

Course Reading

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Kaufmann on the Bible: An Appreciation 1964

On October 9, 1963, Yehezkel Kaufmann, the foremost Jewish bibli-
cist of our time and a profound interpreter of Jewish history, died
after a long illness. Though all of his life's work is suffused with a de-
votion to his people, his original grasp of the issues of Jewish existence
exploded so many fashionable theories, his views were put forth with
such detachment from party, and with such plain-spokenness that few
of the intellectual and academic establishment in Israel were willing to
accord him his due during his lifetime. Never married, a small, ascetic,
retiring man, his life was wholly given over to thought, writing, and
research. To a request for a curriculum vitae he is said to have replied,
"I have no biography, only a bibliography."

The biographical note on Kaufmann in the Hebrew University cata-
logue reads as follows:

Born Dounaievci (Russia), 1889; Yeshiva of Rabbi C. Tschernowitz; Dr.
phil. Berne, 1918; senior teacher of Hebrew subjects, Reali [High]
School, Haifa, 1929-49; research scholar, Bible and history of religion;
recipient, Israel Prize for Jewish Studies, 1958. Hebrew Univ.: Profes-
sor, 1949; Professor Emeritus, 1957.¹

Kaufmann's Berne dissertation was a philosophic "treatise on the
sufficient reason" (*Eine Abhandlung über den Zureichenden Grund*).
Thereafter, although he made a few more contributions to philosophy,
his attention focused almost exclusively upon the complex issues mak-
ing up the riddle of Jewish existence through the ages.² His first major
work, *Gola ve-Nekar* ("Exile and Alienation"), a four-volume historical-

sociological inquiry into Jewish history, dealt chiefly with the post-biblical and Diaspora ages, but one can already find there the germ of the thesis to be developed over the next thirty years in the monumental *Toldot ha-Emuna ha-Yisr'elit* ("History of Israelite Religion," 8 volumes, 1937-1956). Kaufmann believed the singularity of Jewish existence to be determined by the peculiar character of Judaism; but that in turn was rooted in the unique faith of the Bible. Hence, he was inevitably led back to the biblical age in his search for understanding the motives of Jewish history.

Though shy and withdrawn, Kaufmann wrote with vigor and forcefulness. His unorthodoxy (in both the traditional and critical sense), his scope (from the ancient Near East to modern social movements), and his uncompromising self-assurance combined to keep him out of Hebrew University during the best twenty years of his creative life. At the age of sixty, coincident with the retirement of M. Z. Segal in 1949, Kaufmann was suddenly catapulted into a professorship of Bible at the university, which he then held for eight years before retiring. National recognition belatedly followed: the Bialik prize in 1956, the Israel prize in 1958, and in 1961 the highest cultural award, the Bublik prize. It was characteristic of the man that he did not appear at the award-giving ceremonies (once when it was suggested that the ceremony be held at his home, he replied, "If you come for that I will leave for Tiberias"). It was equally characteristic of the award-givers that in the very citation of the Bublik award they expressed reservations about Kaufmann's conclusions in the *Toldot*—for which the award was bestowed (and which, incidentally, was misnamed in the citation).

As time passed, Kaufmann's patience with what he considered the vagaries of biblical criticism grew shorter and shorter. In his final works, the commentaries on Joshua and Judges, his commentatorial virtuosity is spiced with a large dose of pungent criticism and denunciation of the ways of contemporary (especially European) scholarship. In assessing the man's contribution such fulminations must be discounted, but they do help to account for the fact that it took so long to accord him the recognition he richly deserved.

Kaufmann's contribution makes vividly clear how and to what extent the Bible differed from the rest of ancient religious literature, and hence, why its impact on civilization was so much greater. So many parallels between biblical thought and its environment can be shown that the radically different fate of Israel and its religion have become something of an enigma. If, as Wellhausen maintained, "Moab, Ammon, and Edom, Israel's nearest kinsfolk and neighbors, were mon-

otheists in precisely the same sense in which Israel itself was"³ how account for their divergent destinies? Many attempts, of course, have been made to define the difference: the prophetic doctrine of ethical monotheism; the idea of the covenant; the historical rather than mythological nature of biblical religion. However, not one of these adequately accounts for the others, let alone the rest of the differentia. The ethical emphasis neither requires nor is required by the covenantal idea; the covenantal idea is not necessarily anti-mythological or monotheistic. Zoroastrianism was highly ethical—and polytheistic; the Sumerians knew the concept of a covenant between a deity and a king or state; Hittites and Mesopotamians saw theological significance in history. What was it that made for the combination of these and other elements into the unique configuration of biblical thought?

Kaufmann answers: a new intuition of the meaning of reality based on the revolutionary idea that the ground of all is a single Divine Will, transcendent—above fate and magic, outside the continuum of creation—who ordained the world order and revealed his will to men. Breaking the grip of necessity that encloses all pagan views of the world, liberating divinity from fatality, this new intuition infused everything with a radically new meaning. Old forms were largely retained—hence, the many formal parallels between biblical and nonbiblical religion; but they were filled with such new content that (as Kaufmann argues) the bearers of biblical religion no longer understood the pagan conceptions that underlay the practices of their neighbors.

Sacrifice, for example, was no longer regarded as a need of the gods (or God)—a mysterious-magical participation in and maintenance of the cosmic order. It became instead a token of obeisance, a ritual of homage given to men by the grace of God. That is why the prophets could threaten Israel with a stoppage of the cult as a divine punishment for their sin—in utter contrast to pagans who may threaten to stop serving their gods if they fail them. How far biblical writers were from pagan conceptions can be seen in the story of the Philistine "guilt offering" (1 Sam. 5-6). Seeking to rid themselves of a plague of tumors and mice that followed the captured Ark as it moved from town to town, the Philistines make golden images of tumors and mice and, loading them with the Ark on a wagon, send them back to Israelite territory. The modern student recognizes in this a familiar sympathetic magic rite of expulsion; the biblical writer, however, regards the golden images as a guilt offering to God—the only means he knew of getting relief from a plague.

This freedom of the deity from fate and necessity has important consequences in the moral sphere. Human freedom acquires a ground in the ultimate reality—in God. This lends meaning to human choices and justifies human responsibility. A new kind of cosmic drama comes

into being, whose protagonists are God and humans, and whose motive is the tension between the free wills of the two. History displaces myth as the tale of significant events.

But God is not only the author of the material world; he authors the world of values as well. Law and morality both stem from the will of God, unlike the pagan conception in which these are impersonal, primordial elements of the universe, which of themselves do not address or make demands upon persons. The biblical God communicates laws and moral injunctions—expressions of his will—to people directly through revelation. Such an address of one will to another is the only way in which this God can be conceived as relating himself to humans. Since there is no genetic connection, no substantial continuity between God and humans, relationships based on such a connection are precluded. Only the bond created by the meeting of wills remains; therefore, the relation of covenant between God and humans is the only one to which the biblical idea of God was amenable. The covenant idea, argues Kaufmann, was the outcome, not the condition of the distinctive biblical idea of God.

In a comparative morphology that embraces the major manifestations of religious thought, Kaufmann argues with a wealth of detail the distinctiveness of biblical conceptions of cosmogony, cultic ordinances, magic, divination and prophecy, sin and atonement. He shows all of them have been transmuted by the monotheistic idea. Moreover, Kaufmann insists, the non-pagan character of biblical religion is visible in every stratum of the Bible. Hence, he concludes, it is true of every stage of Israel's religion. From its beginning it parted ways with the mythological polytheism of the environment. Living in relative isolation from its neighbors, Israel was able to preserve the distinctive character of its religion throughout the pre-exilic period.

This theory necessitates the detailed arguing of the following major premises:

1. The sources of the Pentateuch, in which the monotheistic viewpoint is generally conceded by all hands, are pre-exilic—including and especially the Priestly Code. Indeed, they belong to a stage of development prior to literary prophecy. Thus, the documents of the earliest stage of Israelite religion already exhibit its essential features.

2. The conditions of the Conquest and Settlement enabled Israel to live relatively insulated from contact with the Canaanites. Kaufmann regarded this as such a crucial matter that instead of completing his *Toldot* he devoted the last ten years of his life to a study of the books of Joshua and Judges.⁴

I see [he wrote me in 1960] that you too are unhappy about my preoccupation with commenting these books. Your view is the same as that of all my good friends, but I cannot agree. . . . These books recount the beginnings of the people of Israel, and so their testimony is decisive for the beginnings of Israel's faith as well. . . . There are pre-monarchic narratives here, though biblical criticism refuses to acknowledge the fact, since that would demolish its position.

The generally accepted view, based in part on what seems to be the biblical evidence, is that after the Israelites entered Canaan (the manner of that entry being in dispute) an amalgamation of populations occurred, with the inevitable coloration of Israelite religion by Canaanite. Indeed, the two must at times have been hardly distinguishable. Kaufmann rejects this view in its entirety. He seeks to demonstrate the historicity of the representation of the invasion in the book of Joshua as a unified attack upon Canaan, carried out with ruthless terror. The highlands of Palestine were cleared of natives, except for a few clearly defined enclaves; only in the coastal and lowlands could the Canaanites hold out for a time owing to their superior chivalry. There was no peaceful settling of Israel among the Canaanites, and hence no basis for a syncretism of their religions.

3. This brings us to the most radical and fundamental part of Kaufmann's argument: the insistence that pre-exilic Israel was not a pagan people; that the biblical indictment of Israel as a backsliding, apostate, "stiffnecked" people is tendentious and exaggerated.

For Kaufmann is not content with arguing the monotheistic character of biblical literature. In his view, that literature is a faithful reflection of the religion of the folk as well. Kaufmann has felt with peculiar sensibility the popular nature of biblical religion. It does not have the character of an esoteric doctrine held by a spiritual elite. This was a folk religion; its leaders sprang from the folk, addressed themselves to the folk, and built their teachings upon the faith of the folk. Israel's prophets introduced no new God, taught no new theology or history. They shared with the folk the same paradigmatic stories about the mighty acts of God in Israel and elsewhere. To be sure, they deduced consequences from this God-belief with a consistency and rigor that the folk could not follow, but this cannot obscure the fundamental unity of their faith with that of the folk.

Another line of argument takes its departure from the consistent misrepresentation of pagan religion as fetishism. A remarkable fact which Kaufmann never tires of reiterating is that throughout the Bible, pagan worship is depicted as the adoration of wood and stone, gold

and silver, of gods that see not and hear not and speak not and eat not. Not a word is said about the living gods and goddesses of which the idols (as we know) were but symbols. The biblical writers seem ignorant of the world of mythology that described the lives and actions of these living gods. To real pagans such jeering at the images would have been wholly irrelevant. Kaufmann accounts for this strange misrepresentation by assuming that Israel was no longer aware of the real nature of paganism. The belief they ascribe to the pagans was, in fact, nothing else than the vestigial idolatry that survived in Israel after genuine mythological polytheism had died—a fetishistic veneration of charmed objects; a superstitious, unofficial, private cult of figurines without benefit of clergy and temple. It was not a culturally productive part of national life at all.

Kaufmann allows that there were occurrences of genuine pagan beliefs. But these turn out, upon examination, to have been importations, not a native product: such phenomena as the chapels built by Solomon for his foreign wives outside of Jerusalem, or the company of Baal prophets and priests that Jezebel brought with her from Tyre to Samaria, or the unique case of Manasseh, the servile vassal of Assyria who paganized Judah forcibly, "filling Jerusalem with blood from one end to the other." It is typical and indicative of the foreignness of these phenomena that they come and go in bloody strife. And what further differentiates them from Israel's vestigial idolatry is their cultic accoutrements: these gods have sanctuaries, priests, and prophets.

For Kaufmann, then, what the Bible calls idolatry is just that: the worship of images, fetishes, nothing more. This mythless, magical adoration of images was indeed practiced by the vulgar throughout the pre-exilic age, and beyond it (cf. 2 Macc. 12:40ff.). Essentially it posed no rival to Israel's God; nonetheless, the zealots of YHWH regarded it as apostasy, and branded it as vicious folly.

Again, the biblical writers brand as idolatrous customs belonging to earlier stages of Israelite religion—customs in themselves not essentially polytheistic—that were later outlawed, e.g., the use of sacred commemorative pillars in the cult of YHWH. To interpret idolatry as "the way of the nations roundabout Israel" as we know it to have been rather than as it is depicted in the Bible itself is an egregious error. The gentile cults that the Bible attributes to Israel are utterly different from the mythological polytheism we know gentile religion to have been from its own sources. Gentile religion according to the Bible is fetishism; that, argues Kaufmann, is but a projection of Israel's own peculiar idolatry on its neighbors. Pagan beliefs had died so long before that the earliest records of Israel already misunderstand them.

The currently regnant opinion that pre-exilic Israel was ridden through with pagan beliefs makes Israel's survival through the Babylo-

nian Exile and its restoration a great riddle. Had Israel worshiped the pagan gods while in its homeland, what reason had it to abandon them in favor of YHWH, whose temple lay in ruins and whose king and army had fallen, when it went into exile? If with virtually no trace of struggle the exiled folk accepted the prophetic interpretation of the exile as punishment for violating the covenant (though, as Jeremiah 44 shows, an alternative pagan interpretation was available to a handful of Judeans); if in Persian times tens of thousands returned to Judea to rebuild it (with the support of those who remained behind)—this can mean only that those who went into exile were, in their vast bulk, worshipers of YHWH.

Kaufmann thus has grave reservations regarding the validity of the biblical denunciation of Israel's apostasy. For he regards this denunciation as flowing from a theological postulate that tended to distort reality: the need of theodicy. Justification of God's judgment upon Israel is a leading motif of biblical thought. The whole historical narrative serves as an explanation for the failure of God's covenant with Israel. In accord with biblical doctrine, that failure must be blamed on human dereliction—hence, the necessity of amassing an overwhelming, decisive indictment against Israel which would leave no doubt about the justice of its fate. This led, Kaufmann argues, to the generalization of guilt from the few to the many; to an exaggeration, and even an invention of guilt. And the guilt had to be idolatry, for that was the one national sin that would entail exile according to the oldest, most widely accepted view of the terms of the covenant. Whereas in other matters the theological postulates of the Bible tend to bolster our confidence in the record (e.g., the absence of self-glorification derived from the insistence that the power of God is behind all success), here a postulate acts to distort it. Israel's apostasy is a need of theodicy, hence its assertion cannot be taken at face value.

Criticism of Kaufmann's work since it has come to the attention of Western scholars⁵ has focused upon his sharp differentiation of Israelite religion from paganism on the one hand, and his "cavalier," "arbitrary" rejection of the biblical indictment of Israel's idolatry on the other. The two amount to the same thing. For the tendency of modern biblical scholarship is to assimilate the phenomenon of Israel to the rest of the ancient Near East. Leaning on analogy, elements of Israelite religion are interpreted as similar in meaning to parallels elsewhere. What Kaufmann takes to be fossils of pre-Israelite conceptions embedded in a later context, and requiring interpretation in the light of that context, others take to be clues to an earlier stage of Israel's religion itself. Certain Psalms call the king the "son of God": Kaufmann insists

that this cliché of Near Eastern court style must be qualified on every side by the absence elsewhere of any trace of deification of kings in Israel. Others, however, consider such a phrase to be a clue to an attitude toward kings that has otherwise been obscured by later editing of the Bible. Kaufmann, they say, here and in similar cases, bases his views on the weakest of foundations: an argument from silence. To this Kaufmann replies: silence here is eloquent, for if such pagan usages really obtained, the biblical authors, intent as they were upon scraping together every bit of sin to damn Israel, would never have omitted it!

There is a serious methodological issue at stake here. How is one to interpret fossils in religion? No scholar will deny that biblical religion, like all religions, shows stratification. The question is whether such stratification betrays stages in the history of biblical religion, or, since it is characteristic of religion to conserve the old alongside the new, and since Israelite religion came into being late, stratification here may not simply be the effect of incorporating older bodies whole into the new Israelite context—with the new determining (for the Israelite) the meaning of the old. In view of the overwhelmingly monotheistic context of biblical thought, the burden would seem to rest on those who claim that fossils are more than memorials to a stage that is pre-historic, so far as Israel is concerned.

Kaufmann's inclination to interpret the atypical in the light of the typical has resulted in the charge that he is anti-evolutionary, that he sees without perspective.

It is true that Kaufmann denies an evolution from the pagan to the Israelite conception of deity. The biblical monotheistic idea is, for him, a new intuition of reality, not an arithmetic matter of diminishing the number of the gods. Even if all the pagan gods were rolled into one, this one would still be far from the God of Israel—an utterly transcendent being, free from necessity and fate, beyond magic, etc. But in tracing the evolution of the monotheistic idea itself in Israel, Kaufmann has outdone his critics. He shows how in its early stage (Torah and histories) few of the far-reaching implications of monotheism for the cult and eschatology were realized. Not until classical prophecy, Kaufmann shows, was the primacy of morality over the cult expounded, or the ideal of the reunification of mankind envisioned. Not before apocalypse was the full-blown historical determinism incipient in the prophets manifest. Kaufmann traces the development of the idea that idolatry is counted a sin against the gentiles through Isaiah, Habakkuk, Jeremiah, and postbiblical writings. There is a beautiful chapter (on Jonah) showing the evolution of the idea of repentance.

No one has done more than Kaufmann to give a perspective vision of the unfolding of the monotheistic idea in Israel.

Why, then, does he appear to so many to be anti-evolutionary? Because of the gross misconception that the only terms in which evolution may be spoken of in biblical religion is from polytheism to monotheism. Insensitive to the record of evolution of the monotheistic idea itself, stages in it have been apportioned between polytheism and monotheism. Before the Babylonian period, for example, the idolatry of the nations was not only condoned by Israel's thinkers, but believed by them to have been divinely appointed. Habakkuk and Jeremiah are the first to open an attack on the idolatry of the nations. Accordingly it is asserted by some that Jeremiah, or the Second Isaiah, were the first *real* monotheists—as though *real* monotheism were incapable of conceiving that the one God had chosen to make Himself known only to a portion of mankind, leaving the rest in ignorance.

Kaufmann's critique of the biblical condemnation of Israel for idolatry has come under heavy fire. He himself believed that fire to have a theological animus.

Christians are especially incapable [he wrote me in 1962] of reconciling themselves to the idea that Israel was not a sinful nation, a people weighted with iniquity; for didn't they crucify Jesus and reject Christianity? And yet . . . !

The truth of the matter is that modern chroniclers of the history of Israelite religion have not always managed to disengage their views from the judgments of faith made by the biblical authors. Thus, modern accounts of the last years of Judah regularly depict in lurid colors borrowed chiefly from Ezekiel the syncretism and debased religious practices that flourished in Jerusalem before the Fall. But this picture of Judah's spiritual decay depends on the biblical conviction that Israel's destiny was determined by a special divine providence, governed by a unique standard, the standard of covenant obligation of loyalty to God. The terrible calamity that befell Israel meant a terrible burden of guilt. The tale of that guilt included murder, fornication, bribe-taking, stealing, as well as apostasy, and it went back to the beginning of Israel's history in order to fill the measure. The modern historian who takes such catalogues of sin at face value is naïve; only a sober, nontheological criticism, balancing the evidence of Ezekiel against that of Kings, Jeremiah, and Lamentations, can hope to arrive at an approximation of the true state of affairs. Kaufmann maintains that such a sober criticism reveals that much of Israel's sin is the result of the special standard to which the prophets hold Israel, much else the result of generalization. This is not chauvinism or special pleading;

it is simply an attempt to separate empirical history from theological judgments made about history. In the field of biblical scholarship such attempts have been all too few.

A word concerning Kaufmann's "rationalistic" bias may be said here. In the Joshua commentary particularly, the rationalistic presuppositions are much in evidence as Kaufmann declares legendary one after another of the many miraculous embellishments of the Conquest narrative. Yet it is not the shallow rationalism that believes every phenomenon capable of explanation. In particular, it refuses to undertake to account for the birth of a new idea.

The birth of an original, genial creation, of an individual or of a society, is not susceptible of "explanation." The rise of every new and original idea is a marvel, any "explanation" of which is bound to be specious and superficial. True, a historian is obligated to explain the phenomena, but this obligation involves too the determination of what he is unable to explain. . . .

Why and how the new religious idea of a transcendent divine will was born in the mind of Moses cannot be known. It could not be known even if more had come down to us concerning that revelation than a beautiful and wondrous fabric of legend. Only with regard to the social-historical background of that revelation is it possible to say something on the basis of the biblical evidence. . . . (*Toldot*, II, 41, 45)

Thus, though himself not a man of faith, Kaufmann leaves room for the answer of faith to the phenomenon of the Bible.⁶

Kaufmann's great strength lay unquestionably in the philosophic-analytic sphere—in the discrimination, interrelation, and development of ideas. His strictly historical and philological contributions, though often containing valuable and suggestive insights, generally lack the same creative brilliance. Here the critic comes to the fore, exposing the weakness in the theories of his predecessors, rather than the master-builder. His historical and exegetical work is similar in that both aim to make sense out of the given data with a minimum of recourse to extrinsic sources. Kaufmann endeavors to show the given in the most plausible light, and while he does not hesitate to emend, rearrange, or excise texts when he feels it necessary, he has done more than most modern scholars to make the biblical text cohere without such recourse. His historical inquiries too contrast with those of the Alt (and even the Albright) school in their restraint. They hew much more closely to the data in their present form, showing little of the imaginative and detective-like approach advocated, say, by Collingwood in the reconstruction of history from documents.

In any historical narrative there must be a good measure of speculation [he wrote me in 1962]. But Collingwood's "detective" theory is too ingenuous. The historian cannot play the detective. Moreover, we know that lawmen investigate and judge and sentence and—fail, clearing the guilty and condemning the innocent.

If at times the guiding principle of biblical criticism appears to be "since the text says so it must be otherwise," the net effect of Kaufmann's approach is to make him (save in the case of Israel's indictment for idolatry, as explained earlier) the advocate of the text. And this tendency grew to its fullest expression in the commentaries to Judges and Joshua.

Countering this tendency at certain points was the pressure of Kaufmann's system, forcing recalcitrant material into the desired mold against the plain sense. As is true with all great synthesists, Kaufmann seemed unable to appreciate fairly data that did not fit readily into the grand pattern. Gideon's battle with Baal is a case in point. Here is one instance, at least, of an Israelite cult of a Canaanite deity that calls into question Kaufmann's insistence upon the absence of contamination of early Israelite religion by Canaanite. So Kaufmann tried, for a time, to deny the plain sense by interpreting the battle as raging over the proper epithets of YHWH (*Toldot*, II: 143). Only later, in his commentary to Judges, did he allow that "perhaps there were some Canaanite vestiges in Ophrah." More revealing is his refusal to acknowledge the presence of vicarious suffering and atonement in Isaiah 53. To my expression of disagreement with his handling of the subject he replied:

It is true, as you say, that the idea is rabbinic; but is that not a Christian influence? . . . The conception of justice and mercy is Jewish. But the conception of vicarious suffering is rooted in that of the avenging Erinyes, who require satisfaction. That is something fundamentally pagan. I cannot believe that an Israelite prophet conceived such an idea.

There were more things in ancient Israel than are dreamed of even in Kaufmann's philosophy. The biblical record is too true to life to be encompassed by a single system, be it ever so complex, ramified and marvelously integrated. The varieties of contemporary religious expression that Kaufmann convincingly pleads for, in opposition to the naïve rectilinear systems of his predecessors, were in fact more various than he was willing to admit.

Since Kaufmann's categorical language has been a stumbling block, a

word of exegesis is here in order. It is part of classical Hebrew style to favor hyperbole and picturesque imagery that, if translated literally into English, must seem barbarous. A familiar Talmudic dictum, "No reliance is to be placed upon categorical statements" takes this penchant into account and to a considerable extent must be applied to Kaufmann's style for a proper reading of him. Amidst the many categorical statements one must be on the lookout for the qualification, which usually makes its appearance sooner or later, and which must be extended to all further occurrences of that statement. A crucial example is Kaufmann's oft-repeated assertion that the biblical writers are ignorant of mythological polytheism, from which he proceeds to infer that Israel's world was free from myth. In one passage the following significant qualification is made:

A psychological consideration rebels against adopting in its extreme form the conclusion . . . that the biblical age was not only ignorant of pagan myths but also of the gentile's belief in living gods. For how is it possible that Israel, between whom and the gentiles there was always constant intercourse, and in whose midst, as it seems, zealous and loyal pagans lived, was not aware that the gentiles believed in living gods, not in fetishes alone? We do not, in fact, mean to assert that there were no circles in Israel who knew paganism better than the authors of the Bible. After all, no pagan-Israelite sources have come down to us, hence we cannot make a sweeping categorical judgment. However, the fact that in the Bible no myth concerning a foreign deity is ever mentioned or alluded to, and that the Bible was able to base its anti-idolatry polemic solely on the argument of fetishism teaches us, at least, that the chief influence of foreign paganism upon Israel was not in the realm of mythology; and that in essence the struggle of the faith of YHWH against foreign cults was not a struggle against foreign myths. (I:283)

To my recollection Kaufmann never again mentions "pagan-Israelite sources"; indeed, he endeavors to minimize their presence to the vanishing point. What interests him is the mainstream of Israel's culture, and that, he is convinced, is to be found in the biblical record.

One may be convinced, after Kaufmann, that the phenomenology of biblical faith is indeed as he has portrayed it and yet be haunted by the doubt that it so wholly dominated the scene in ancient Israel. It is true that the Bible says virtually nothing about a native Israelite magic, or demonology, or illegitimate YHWH-divination—yet these all existed in postbiblical and rabbinic times. Is it not more plausible to interpret such later phenomena as survivals rather than as later importations? Perhaps the biblical silence on these matters is not as decisive

as Kaufmann would have it. It is true, again, that the polemic against idolatry consistently misrepresents pagan worship as fetishism—an argument that could not convince a theologically informed pagan. But what do we know of the level of belief of the pagan, let alone the Israelite, masses? How much of a mythological basis had the vulgar religion? Again, what assurance is there that the polemic has not distorted the opposed beliefs in the light of the polemicists' own views? Consider the alternative that Elijah puts to his audience at Mount Carmel: Either YHWH or Baal, you cannot have both. That is certainly not a pagan way of looking at things, and, to the extent that the audience were informed Baal worshipers, the alternative would not have appeared a real one. The formulation is addressed to wavering *monotheists*, presupposes the monotheistic viewpoint, and chooses to disregard the pagan one. And yet it is hard to doubt that there were real pagans present. Whether Elijah actually spoke as reported or the narrator has recast his speech, a pagan viewpoint that seems likely to have been present has gone unnoticed in the biblical record; when pagans are addressed a viewpoint of the writer is ascribed to them.

It seems clear that, as has been maintained vigorously by modern criticism, ancient Israel had more than one religion. Where criticism appears to have erred is in assuming that we can form a picture of Israel's nonbiblical religion(s) from the biblical evidence. Israel's nonbiblical religion(s) can no more be known from the biblical evidence than can the religions of Israel's neighbors. For the true objects of the biblical polemic are either faults of monotheism (e.g., the overvaluation of the cult) or a caricature or vestige of true paganism called idolatry. Kaufmann contends that this proves the absence of real polytheists in Israel, but all it proves is that the biblical writers never addressed themselves to such persons, though it seems certain that they existed. Biblical literature grew in and spoke to the monotheistic actuality and potentiality of ancient Israel. Ideally (to these writers) all Israel was included, but what proportion of the population was really involved can hardly be known. That this was the official public religion of Israel in pre-exilic times may be granted. By post-exilic times it was the sole surviving form of ancient Israel's faith.

Of this religion, then, Kaufmann has given a magnificent account, in which the parts cohere in a remarkably integrated whole. That he has found a key to the phenomena cannot be doubted, for otherwise so much could not be illuminated by his fundamental thesis on the nature of the monotheistic idea. Kaufmann's philosophic grasp of the elements of the biblical worldview makes it possible to comprehend it with a new clarity as one of the perennially relevant expressions of the quest for meaning. This perhaps is Kaufmann's greatest contribution: that he has elevated the discussion of biblical thought above ecclesias-

tical dogma and partisanship into the realm of the eternally significant ideas.

NOTES

1. 1960 edition; for further information see the obituary notices and appreciations in *Davar*, 11 October 1963; *Haaretz*, 11 October 1963; *Yedi'ot Aharonot*, 18 October 1963; but especially Israeli President Shazar's memoir in *Hadoar*, 13 Kislev 5724, and Nahum Glatzer's in *Bitzaron* 49/1 (October 1963):1-5, and the editorial notice, *ibid.*, 47.

2. A full bibliography of Kaufmann's writings appeared in the *Yehezkel Kaufmann Jubilee Volume*, ed. Menahem Haran (Jerusalem 1960), 1-8.

3. J. Wellhausen, article, "Israel," reprinted from the *EncBrit* (ninth ed., 1880, XIII, 396-420) in the English translation of *Prolegomena to the History of Israel* (Edinburgh, 1885), 440.

4. Kaufmann's full-dress Hebrew commentaries on these works appeared in 1959 and 1961, respectively. A preliminary study, *The Biblical Account of the Conquest of Palestine*, appeared in English in 1953 (cf. the reaction of John Bright in *Early Israel in Recent History Writing* [Chicago, 1956], 56-78). (Reissued as *The Biblical Account of the Conquest of Canaan* in 1985, with a preface by me and maps by Shmuel Ahituv.)

5. In the present writer's English abridgment, *The Religion of Israel* (second corrected printing, Chicago, 1963); cf. representative reviews by J. P. Hyatt, *JBR*, January, 1961; D. R. Dumm, *CBQ*, January 1961; (London) *Times Literary Supplement*, June 16, 1961; G. E. Mendenhall, *The Lutheran*, August 9, 1961; D. N. Freedman, *JBL*, March 1962; W. Harrelson, *Int*, October 1962.

6. On the question of Kaufmann's "faith," the reference to Providence on page 39 of the Preface to the 1960 printing of the *Toldot* is noteworthy.

Additional note:

An intellectual biography of Kaufmann has now appeared: Thomas M. Krapp, *Yehezkel Kaufmann: Ein Lebens- und Erkenntnisweg zur Theologie der Hebräischen Bibel* (Berlin: Institut Kirche und Judentum, 1990). Krapp has also produced a comprehensive account of Kaufmann's thesis concerning the antiquity of the priestly source of the Pentateuch, its neglect by Christian biblical scholarship and its Jewish-Israeli advocates: *Die Priesterschrift und die vorexilische Zeit: Yehezkel Kaufmanns vernachlässigter Beitrag zur Geschichte der biblischen Religion* (Freiburg, Schweiz: Universitätsverlag/Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992).

Kaufmann's argument that the biblical depiction of pagan religion misrepresents it as fetishism ("worship of wood and stone") is contested by J. Faur, "The Biblical Idea of Idolatry," *JQR* 69 (1978):1-15. Faur adduces much evidence for the pagan conception of the god-image as divine in itself. On the other hand, J.D. Levenson, "Yehezkel Kaufmann and Mythology," *Conservative Judaism* 36 (1982):36-43 discounts the fetishistic representation as a distorting reductionism by biblical polemicists (cf. my argument from the story of Elijah on Mount Carmel). Levenson further criticizes Kaufmann for adopting too narrow a definition of mythology—after the correcting of which Levenson finds allusions to myths about YHWH. Yet Levenson admits that the Bible, so far alone in the ancient Near East, exhibits a "disjunction from" and a "restriction of" the world of myth.

THE BIBLICAL TEXT AND ITS INTERPRETATION