into chapter 22 with a "test" to that oath Abraham made with Abimelech:

{E} Now it came about after these things, that **Elohim tested Abraham**. He said, "**Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac**, and go to the land of Moriah, and **offer him there as a burnt offering** on one of the mountains of which I will tell you."<sup>51</sup>

In this infamous Biblical scene, after Abraham swears by Elohim to not deal falsely with Abimelech's "offspring" or "posterity", Elohim instructs Abraham to kill Isaac! With Abraham's son by the Egyptian maid Hagar now driven away with the promise of, "*Seed for you will be called by Isaac,*" here Elohim emphatically calls Isaac: "*Your son, your only son.*" Various readers of the Bible have marveled at this reference because the story's present emended form in Genesis (JE) claims Abraham had two sons: Ishmael & Isaac. Seeing as how Isaac was not Abraham's only son (in neither E nor J), this scene depicts the *offering up of Isaac as a sacrificial substitute* (i.e. death by proxy) for any potential "offspring" or "posterity" of Abraham. Note the repeated and unsettling familial references to father-and-son during the course of the sacrificial scene:

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<sup>49</sup> Genesis 21:31

<sup>50</sup> From Genesis 21:33

<sup>51</sup> From Genesis 22:1,2



{E} Abraham took Isaac his son; and he split wood for the burnt offering. ... Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. ... Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, "My father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." And he said, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" Abraham said, "Elohim will see for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." ... Abraham bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. "...you have done this thing and have not withheld your son, your only son."<sup>52</sup>

This makes a gratuitous total of ten times that Isaac is called Abraham's "son" in what are likely the genuine Elohist verses of this story. However a notorious J-inspired textual intervention to salvage Isaac's character from death was inserted at the climax of the scene:

{E} & {J} Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. [But the angel of Yahweh called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." He said, "Do not stretch out your hand against the lad, and do nothing to him; for now I know that you are a fearer of Elohim, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me." Then Abraham raised his eyes and looked, and behold, behind [him] a ram caught in the thicket by his horns; and Abraham went and took the ram and offered him up for a burnt offering in the place of his son. Abraham called the name of that place Yahweh Will Provide {i.e. "will see"; Heb. *Yahweh-Jireh*}, as it is said to this day, "In the mount of Yahweh it will be seen {Heb. *Yerah*}." Then the angel of Yahweh called to Abraham a second time from heaven, and said, "By Myself I have sworn, declares Yahweh,] because you have done this thing and have not withheld your son, your only son..."<sup>53</sup>

The shift in this scene from Elohist to Yahwist in reference to God is uncanny: Because *Elohim tested Abraham*, he *arose and went to the place which Elohim had told him*, and when *they came to the place which Elohim had told him* ... "*the angel of Yahweh*" saves Isaac from the critical moment of death, telling Abraham, "*I {i.e. Yahweh} know that you {i.e. Abraham} are a fearer of Elohim, since you have not withheld your son from Me {i.e. Yahweh}.*" Despite having just told his son, "*Elohim will see for Himself the lamb,*" Abraham is now depicted naming the mountain, "*Yahweh Will See,*" and offering a ram in the place of Isaac. Similar insertions have been examined, and the particular claim that Abraham named the historical location after Yahweh has been shown to be contrary to both the original E tradition and P (explicitly stating Abraham never knew God by the name Yahweh)!

This Yahwist intervention in the midst of an Elohist text at what would have been the last moment of Isaac's life may make for an astonishing *deus ex machina* plot device, but it was not the intent of the Elohist author whose startling and ironic original conclusion has been obscured by this latter hand. Consider for example the revealing cyclical structure of the Yahwist break in the plot, leaving the reader exactly where the interruption started: *Elohim addressing Abraham after he took the knife to kill Isaac*. By beginning and ending the insertion with the dual addresses, "*The angel of Yahweh called to {Abraham} from heaven,*" the redaction

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<sup>52</sup> From Genesis 22:3,6-10,16

<sup>53</sup> From Genesis 22:10-16

simultaneously allows for a smoother transition from Elohist to Yahwist and back to Elohist, while also converting a singular address of Elohim (the original speaker) into the word of Yahweh! Aside from the internal textual signs indicative that *the specific passage regarding the sparing of Isaac is a Yahwist-inspired interpolation*, consider also how Isaac's death makes proper sense of the surrounding Elohist material:

- From the beginning, the story offers specifics detailing Abraham's travels with *a donkey, two young men, and Isaac*. On the third day he sees the mountain from a distance and says to the young men, "*Stay here with the donkey, I and the lad will go over there, and we will return to you.*" However the story concludes: "*Abraham returned to his young men, and they arose and went together to Beersheba; and Abraham lived at Beersheba.*" That Abraham returns without Isaac is overlooked, following the J insertion.
- Immediately after Abraham, "*Took the knife to slay his son,*" the act is affirmed: "*You have done this thing and have not withheld your son, your only son.*" These words call to mind the initial story of Abimelech taking Sarah and confessing, "*In the innocence of my palms I have done this.*" There also Elohim affirms: "*Yes, I know that in the integrity of your heart you have done this.*" Concerning both counts (Abimelech with Sarah; Abraham with Isaac) Elohim remarks, "*You have done this,*" yet critical redactions to E (legitimizing Isaac's birth & resurrecting him from death) now lead the reader to assume these words refer to the intent of the act in question and not the act itself.
- Because Abraham had, "*Done this thing and ... obeyed My voice,*" (by offering his "*only son*"), he is promised the blessing: "*I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and the sand which is on the seashore.*" Nevertheless, Isaac's character never appears again in E (e.g. taking a wife; fathering children). Likewise, the subsequent surviving passages in E concerning the northern house of Israel conspicuously do not include an account of the famed Jacob's nativity, despite claims that his father was Isaac. However, the E traditions of Abraham and Jacob are bridged with a depiction of Abraham going on to father six more sons, despite both J & P claims of Isaac being a miracle baby in Abraham and Sarah's extreme old age.

Peeling back the layers of redaction and reconstructing the originally intended northern Elohist tradition reveals the truly astonishing and ironic climax to the story of an "Exalted Father" (Abraham) adopting his wife's illegitimate Philistine son "He Will Laugh" (Isaac). Abraham, having sent away his only offspring by Hagar the Egyptian with the promise that seed for him would be called by Isaac, fulfills Elohim's dreadful test of killing, "*Your only son, whom you love, Isaac,*" in spite of making the covenant of Beersheba, where he swore by Elohim to not deal falsely with Abimelech's offspring or posterity! It is in light of this context where Jacob's later reference in E to, "*The Elohim of my father, the Elohim of Abraham, and the fear of Isaac,*" begins to make sense.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> From Genesis 31:4; compare Genesis 48:16, where Jacob blesses Joseph, saying,

However the most pertinent question remains unanswered: why would the Elohist tradition relate such a fearful scene? Indeed, why would an Israelite author depict the Elohim of Abraham prompting the death of a young Isaac in the first place? To answer this question, first consider the motive behind the J-inspired insertion, both defending the legitimacy of Isaac’s birth as the literal seed of Abraham and textually resurrecting him from a premature death at the hand of Abraham. As the next chapter will outline from the Yahwist document, *Isaac the son of Abraham is an important southern patriarch*, fathering Jacob & Esau, living in South Canaan to be an old man, and playing a critical role in rival Judahite tradition. Now it may be observed that certain post-“resurrection” details of Isaac’s life—as told in J—create a chain of striking parallels (converging on the founding of Beersheba in Genesis), between *the original E narrative of Abraham (leading up to Isaac’s premature death)*, and *the latter J stories of Isaac (living to become an old man)*:

<b>Elohist Abraham Cycle (Genesis 20-22)</b>	<b>Yahwist “Resurrection Accounts” of Isaac</b>
Abimelech thought Abraham's wife was his sister; Abraham is welcome in Gerar. {20:1-18}	Abimelech thought Isaac's wife was his sister; Isaac is welcome in Gerar. {26:6-11}
Abraham reproves Abimelech concerning a well of water that his servants had seized, and they make a covenant. {21:25-30}	The herdsmen of Gerar dispute with the herdsmen of Isaac concerning certain wells of water from Abraham’s day. {26:18-22}
Abimelech & Phicol remark, “ <i>Elohim is with you</i> ,” and ask Abraham swear he will not deal falsely, but according to the kindness Abimelech has shown. {21:22-24}	Abimelech & Phicol remark, “ <i>Yahweh has been with you</i> ,” and ask Isaac swear he will do them no harm, just as they have done nothing but good to him. {26:26-31}
Abraham calls the place, <i>Beersheba</i> {“ <i>Well of an Oath</i> ”}, because they took an oath there. Abraham sacrifices Isaac and lives in Beersheba. {21:31,32; 22:1-9,19}	Isaac’s servants dig another well so Isaac calls it, <i>Shibah</i> {“ <i>Seventh</i> ”}, therefore the city is called, <i>Beersheba</i> . Isaac builds an altar to Yahweh at Beersheba. {26:23-25,32,33}

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*The angel who has redeemed me from all evil,  
Bless the lads {Ephraim and Manasseh};  
And may **my name be called in them**,  
And **the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac**.*

Dismissing the common possibility of textual emendation, it is curious how after E says Abraham was promised, “*By Isaac seed for you will be called*,” Jacob is depicted announcing, “*My name be called in {Ephraim and Manasseh}*.” Indeed, both expressions are indicative of adoption (i.e. a father-son relationship in name or pretense). In the wake of noticeable textual insertions, one is left to wonder why in E “the name” of both Abraham and Isaac is found “called in” Jacob, who is depicted willing it to Ephraim & Manasseh. Similarly, Isaac’s name appears again (31:53), where “*Jacob swore by the fear of his father Isaac*.” While this ambiguous expression may likewise represent textual emendation, it nevertheless also resembles a veiled reference to Isaac’s death in E.

Considering the E departure of Hagar (21:9-19) was also seen copied in J (16:4-13), this demonstrates every section, from beginning to end, of the surviving Elohist story of Abraham & Isaac was *lifted from its original context and recast into Yahwist tradition*, with the notable reversals of Isaac's dubious beginnings and dreadful end!

Therefore a careful examination of these rival texts and their evolution reveals the original northern Elohist document in its opening chapters immediately distinguished itself from Southern tradition in perhaps the most direct way possible: by depicting Isaac as a bastard son whom Abraham killed in good faith that he would establish his descendants – exclusive of a Southern Isaac. Thus, the true heritage and culture of the sovereign nation of Israel (the ten tribes of the House of Jacob) might be emphatically communicated and perennially protected against the real threat of adulteration with Judahite claims and other indigenous elements of Canaan. Nevertheless after the Assyrian Captivity of Israel, the Elohist document was textually synopsisized/adulterated in the territory of Judah, and therefore emended with late material, at precisely those points which were irreconcilable with the Yahwist stories. In the burgeoning and official “family history” of King Hezekiah's post-captivity Judeo-Israelite society, the Israelite account of Isaac's untimely death had to be stayed, as any original accounts of Israel's heritage were prefaced, emended, or excised.

### **CONCLUSION: THE UNADULTERATED ELOHIST**

This brief analysis of the Elohist document focused primarily on those of its passages which can be found in Genesis, although the compiled North Israelite tradition continues into various chapters of Exodus and Numbers. Due in part to their author's characteristic exclusive use of “Elohim” & “El”, these scattered passages spanning Genesis 20-50 are often more clearly discernable and provide an excellent introduction into further study of the Elohist. An ancient Israelite historical reconstruction based on comparative textual analysis (i.e. *recension*) proves more difficult beginning with Exodus, where the line between “Yahweh” & “Elohim” becomes skewed. Posing an even greater challenge, the written traditions concerning an exodus from Egypt, based on the late collective memory of the confederated northern peoples (i.e. “Israel”), carried a much different cultural significance to the indigenous Canaanite peoples in the south (i.e. “Judah”). Great care should be taken in separating Asiatic/Hyksos, Syro-Israelite, and Judeo-Canaanite history amidst late, varying, and merging written traditions.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> For example, after the Hyksos ruled Egypt and were ultimately driven out by King Ahmose I, the entire region of Canaan subsequently fell subject to Egyptian rule from around 1550 to 1150 B.C.E.. Therefore, the indigenous Canaanite peoples would have had oral traditions based on their collective memory of a “bondage” episode spanning some 400 years. (See Genesis 15:13; Exodus 12:40.) This became typified by the story of Moses, the Levite hero, leading the people out of Egypt (i.e. “*the house of bondage*”).

On the other hand, the confederated peoples to the north in Canaan and up to Syria represented the descendants of those original Asiatics who were actually driven out of Egypt before the critical watershed event of 1550 B.C.E.. These northern people would have also told stories, featuring a time when their ancestors enjoyed great success and

Increasing degrees of difficulty in isolating the original Elohist text have already been witnessed within the Genesis passages. From the very first part of the surviving story, the northern traditions concerning Abraham & Isaac have been virtually revoked by the work of a J-inspired redactor, merging E with J into J&E:

- Whereas Isaac's birth was the laughable product of his father's actions, causing a Philistine king to take the desirable Sarah... *now Isaac's birth is the miraculous fulfillment of a promise made by Yahweh when Sarah was advanced in age and post-menopausal.*
- Whereas Isaac's death was the dreadful product of his father's actions, fulfilling a test of Elohim to offer his adopted son representing his seed as a sacrifice... *now Isaac's death is replaced with a ram due to the angel of Yahweh intervening at the last moment.*

Elohist tradition concerning Jacob follows (along with its subsequent Judahizing emendations):

- Whereas Jacob dreams of a ladder with angels of Elohim, calls this place, "House of Elohim," vows to dedicate himself to Elohim (if he is kept on his journey), and so returns safely to build an altar called: "El-Beth-El"... *now Yahweh stands at the ladder, identifies himself as Yahweh, vows to keep Jacob on his journey (and bring him back), and so Jacob wakes up and exclaims: "Surely Yahweh is in this place, and I did not know it."*
- Whereas Jacob had journeyed to North Syria, taking Syrian wives who invoked Elohim while bearing sons who would ultimately represent the Ten Tribes of the northern territory and Kingdom of Israel... *now one of those wives exclaims, "This time I will praise Yahweh," after bearing three additional sons who would ultimately represent the priesthood and territory of the kingdom of Judah.*
- Whereas Jacob's favorite son Joseph is stolen into Egypt (despite the firstborn Reuben's attempt to save him), becoming a ruler in Egypt and receiving the birthright blessing from Jacob... *now it is Judah who saves Joseph from death, convincing his brothers to sell him into Egypt and (despite Reuben's firstborn claim) receiving the birthright blessing from Jacob who exclaims, "Your father's sons shall bow down to you."*

The more we study the Elohist document and subsequent literary layers of the Holy Bible, the more details will emerge, simultaneously painting the same grotesque picture. The sacred written traditions of the ancient Israelites were undermined and uprooted after the fall of Israel

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prosperity in Egypt. These became exemplified by the story of Joseph, the Northern Patriarch, gaining authority in Egypt and fathering the house of Ephraim & Manasseh.

Both traditions have merged & emerged into the late Biblical tradition (written centuries after the historical events from which they developed), and their isolation and study prove very challenging from an historical perspective.

for socio-political reasons, reflecting the aims of a royal administration and priesthood centered in Jerusalem of Judah:

1. Israel's traditional religion is replaced with Judah's official state religion (Yahwism).
2. Israel's family tree & map are redrawn to include Judah's people & territory.
3. Israel's national history is revised with claims of Judah's right to rule over them.

Gaining a wider view of how Canaanite influences could supplant and transmute Israelite culture to ultimately become immortalized into the Biblical histories requires a closer analysis of the second literary source in Genesis: the *Yahwist*. Indeed, understanding the social connection between the Canaanites & Judahites must begin with a biographical profile of the J author. According to J, Judah, immediately after convincing Joseph's brothers to sell him, "*Went down from his brothers and turned aside to ... a daughter of a certain Canaanite.*"<sup>56</sup> While Joseph was described as "*The one distinguished among his brothers,*" who was this Canaanitish Judah – so distinct he had to be textually grafted into Israel's genealogical tree?

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<sup>56</sup> From Genesis 38:1,2