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DIVINE FATHERHOOD: RE-EXAMINING THE PARADIGM

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This study examines various approaches to the understanding of the father-God concept, recognizing that much that has been said up to this point has been heavily influenced by sources other than either the Hebrew Scriptures or their Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) context. It briefly traces the development of the concept from the time of Origen through to modern times, noticing that biblical texts have been minimized through Greco-Roman paradigms or anthropocentric concerns. This is followed by a brief survey of Sumerian, Akkadian, Egyptian and Ugaritic concepts of their father-gods which are then compared and contrasted with references to the Hebrew Scriptures. The resulting picture may be more different than commonly accepted.

Key Words: Fatherhood of God, father-gods, Father-God, Sumerian gods, personal gods, Babylonian gods, Egyptian gods

1. Introduction

> The Christian religion, like every other religion, stands or falls by its conception of God, and to that conception of God the idea of the Fatherhood of God is integral.
>
> William Boothby Selbie[1]

How do we understand the concept of God? Where do we draw our ideas from? This study takes up the challenge of Selbie's perceptive and provocative statement in three steps: first, through an historical overview of Christian theology; second, through an examination of ideas from the Ancient Near East (ANE); and third, through an exploration of Old Testament theology.

2. Historical-Theological Overview

Origen recognizes that the fatherhood of God lies at the heart of the Christian faith. However, he takes it somewhat for granted, and often uses the

[1] William Boothby Selbie, *The Fatherhood of God* (New York: Scribners, 1936), 11.

word "father" merely as a synonym for God.[2] Nevertheless, he links middle Platonist thought and biblical ideas in his attempts to define God and the world,[3] and is thus the first theologian to attempt any analysis of the idea of God as father. Basically, he presents a caricature of God formed by combining Hebrew Scriptures and Greek philosophy, then contrasts this caricature with the Christian father-God—before whom humans stand in love rather than fear.[4]

It is not until Athanasius in the fourth century that the fatherhood of God becomes an issue of sustained discussion, more for the purpose of Trinitarian debate and as a polemic against Arius and the Alexandrian school than as an investigation of the fatherhood of God, per se.[5] His position becomes orthodoxy in the hands of his successors, the Cappadocian fathers and Augustine.[6]

In other words, from the time of Origen on, discussion on the fatherhood of God serves mainly to explain the metaphysics of the Godhead. Under Gnostic influence and with the tools of Greco-oriental theology, a great gulf is fixed between God and his creation,[7] with an impact on the understanding of the fatherhood of God that is maintained by the Protestant Reformers centuries later. For example, Luther portrays God as a "consuming fire,"[8] inflicting punishment in a "fatherly spirit,"[9] and as an "iron wall, against which we cannot bump without destroying ourselves."[10] Similarly, Calvin declares that no "ruined" man "will ever perceive God to be a Father,"[11] and that humans may only call God "father" because he is Christ's father.[12] Calvin's systematized theological structure is founded on the con-

2 Peter Widdicombe, *The Fatherhood of God from Origen to Athanasius* (Oxford Theological Monographs; Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 7.

3 Ibid., 9.

4 Ibid., 253.

5 Ibid., 1, 136, 159–60.

6 Ibid., 255.

7 Selbie, *Fatherhood of God*, 66.

8 Martin Luther, "Lectures on Isaiah, Chapters 1–39," in *Luther's Works* (ed. Jaroslav Pelikan; trans. Herbert J. A. Bouman; 30 vols.; Saint Louis: Concordia, 1969), 16:55.

9 Ibid., 54.

10 Martin Luther, "Selected Psalms I," in *Luther's Works* (ed. Jaroslav Pelikan; trans. L. W. Spitz Jr.; 30 vols.; Saint Louis: Concordia, 1969), 12:312. Luther describes the impossibility of humans approaching God "naked," i.e., unclothed without Christ. Martin Luther, "First Lectures on the Psalms II, Psalms 76–126," in *Luther's Works* (ed. Jaroslav Pelikan; trans. Herbert J. A. Bouman; 30 vols.; Saint Louis: Concordia, 1969), 11:208–9.

11 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (trans. John Allen; 2 vols.; Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Christian Education, 1936), 1:51.

12 John Calvin, *Tracts and Treatises on the Doctrine and Worship of the Church* (trans. Henry Beveridge; 3 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), 2:40.

trast between God's sovereignty and human remoteness,[13] and the ideas of atonement and God's fatherhood are considered forensically incompatible.[14]

In a late-nineteenth-century reaction to the autocratic theism of Calvinism, Clarke, Peabody, and Rauschenbusch formulate a "social gospel."[15] For them, God is father of all humanity and all men are brothers. These new "liberal" ideas about God are the culmination of a universalistic perspective evolving over centuries.[16] Rob S. Candlish and Thomas J. Crawford vigorously debate whether God's fatherhood is universal, or whether he can only be called "father" in Christ. [17] The final death of the wicked at the *eschaton* is offered as proof that God's fatherhood does not apply to all.[18] Rather, one must be "blameless and harmless" before he can be called a child of God.[19] This is a revival of Origen's idea that only a person free from sin has the right to call God "Father."[20]

From these debates an anthropocentric approach to God's fatherhood develops, with an emphasis on understanding it from the perspective of human experience. To some extent, Sigmund Freud systematizes and popu-

13 Selbie, *Fatherhood of God*, 75.

14 Ibid., 72.

15 Janet Forsythe Fishburn, *The Fatherhood of God and the Victorian Family: The Social Gospel in America* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 136–39. This emphasis is based exclusively on the parable of the prodigal son, focusing on God's patience, pity, and willingness to forgive. Ibid., 140.

16 Washington Gladden, *How Much Is Left of the Old Doctrines? A Book for the People* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1899), 23. Gladden speaks of the universal hunger for a God whom people can know and love. Walter Lippmann observes that the God of medieval Christianity is like a great feudal lord, duty-bound to treat his vassals well; the God of the Enlightenment is like a constitutional monarch, who reigns but does not govern; and the God of Modernism is the sum total of the laws of nature, or an expression of some kind of deified constitutionalism. Walter Lippmann, *Preface to Morals* (New York: Macmillan, 1929), 54–55, cited by Harriet Crabtree, *The Christian Life: Traditional Metaphors and Contemporary Theologies* (HDR 29; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 6.

17 For example, see Thomas J. Crawford, *The Fatherhood of God: Considered in Its General and Special Aspects and Particularly in Relation to the Atonement, with a Review of Recent Speculations on the Subject, and a Reply to the Strictures of Dr. Candlish* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1868), 275, and Rob S. Candlish, *The Fatherhood of God: Being the First Course of the Cunningham Lectures* (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1867), 117.

18 Charles H. H. Wright, *The Fatherhood of God and Its Relation to the Person and Work of Christ, and the Operations of the Holy Spirit* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1867), 79–97.

19 Ibid., 193–94.

20 Widdicombe, *Fatherhood of God from Origen to Athanasius,* 109. For Origen, such a person assumes a new ontological condition that makes him/her constitutionally incapable of sinning. Ibid., 103.

larizes this approach. He largely draws his inspiration from Greek mythology, to develop a paradigm that holds fatherhood responsible for a range of guilt neuroses experienced throughout the lifespan.[21] It is not surprising, then, that the motif of the fatherhood of God has been labeled as the "Achilles' heel"[22] of the Judeo-Christian religion.

The fatherhood of God motif attracts little attention in twentieth century biblical studies until feminist theology, which draws heavily upon, and expands, the work of Freud.[23] The most prominent feminist theologian to tackle the motif of God's fatherhood is Mary Daly, who takes Freud's theories to their logical conclusion and blames fatherhood for a self-alienation that produces rape, genocide, and war.[24] As Catherina Halkes observes, "it is hardly possible to call to mind a single feminist theologian, whatever her phase of development may be, who does not find the image of the Father-God a challenge and a direct confrontation."[25]

21 Sigmund Freud, *Moses and Monotheism* (trans. Katherine Jones; International Psycho-Analytical Library 33; London: Hogarth, 1951), 187–89. His hypothesis that all moral authority springs from the father impugns God with the responsibility for human dysfunction. Annemarie Ohler observes that "the broad aftereffect of the Freudian Hypothesis about the 'Oedipus Complex' has contributed in no small measure to the darkening of the image of the father." Annemarie Ohler, *The Bible Looks at Fathers*, (trans. Omar Kaste; Collegeville: Liturgical, 1999), xix. The son can only succeed if he "kills" his father, a "law of nature" that suggests a son cannot succeed without first disposing of his father in some way. In response, Ohler suggests that Freud should have visited America. As early as 1830, the aristocratic Frenchman Alexis de Tocqueville notes that there fathers actively encourage sons to strike out on their own, in contrast to the continental practice of fathers tightly reining in their sons until after their own retirement. Ibid.

22 Robert Hamerton-Kelly, *God the Father: Theology and Patriarchy in the Teaching of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 5–7.

23 With the possible exception of Liberation theology, which uses the concept of God as Father in an attempt to avoid "speculative philosophical language," portraying him rather as "the merciful Father who is revealed to the simple" as "our solicitous, infinitely able Parent." Ronaldo Muñoz, "God the Father," in *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology* (ed. Ignacio Allacuría and Jon Sobrino; trans. Robert R. Barr; Maryknoll: Orbis, 1993), 406, 413.

24 Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (Boston: Beacon, 1973), 114–22. She could have made a much stronger case if she had not appealed to Greek mythology, for in so doing she legitimizes Augustine's use of Plato to arrive at the conclusion of the woman only being complete in the man.

25 Catherina Halkes, "The Themes of Protest in Feminist Theology against God the Father," in *God as Father*? (ed. Johannes-Baptist Metz and Edward Schillebeeck; trans. David Smith; Concilium 143; New York: Seabury, 1981), 103. This antipathy against God arises from a perceived hierarchical and patriarchal authoritarian structure based on the Lord-God, father of all, who directs the "Holy Father," ecclesiastical head of pastoral rulers and spiritual "fathers," then on down to the prince, "father of his coun-

One final issue concerning God's fatherhood is the popular misconception that "the idea of God as Father is essentially a New Testament concept."[26] In modern times, this opinion can be traced to the influential Wilhelm Bousset,[27] who lays the foundations on which his student Rudolf Bultmann builds.[28] Bultmann, in turn, influences a generation of New Testament scholars, including Joachim Jeremias,[29] the scholar most responsible for the current popular view.[30] The general contemporary understanding is that the fatherhood of God has particular significance in the New Testament,[31] but is "thin and underdeveloped" in the Old Testament.[32] Underlying this misconception is a presupposition, based largely on the writings of Paul but reflecting Origen's conclusions, that the benevolent father God of the New Testament must be contrasted to the "ruling master" God of the Old Testament.[33]

On the other hand, in the search for the origins of the New Testament position, contrary positions have sometimes been overstated and only muddy the waters. "The Fatherhood of God is a characteristically Jewish doctrine, found in equal abundance in the Old Testament and in Rabbinic literature."[34] This view is supported by Marianne Meye Thompson, who states that the portraits of God as father in the Old and New Testaments are

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try" (i.e., ruler over the fatherland), finally to the father over a family, head over his wife, and owner of his children. Thus, "authority and right come from above; obedience, dependence and reliance operate below." Jürgen Moltmann, "The Motherly Father: Is Trinitarian Patripassianism Replacing Theological Patriarchalism?," in *God as Father*? (ed. Johannes-Baptist Metz and Edward Schillebeeck; trans. David Smith; Concilium 143; New York: Seabury, 1981), 52.

26 Thomas McGovern, "John Paul II on the Millennium and God as Father," *Homiletic and Pastoral Review* 99.7 (April 1999): 9.

27 Wilhelm D. Bousset, *Jesu Predigt in ihrem Gegensatz zum Judentum: Ein religionsgeschichtlicher Vergleich* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1892).

28 See especially Rudolf Bultmann, *Primitive Christianity in Its Contemporary Setting* (trans. R. H. Fuller; New York: Meridian, 1956).

29 See particularly, Joachim Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus* (Naperville: Allenson, 1967).

30 W. E. Nunnally, "The Fatherhood of God at Qumran" (Ph.D diss., Hebrew Union College, 1992), 235.

31 Geoffrey W. Bromiley, "God," *ISBE* 2:501; Evert J. Blekkink, *The Fatherhood of God: Considered from Six Inter-Related Standpoints* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1942), 32.

32 J. D. W. Watts, "God the Father," *ISBE* 2:510. See also, Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah: The English Text, with Introduction, Exposition and Notes* (3 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 3:488.

33 For example, see Rom 8:15, where Paul compares the "spirit of servitude and fear" with the "spirit of adoption" as sons. Cf. G. Ernest Wright, "The Terminology of Old Testament Religion and Its Significance," *JNES* 1 (1942): 404.

34 Frederick John Foakes-Jackson and Kirsopp Lake, *The Beginnings of Christianity. Part I, The Acts of the Apostles* (5 vols.; London: MacMillan, 1942), 1:401.

marked more by continuity than by discontinuity.[35] It is also consistent with the findings of Nunnally in his review of unpublished prayers, psalms, wisdom literature, and legal testaments from Qumran, which he compares with the early Jewish midrashic and liturgical texts.[36]

As this brief survey of Christian history indicates, biblical texts have been sidelined, either in favor of Greco-Roman paradigms or of anthropocentric concerns. Added to this, "there has long been a certain traditional resistance among many western Europeans to any close links between Semitic and Indo-European material,"[37] especially since the Renaissance, resulting in Greek philosophical ideas being read back into biblical understandings of God. However, if biblical studies are to be credible, they must take account of the abundance of material that has been found in the period since Christian prejudices have become firmly fixed in favor of Greco-Latin traditions. The literature of the Ancient Near East is especially useful in informing us of much older paradigms, without which no modern biblical exegesis or paradigm can be complete.[38]

3. Ideas from the Ancient Near East

3.1. Sumer

The Sumerians are the first people in recorded history to develop ethical, religious, social, political, and philosophical ideas.[39] The study of the father-

35 Marianne Meye Thompson, *The Promise of the Father: Jesus and God in the New Testament* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 19.

36 Nunnally, "The Fatherhood of God at Qumran," 238, 239. In this seminal work, Nunnally examines both published and unpublished Qumranic material, and shows quite conclusively that the Judaism of that era enjoyed a personal relationship with the father-God.

37 Stephanie Dalley, "Gilgamesh in the Arabian Nights," in *Gilgamesh: A Reader* (ed. John Maier; Wauconda: Bolchazy-Carducci, 1997), 216. When Dalley refers to "Indo-European material" she means the classics from the Greco-Roman period.

38 See Kenton L. Sparks, *Ancient Texts for the Study of the Hebrew Bible: A Guide to the Background Literature* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2005), for an up-to-date bibliography of ANE sources.

39 Sumer covers the southern half of modern Iraq, from the region of Baghdad to the Persian Gulf. The region is later known as Sumer and Akkad, and later still as Babylonia. It may have originally been inhabited by colonists who had been an oppressed economic or religious minority, not unlike the first Europeans to settle in America. Their freedom of worship may have led to their religious creativity and expression, and later to their political organization. See Samuel Noah Kramer, *The Sacred Marriage Rite: Aspects of Faith, Myth, and Ritual in Ancient Sumer* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969), 3; idem, *From the Poetry of Sumer: Creation, Glorification, Adoration*

hood of the gods must therefore commence with them. It is from the sacred stories of Sumer that we obtain the first glimpses of Ancient Near Eastern cosmogony: the account of the origin of their universe, an introduction to their gods, and the genesis of humanity.[40] Their doctrines become the "basic creed and dogma of much of the ancient Near East," but nowhere are they systematized.[41]

In Sumerian cosmogony, the primeval sea-goddess Nammu is "the primeval mother, the bearer of the senior gods."[42] Nothing is said of her origin or birth. Perhaps the Sumerians conceive of the primeval ocean as having existed eternally. But at some stage she gives birth to the cosmic mountain, consisting of the entwined gods An and Ki, a united heaven and earth, who in turn produce the air-god, Enlil. He subsequently separates his entwined parents, his father An carrying off heaven, Enlil carrying off his mother, Ki, the earth. The union of Enlil and mother earth sets the stage for the organization of the universe—the creation of man, animals, and plants, and the establishment of civilization.[43]

It is with Enlil that the real significance of the fatherhood of the gods in Sumerian thought becomes plain. While Nammu, the primeval ocean, precedes any father-god, it is only when Enlil breaks up the cozy arrangement between his enmeshed parents that there is a positive and perpetuating progress in the creation of earth and its cultures.[44] No wonder he is considered "by far the most important deity" of the Sumerian pantheon.[45]

Enlil is called the "bull that overwhelms,"[46] a powerful metaphor highlighting his fertility. He is the god responsible for planning and maintaining the most productive functions of the cosmos, ensuring prosperity for all. As "father of the gods," he adjudicates in the highest court available to gods and humans, and upholds divine laws that "like heaven cannot be over-

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(Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 51, 52; idem, *History Begins at Sumer: Thirty-nine Firsts in Man's Recorded History* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1981), xix.

40 Samuel Noah Kramer, *Sumerian Mythology: A Study of Spiritual and Literary Achievement in the Third Millennium B.C.* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1972), 30.

41 Samuel Noah Kramer, *The Sumerians: Their History, Culture, and Character* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 145.

42 Jacob Klein, "Enki and Ninmahê," *COS* 1:516.

43 Kramer, *History Begins at Sumer*, 82, 83; idem, *Sumerian Mythology*, 39–41.

44 Gertrud Faber, "The Song of the Hoe," *COS* 1:511.

45 Kramer, *History Begins at Sumer*, 88.

46 Zimmern KL II.1–6, in Stephen Langdon, *Sumerian Liturgies and Psalms* (The University of Pennsylvania Museum—Publications of the Babylonian Section 10/4; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1919), 292. See also H. L. J. Vanstiphout, "The Disputation between Summer and Winter," *COS* 1:585.

turned" nor "shattered."[47] As father of kings, he gives earthly monarchs sovereignty, prospering their reigns and subduing their enemies.[48]

Apart from the main pantheon, there are lesser deities, regarded as personal gods for the people of Sumer. The personal god intercedes for the human supplicant in the assembly of the gods.[49] He engenders, provides, protects, and claims personal obedience.[50] The relationship is perpetuated through the generations by god and goddess incarnate in human parents. The personal god of the father passes from the body of the father to the son from generation to generation, hence the term "god of the fathers."[51] This is a comfortable arrangement, in light of the Sumerian view of parents generally—"the father is respected," and "the mother is feared."[52]

So the Sumerians primarily see the fatherhood of their gods as procreative, and secondarily as the source of wisdom. The divine law dispensed by the father-god ensures human progress and prosperity, reconciliation and sovereignty.

3.2. Babylon

Babylon comes from the same geographic region as Sumer. The Babylonians speak a different language, but borrow copiously from Sumerian theology and culture, adapting them to their own purposes.[53] Although Sumerian influence is evident in the pantheons of the three main extant Babylonian literary works—the *Gilgamesh Epic*,[54] the *Atrahasis Epic*,[55] and the *Enuma Eliš*,[56]—the Babylonian Marduk and Ishtar are ascendant.

47 "Hymn to Enlil," in Kramer, *History Begins at Sumer*, 91.

48 Ibid., 89.

49 Kramer, *The Sumerians*, 126, 127.

50 Thorkild Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness: A History of Mesopotamian Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 158.

51 Ibid., 159.

52 Kramer, *Poetry of Sumer*, 68.

53 Within a few decades, Akkad, a previously insignificant town near the city of Babylon, becomes the fear and envy of nations as far-flung as the highlands of Anatolia to the north, the Mediterranean to the west, and the Indus Valley to the east. Although the economic and military activity of its dynasty lasts only from ca. 2310–2160 B.C.E., its cultural and linguistic influence dominate the whole of Mesopotamia and much of the Near East for two and a half millennia. The kings of Akkad represent the ideal monarchy, and their statues appear in the sanctuaries of the great urban centers. Joan Goodnick Westenholz, *Legends of the Kings of Akkade: The Texts* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 1.

54 The latest and best-known version dates to the end of the Middle Babylonian period, about 1000 B.C.E. It is written on twelve tablets in Akkadian, the main Semitic language of Assyria and Babylonia. With earlier versions extant up to 1100 years earlier,

The language of fatherhood is especially used with reference to the god presiding over the heavenly council. By virtue of his position, the head of the pantheon is creator-judge and father presiding over the council of the gods to ensure the maintenance of the divine order. Anšar presides over the council of the gods in the *Enuma Eliš* and Enlil in the *Myth of Zu*. When Marduk summons the full assembly of the gods he addresses Anšar (presiding over the assembly) as father and father-creator,[57] and he speaks of the other gods there collectively as "my ancestors."[58] He protests "the evil [perpetrated] against the gods my fathers" when challenging Tiamat to lend credibility and legitimacy to his challenge against her.[59] When he defeats Tiamat and the gods rejoice together, he is promoted to head of the pantheon and addressed as the provider for the father gods, and the one to care for their sanctuaries.[60] The link between the motifs of creator and judge is thus reinforced and a cyclical element added to the picture.

3.3. Egypt

Gods proliferate in the scattered Egyptian religio-political centers, especially Heliopolis, Memphis, and Thebes. Each center had its own theology, and approximately 740 different gods are mentioned by the time of Tuthmoses III (1504–1450 B.C.E.).[61]

The Heliopolitans believe Atum rises from the chaotic primordial watery abyss, dispels the darkness, and fathers children, even before completing the created realms.[62] He becomes the father of humanity, but only be-

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it is possible to document its evolution over that time. Jeffrey H. Tigay, *The Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982).

55 The most complete edition was copied during the reign of Ammi-tsaduqa, great-great-grandson of Hammurabi (ca. 1600 B.C.E.), although most extant copies date to ca. 700-650 B.C.E. W. G. Lambert and A. R. Millard, *Atrahasis: The Babylonian Story of the Flood* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969), 5.

56 It is commonly refereed to *The Babylonian Epic of Creation* or as *When on High*, after the opening words in translation. It is seven tablets long and is composed around 1200 B.C.E., apparently for the purpose of legitimizing Marduk's ascendancy over the earlier established pantheon. S. Langdon, *The Babylonian Epic of Creation: Restored from the Recently Recovered Tablets of Aššur, Transcription, Translation and Commentary* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1923); Alexander Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis: The Story of Creation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1942).

57 "The Creation Epic," Tablet II.112; *ANET*, 64.

58 Benjamin R. Foster, "Epic of Creation (iii.6)," *COS* 1:395.

59 Foster, "Epic of Creation (iv.84–86),"*COS* 1:398.

60 Foster, "Epic of Creation (vi.109–160),"*COS* 1:402.

61 Veronica Ions, *Egyptian Mythology* (New York: Peter Bedrick, 1983), 34.

62 Ibid., 35.

cause the human race arrives unexpectedly through the tears of anxious grief he sheds as he loses sight of his children playing in the watery abyss. [63] He also becomes known as the "Lord of Totality" reflecting his role in bringing the material world into being.[64]

The relationship between the gods and humanity does not seem very positive. When the first humans revolt against the harsh conditions imposed by the gods, only Ra's sense of justice averts human annihilation.[65] The gods escape to their own realm, and Ra abdicates his earthly kingdom, which ends up in the care of the pharaohs, [66] who claim that the gods are their fathers. The pharaohs then maintain the order of creation and civil order, using elaborate public religious ceremonies and rituals to prevent the re-emergence of primeval chaos. The common people thus enjoy peace and prosperity through the hands of the pharaohs.

Funerary texts enrich our understanding of the father-god motif by describing the individual roles of the gods. Ra is the most important father-god, for he provides not only barley, spelt, bread, and beer for this life;[67] he also provides for the afterlife. He sets the ladder for the resurrected soul to ascend into the sky,[68] sends his messengers to ensure it arrives safely,[69] and becomes the focus of attention as the resurrected king enters the heavenly realm.

Geb is called "father" because of his role in putting all the bones of the deceased back together, restoring intestines and eyes,[70] and providing a helping hand on the journey through the sky.[71] He affectionately welcomes the resurrected king into the heavenly realm and places him at the head of the other resurrected beings.[72] He facilitates the acceptance of the newcomer

63 James P. Allen, "From Papyrus Bremner-Rhind (1.9)," *COS* 1:14–15.

64 James P. Allen, "Coffin Texts Spell 261 (1.11)," *COS* 1:17, see also note 3.

65 "Deliverance of Mankind from Destruction," *ANET*, 10–11.

66 Ra first hands rulership of the earth over to Thoth (the moon), who restores light to the world. *ANET*, 8. However, power is passed from demigod to demigod, until it eventually ends up with the pharaohs. Pascal Vernus, *The Gods of Ancient Egypt* (trans. Jane Marie Todd; New York: John Braziller, 1998), 83.

67 Ut.205.121a, in *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts* (trans. Raymond O. Faulkner; Oxford: Clarendon, 1969), 37.

68 Ut.271.390, in ibid., 791.

69 Ut.214.136, in ibid., 41.

70 Ut.14.9c, Ut.15, Pyramid Text of Pepi II, in E. A. Wallis Budge, *Osiris and the Egyptian Religion of Resurrection: Illustrated After Drawings from Egyptian Papyri and Monuments* (London: P. L. Warner, 1911; reprint, New York: University Books, 1961), 2:314.

71 Ut.485A.1030, in *Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts*, 172.

72 Ut.373.655-656, in ibid., 123, 124

by the other gods, naming the resurrected pharaoh as his rightful heir in whom he is satisfied,[73] and transferring his honor to his son, the king.[74]

In Memphite theology, Ptah, "father of the gods," is described in much the same way as Atum of the Heliopolitans.[75] A new addition to the myth is that the son is idealized as protector and preserver of the father-deity, and is even called the "Saviour of his father."[76] The mother figure also obtains more rights and privileges for her son through tricking the aged father.[77]

For the Thebans, Atum is the sustainer of those left behind at a pharaoh's death,[78] and the one who makes living eternally possible.[79] Ra is still affirmed as the "father of the Fathers of all the gods," whose substance is unknown.[80] But he is also the focus of joy for the "common folks," the source of "sweetness" and "love," and the reason for all existence[81]—in contrast to earlier dynasties when only the pharaohs seem to have access to the gods.[82]

As in Memphis, the ruling pharaoh in Thebes is linked with the father-god, who ensures a long and stable reign.[83] As in Heliopolis, Ra provides a ladder between the two worlds for the resurrected soul.[84] Father Geb is again a key player, providing the guarantee of resurrection for a dead pharaoh,[85] keeping magic-stealing crocodiles out of the gods' domain,[86] and ensuring no coup or foreign attack succeeds as power passes from father to son.[87] Father Osiris has a key role in the resurrection, since it is his preroga-

73 Ut.127.80a, in Samuel A. B. Mercer, *The Pyramid Texts: In Translation and Commentary* (New York: Longmans Green, 1952), 44; Ut.3.3a, in ibid., 20.

74 Ut.592.1615-1619, in *Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts*, 243.

75 James P. Allen, "Hymn to Ptah," *COS* 1:20–21.

76 J. Gwyn Griffiths, *Plutarch's de Iside et Osiride: Edited with an Introduction Translation and Commentary* (Cambridge: University of Wales Press, 1970), 344, 345.

77 *ANET*, 12, 13.

78 Spell 72.S3, in Thomas George Allen, *The Book of the Dead or, Going Forth by Day: Ideas of the Ancient Egyptian Concerning the Hereafter as Expressed in Their Own Terms* (The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago: Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization 37; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 65.

79 Spell 170.S3, in ibid., 178.

80 Spell 15*A*4.2–3, in ibid., 19.

81 Spell 15*B*2.1–2, in ibid., 21.

82 Vernus, *Gods of Ancient Egypt*, 97.

83 Spell 175*b*.S3, in Allen, *Book of the Dead*, 184.

84 Spell 153.S7, in ibid., 152.

85 Spell 69*a*.S2–S4, in ibid., 63.

86 Magic was needed to successfully navigate the various hazards along the way to the realm of the gods. Spell 31*b*.S, in ibid., 41.

87 Spell 47.S3, in ibid., 51.

tive to preserve the flesh of the deceased.[88] And corresponding to a similar theme in Sumerian and Memphite theology, Horus is extolled for rescuing his father, showing the ascending importance of the son over the father.[89]

In all these instances, it is difficult to determine the exact nature of the relationship between gods and humans in general. Most of the spells and utterances seem to be quite manipulative, ensuring the success of the human supplicant in the afterlife. Even the joyous ceremonies enjoyed by the commoners may primarily be tools of the pharaohs to guarantee present peace and prosperity and future security. Certainly, the relationship of the masses to Ra must be colored by the early human attempts to rebel, despite the later softening of his attitude.

The relationship between pharaoh and the father-god is clearer. There is a fusion of their identities, with the father-god deferring to his pharaoh-son. Such preferential treatment certainly reinforces the notion that the masses did not really count for much.

This much is certain. The Egyptian gods are called "father" in the context of the generation of other gods, the world, and everything in it. They are also called "father" in relation to the pharaohs, and in relation to assisting souls in the afterlife into the presence of Ra. Thus it is in the context of creation and resurrection that their fatherhood is made evident. But as for the exact nature that this relationship assumed, we must reserve judgment.

3.4. Ugarit

Our understanding of second-millennium B.C.E. Canaanite mythology has been "significantly enhanced" through what has been touted as the most important archaeological discovery of the early twentieth century: the library of a chief priest of the storm-god in the ancient city of Ugarit.[90] The

88 Spell 155.S1, in ibid., 153, 154; Spell 181*d*.S.1, in ibid., 194.

89 Spell 78.S16, in ibid., 69.

90 John W. Miller, "God as Father in the Bible and the Father Image in Several Contemporary Ancient Near Eastern Myths: A Comparison," *SR* 14.3 (1985): 349. As a vassal state in the Hittite empire, Ugarit falls "squarely within the Hittite sphere of influence." Cyrus H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Literature: A Comprehensive Translation of the Poetic and Prose Texts* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1949), ix. The library tablets date between 1400 and 1200 B.C.E., at the height of Ugarit's international trade. Ibid., ix, x. They are written in a previously unknown language using a cuneiform script, deciphered soon after their discovery due to the relative simplicity of the characters. Johannes C. de Moor, *An Anthology of Religious Texts from Ugarit* (Leiden: Brill, 1987), vii, viii. The significance of Ugaritic religious literature lies in its strategic position between the Hittite nation and Israel, forming a possible ideological bridge between them. The inhabitants of Ugarit distance themselves from the Canaanites, but their culture is largely Canaanite, allowing data from there to give "a fairly accurate view of

"family tree" of the Canaanite pantheon is difficult to determine,[91] since the simple use of the designation "father" is insufficient to establish filial relationship. [92] El does not physically conceive all the gods—he crafts some out of clay—yet he is still called "father of the gods."[93] This gives him the highest authority.[94] However, other clues are needed to develop an understanding of the nature and quality of fatherhood among the Canaanite gods. One source may be the narrative poems with their chronicling of human-divine relationships. In reviewing these, it appears that El is the only god in the Ugaritic pantheon spoken of as "father" in relation to both gods and humanity.

In both the Kirta and Aqhat epics, the "father of mankind"[95] provides progeny for his earthly subjects and sufficient resources to maintain them. El as father-god is moved with pity for his earthly son Kirta, and arranges circumstances so that Kirta sires a number of children.[96] El is not only the clansman-protector of Kirta, but as "the king" and "father of years" exercises dominion over all humanity.

On the other hand, El becomes inebriated at a feast and needs to be carried home.[97] As well as that, his daughter ʾAnat sometimes outwits him and he cowers at her wilting words.[98] He also shows ineptitude when he accedes to Yamm and Nahar's demand for Baal to be taken from the assembly

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the Canaanite pantheon." Jonathan N. Tubb, *Canaanites*: *Peoples of the Past* (London: British Museum, 1998), 73. See J. David Schloen, *The House of the Father as Fact and Symbol: Patrimonialism in Ugarit and the Ancient Near East* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2001), for a recent treatment of the subject.

91 Although there is no creation account as such in Ugaritic literature, Mullen argues that the struggle with, and eventual defeat of, Yamm, the sea, constitutes the "first phase of creation—the restriction of the bounds of the sea—the separation of water and dry land." E. Theodore Mullen Jr., *The Divine Council in Canaanite and Early Hebrew Literature* (Chico, CA: Scholars, 1980), 13. Unfortunately, that debate cannot be pursued here.

92 The genealogy of the gods is difficult to determine because of who calls whom father. Mullen, *Divine Council*, 16–17, 19–22; Conrad E. L'Hereux, *Rank Among the Canaanite Gods: El, Ba'al, and the Repha'im* (HSM 21; Missoula: Scholars Press, 1979), 12–14; N. Wyatt, "The Titles of the Ugaritic Storm God," *UF* 24 (1992): 406.

93 Lowell K. Handy, *Among the Host of Heaven: The Syro-Palestinian Pantheon as Bureaucracy* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 78.

94 Ibid., 79.

95 Denis Pardee, "The Kirta Epic," *COS* 1:334.

96 Ibid., 338.

97 Theodore J. Lewis, "El's Divine Feast", 19; *CAT* 1.114 15–22; Simon B. Parker, ed., *Ugaritic Narrative Poetry* (SBLWAW 9; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), 195.

98 Aqhat, 4; *CAT* 1.17 V:4–55; 5; *CAT* 1.18 I:1–20; Parker, *Ugaritic Narrative Poetry*, 62–64.

of gods.[99] When Mot (death) swallows Baal, El hopelessly mourns in the dust and covers his loins with sackcloth,[100] and it is left to Baal's sister ʾAnat to rescue him from the underworld.

The fatherhood of El therefore has many facets. It is seen in the context of creation, presiding over the heavenly council, and may sometimes be understood in terms of harshness and vindictiveness but here it seems pliant in the hands of demanding children. On the other hand, the myth of Baal may be yet another example of the transition of power from an older to a younger god, and El's delay before manifesting his divine prerogative may be seen as a father's deliberate and measured response to the premature demands of his children.

3.5. The Ancient Near East in Summary

In summary, the fatherhood of the gods has wide scope across the Ancient Near East. It is evident in the dynamic activity of creation, in the maintenance of civil and divine order, in the accountability of gods and men in judgment, in the provision of hope for the future, and finally in resurrection from the dead. The way humans relate to the gods is largely positive, but kings do seem to have some advantage. However, there is insufficient data to compare the levels of devotion shown by kings and commoners to their father-gods.

We now turn to the Hebrew concept of God's fatherhood. Has the understanding of ANE gods informed it, has there been significant borrowing or was a new paradigm developed to function as a polemic against the father-god theology of the surrounding nations?

4. An Old Testament Theology of God as Father

In contrast to Ancient Near Eastern myths, the Old Testament creation accounts do not picture creation as the result of gods being engaged in sexual activity. Human origins in the Sumero-Akkadian and Egyptian accounts seem manipulative and accidental. In contrast, in the Old Testament, God shows forethought, design, dignity, blessing, provision, and satisfied approval (he blessed them, Gen 1:28), as he stoops first to form Adam then to construct Eve (Gen 2:7, 22).

The Old Testament linking of God's fatherhood to creation means that he is recognized as father of all creation for all time, so no one people has

[99] Mark S. Smith, "The Baal Cycle," 8; *CAT* 1.2:30–38; Parker, *Ugaritic Narrative Poetry*, 100–1.

[100] *KTU* 1.5 VI:14–17; Parker, *Ugaritic Narrative Poetry*, 149.

exclusive rights to him (Isa 64:8). There is neither time nor place where he is unable to be father to his children. The gods of the ANE may appear as impotent, remote, inaccessible, self-indulgent, and bitter. But the God of the OT is always there for his children (Ps 103:13–17), and nothing—from either the natural or supernatural realm—is able to separate him from them.

There are 18 references in 17 verses of the Hebrew Scriptures that explicitly call God "father."[101] Five of these refer to God as the father of David and his dynasty,[102] eleven to him being the father of his people,[103] and twice his love is compared to the love of a father for his child.[104] Although they range across the breadth of the canon, there are strong thematic and linguistic parallels that may be observed common among them.

The subject of God's fatherhood is not an afterthought in the Hebrew Scriptures, and although it may not immediately be seen in association with major themes of creation, exodus, or covenant, its prominence may still be evidenced by the significance given to the passages that contain them. Note the superlative descriptions which some commentators give to many of the biblical father-God passages: Albright opines that the Song of Moses is one of the most impressive religious poems in the entire Hebrew Scriptures;[105] Kruse suggests that there is hardly any "prophecy" in the Old Testament that has had so many repercussions in biblical literature as the oracle Nathan gave to king David;[106] Gordon thinks that 2 Sam 7 is not only the ideological summit of 'Deuteronomistic History', but also of the OT as a whole;[107] Dahood observes that Ps 68 is widely admitted as textually and exegetically the most difficult and obscure of the psalms;[108] Weiser notes that Ps 103 is "one of the finest blossoms on the tree of biblical faith,"[109]

101 This includes only verses that call God father (אָב), and does not include references where the relationship is implied, or described in different terms, as in the "son" texts (e.g., "you are my son," Ps 2:6; Exod 4:22–23; Hos 11:1; etc.). This has been an arbitrary decision of delimitation—the "son" texts would make a separate study in themselves.

102 2 Sam 7:14; 1 Chr 17:13; 22:10; 28:6; Ps 89:27 [26].

103 Deut 32:6; 1 Chr 29:10; Ps 68:6 [5]; Isa 63:16 (2x); 64:8; Jer 3:4, 19; 31:9; Mal 1:6; 2:10.

104 Ps 103:13; Prov 3:12.

105 W. F. Albright, "Some Remarks on the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32," in E*ssays in Honour of Millar Burrows* (ed. Martin Noth; Leiden: Brill, 1959), 339. Note that Deut 32 is understood here as the Song of Moses, in contrast to Exod 15, which is sometimes given the same name.

106 Heinz Kruse, "David's Covenant," *VT* 35 (1985): 139.

107 Robert P. Gordon, *1 & 2 Samuel: A Commentary* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1986), 235. See also A. A. Anderson, *2 Samuel* (WBC 11; Dallas: Word, 1989), 112.

108 Mitchel Dahood, *Psalms II: 51–100* (AB 17; Garden City: Doubleday, 1968), 133.

109 Artur Weiser, *The Psalms: A Commentary* (trans. H. Hartnell; OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster), 657.

while McConville reports that Jer 31:19 is said to be "among the most poignant" in the book of Jeremiah;[110] and Kaiser calls Mal 2:10–16 "one of the most important and one of the most difficult pericopes in the book of Malachi."[111] Added to these chapters that highlight God's fatherhood, 1 Chr 17 serves as the climax to which the genealogical foundation of the book leads.

God's fatherhood is introduced (at least to public religious life) in a public assembly called to "proclaim the name of the LORD" (Deut 32:3)—a phrase echoing the answer given when Moses asked God to show his face (Exod 33:18–20). In the resulting theophany at Mt. Sinai, God gave specific characteristics to describe himself (34:5–7). These descriptions would later appear in the Song of Moses, and in other father-God passages (especially Ps 103) with the following keywords/ or thoughts: רֶחֶם "motherly yearning;" חַנּוּן "gracious," אֶרֶךְ "slow to anger"—also refers to [eagle] pinions, see Ps 103:5), חֶסֶד "faithfulness," and אֱמֶת "truth," forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, not clearing the guilty, but visiting the iniquity of the parents upon the children to the third and the fourth generation. The word for "yearning" (from the root רחם) is especially interesting in that it includes qualities that, humanly speaking, belong to the mother.[112]

Significant because it is the first extended portrayal of God as father, the linguistic backdrop to the Song of Moses (Deut 32) is painted in the subtle color of creation theology. It commences with calling heaven and earth to attention—an echo of the ten times in creation when God spoke, and a theme seen in other father-God passages.[113] Creation themes become a backdrop for the father-God panorama (the hendiadys of "heaven and earth" in the exordium of v. 1). Exodus and the covenant dominate the foreground. A contrast is drawn between the father-God of covenant faithfulness, who initiated (at creation) and established (during the exodus) a relationship with his people, and the people who are described as "foolish" and "unwise" (v. 6) for their ingratitude and rejection, and their insistence in worshiping "worthless idols" (v. 21). This tension between the fickleness of humanity and the abiding faithfulness of God is witnessed right up to the

[110] Walter Brueggemann, *To Pluck Up, to Tear Down: A Commentary on the Book of Jeremiah 1-25* (ITC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 43.

[111] Walter C. Kaiser Jr., "Divorce in Malachi 2:10–16," *CTR* 2.1 (1987): 73.

[112] Although it may be argued that רֶחֶם can no longer be influenced by the gender implications of רֶחֶם, Sarah J. Dille makes a case for רֶחֶם to maintain its function in feminine imagery. Sarah J. Dille, *Mixing Metaphors: God as Mother and Father in Deutero-Isaiah* (JSOTSup 398 / Gender, Culture, Theory 13; New York: T & T Clark, 2004), 39.

[113] Echoed by the use of certain keywords in the Nathan-vision corpus (בָּנָה "build," כון "establish," heaven and earth [1Chr 29:11], plus Ps 68:8; Ps 89:6–19 [5–18]; Prov 3:19–20; Isa 64:8–9; and Mal 2:10).

time of Malachi (Mal 1:6; 2:10). However, although reference to God's fatherhood in the Song of Moses is cast in the context of a Hittite suzerainty treaty, the alliance described is more in terms of relational closeness than legal bonds. God deals with the situation as a father, gently, but firmly, guiding his errant children, rather than as a conquering king wiping out all opposition.

God's fatherhood, as portrayed in Scripture, is quite unlike the father-gods of the ANE in at least one important regard. Nowhere in the biblical account is there a hint of humans becoming gods, unlike the pharaohs, for example, that became gods on their ascension to the throne. There are a number of places that spell out, at length for example, that once a human always a human (e.g. "He knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust" [Ps 103:14]). This is also seen in the lengths taken to outline Solomon's genealogy. God would raise up a "son," not by his own procreative powers, (as seen in the sexual procreative acts of the ANE father-gods) but through David's act of procreation (2 Sam 7:14). Solomon, then, becomes a son by "adoption," or in other words, his relationship with God is a spiritual, not physical one, yet it profoundly affects every area of the new king's life. This forms the pattern for the father-son relationship with all his children (note that Prov 3:12; and 2 Sam 7:14 both feature the word יכח "discipline" to ensure covenant continuity).

The father nurtures his children to the place where they may live life responsibly and accountably, like a young eagle that must learn to fly (Deut 32:11—the eaglet is tipped off the back of a coaching parent in its flying lessons). He nurtures by building and establishing: a name (2 Sam 7:9); and a dynasty (v. 16) for David; and a throne for Solomon (v. 13). He assures their long-term viability (1 Chr 17:14), sometimes seen in re-establishing his scattered people (Jer 31:7–9). He promises to "plant" his people so that they may have a place free from the oppression of wicked men (2 Sam 7:10), and where they may maintain their social/political stability (1 Chr 22:12–13). David is confident in asking God to establish the hearts of his people toward the father to ensure continuing loyalty (1 Chr 29:18–19), but if they fail, God assures them that their sins have been removed to the remotest extremes (Ps 103:11–12), and that he forgives sin and heals their sickness (v. 3).

The theme of the father-God judging is made prominent in the passages dealt with in Psalms and Proverbs. In Ps 68 he ascends to his throne (v. 19 [18]) from where he deals out the "just deserts" to the oppressors of his people (vv. 2–3 [1–2]; 13 [12]; 15–19 [14–18]; 24 [23]; 31 [30]); he shows himself triumphant over the forces of evil—and to the mind of someone from

the ANE, the forces of the underworld (Ps 68:3 [2]); and he restores the prosperity of his people (vv. 4–13 [3–12]; 20 [19]; 23 [22]; 36 [35]).

The father-God's judicial acts take place from the throne of his sanctuary in heaven, which is described in terms of righteousness, justice, mercy and truth (Ps 89:15 [14]), and it is established for those who keep his covenant (Ps 103:19). This means he not only deals with oppressors of his people, but with their rebellion against the divine order as well. He declares that he will punish his sons if they forsake his laws and judgments, statutes and commandments (vv. 31–33 [30–32]). The idea of God rebuking his children is explained in terms of showing them favor (Prov 3:11–12)—to prevent their ultimate self-destruction. The "son" is admonished neither to forget the father's commands (v. 1) nor to despise the discipline of the LORD, as his discipline is administered because of his love (v. 12). As "the potter," God is given the right to continue to mould and shape human destiny to bring out the best work of art from the human lump of "clay" (Isa 64:8).

Divine-human accountability is backed up by God's memory,[114] which serves not merely of bringing his children to account, but rather functions as a guarantee for covenant continuity and stability. He remembers, "we are dust" (Ps 103:14), and he remembers the Exodus (Isa 64:11) when humans forget. This becomes a long-term reality check, effective in situations such as when "unfaithful Judah" (Jer 3:4–5) used her pious pretense of loyalty to manipulate God's bounty, while at the same time pursuing the hunt for lovers, and covering her "promiscuity" with the hypocrisy of her religious professions by calling on God as her father.

Therefore, God's fatherhood is not something forced upon the unwilling. The "child" of God was given the right of veto. The prospect of divine discipline remained for the one choosing to turn aside, should s/he opt to reject the חֻקִּים "statutes" and מִשְׁפָּטִים "judgments" that God had given to Moses. Initially these decrees were given as a token of parental love (Prov 3:12), and the bond between humanity and God was made sure by virtue of God's faithfulness (חֶסֶד), even if there were times when the human part of the agreement broke down. It is clear that the human is free to break away from the arrangement, even though a number of Bible writers outline both the warnings and the results of pursuing such a course (e.g. Ps 89:47–51 [46–50]).

After repeated attempts of breaking free of the father's yearnings for them, the people repeatedly end up in hopeless despair, rendering the fatherhood of God even more poignant to them. The "not-yet" stance of Isaiah means that sometimes the father may appear frustratingly silent,

[114] God "remembers" in Ps 103:14; Isa 64:11; Jer 2:2; and 31:20.

when he should, at least to human eyes, be down here rattling a few mountains (Isa 63:19 [64:1]). Perhaps the reason he does not is because he has a more gentle approach. He leads the most vulnerable along the most accessible and gentle roads (Jer 31:9)—like a father with a fumbling child—at a pace that may make the Bible writers impatient.[115]

However, what counts in the end, is the exuberance expressed by the people for their father-God—shining above their despair. Psalm 68 expresses a hymn of praise for the father who has jurisdiction over every realm, and old and young celebrate together in the streets (Jer 31:13). What is pictured here is a relationship that at times shows incredible intimacy—experienced on an individual level, and celebrated corporately—between the father-God and his people. Even though many of the passages in this study are based on the Davidic covenant, it appears the common people took this personally, and applied its benefits to themselves. They saw God as their father, and trusted in his care for them.

Even though the human race may have deserted every covenant that God has made with them, he still remains their father because he created them in the first place. He can never cease to be their father.[116] The implication of his faithfulness (חֶסֶד) continuing into eternity (לְעֹלָם) is that the father-God restores the realm of creation—people and land—to its pristine condition in his last act of victory (Jer 31:10–14). Above all, his parenting style may be best described in terms of the two closely related synonyms רֶחֶם "pity, the yearning of a mother" and אָהַב "love." This may not suit those who prefer to see God through a Hellenistic lens, and it may be uncomfortable for those feminist theologians who equate God's fatherhood with patriarchy, but this is the Father the Hebrew Scriptures describe.

[115] Dille observes that inheritance of the land is in itself an indication of a father-son relationship, so the events described here of a return from exile reinforces the idea of a fatherly bond. See Dille, *Mixing Metaphors*, 31.

[116] In the ANE this relationship could be broken after a duly appointed public ceremony, in which the father said, "you are not my son." See Moshe Weinfeld, "Ancient Near Eastern Patterns in Prophetic Literature," *VT* 27 (1977): 188. There is no record of God saying this in Scripture.