THE HEBREW/ISRAELITE WEATHER-DEITY

BY

WALTER GERHARDT, JR.
Mooresstown, New Jersey, U.S.A.

The origin and meaning of the deity YHWH as an historic literary form, as well as an indigenous dialectic idiom of the Hebrew/Israelite society, is open to investigation. 1) Also, the decipherment of the Hebrew form y-h-w-h (YHWH), for all intent and purposes of the science of orthography and etymology, as well as the corollation of this form, and its variants y-h-w/y-w-h, to similar forms in Akkadian and Ugaritic are not as yet conclusive enough to warrant final approval. 2) To add further complications to the problem of investigating the archaic literary expression of the deity YHWH as a literate idiom, semitic studies have been partially expressed via theological exposé which, important for empirical studies, has had limiting effect upon the analytical approach to the study of YHWH as an expression of the Hebrew/Israelite literary mentality. To understand the literary character

1) The formulation and idiomatic expression of the character of the deity YHWH in the Biblical literature is represented by several viewpoints. Since YHWH is the single most important “character” in the Hebrew Bible, continued attention will be given to the orthography, etymology and semantic of the deity.

of the deity YHWH in Biblical literature, investigations must not be confined solely to empirical studies or scientific analogies, but should also include a literary critique since the deity YHWH is expressed primarily through literature contained within the Biblical literary anthology. 3)

Further difficulties are encountered in considering the literary material of the YHWH idiom due to a correspondence of this material to an historic chronology of the ethno-social development of the Hebrew/Israelite society. 4) The main difficulty seems to reside in the attempt to reconstruct the Biblical literature, especially the YHWH literary material, into a progressive religious history. However, a “geo-legendary” antecedent is important for correctly understanding the literary expression of the deity YHWH. The Biblical author, assuming an anonymity of authorship, of the Sinai stories depicts YHWH as a tribal deity, or inter-tribal deity, of the Hebrews (‘iḥrim) who resided in the Sinai/Edom environ prior to, and during, the Israelite migration from Egypt to this region. 5) The Sinai stories suggest that YHWH was known and expressed under several names by a tribal complex, who are classified by the author as Hebrew transients or nomads (Ḥab/piru), in the role of what might be designated as numen locus. Exodus 7.16 contains several clues to the clarification role. 6) The resident deity of the Sinai/Edom environ, designated “god”


6) Exodus 7.16a; “YHWH, ‘god’ of the Hebrews sent me”; 5.1; YHWH ḫōḏeh yiṣra’el // 5.3; ḥōḏeh hā’iḥrim. It is significant that after identifying YHWH as “god of Israel”, Moses encounters Pharaoh’s comments, “Who is YHWH?”, and “I do not know YHWH!”; then, Moses identified YHWH as “god of the Hebrews” (ḵōḏeh ‘iḥrim) which seems to imply that the Pharaoh was