

Abraham, Early West-Semitic Religion, and the Emergence of Abrahamic Monotheism: A Historical, Theological, and Ethnographic Inquiry

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Abstract

This study examines the gradual transformation of early West-Semitic religious conceptions into what later became known as Abrahamic monotheism. Rather than approaching monotheism as a fully formed and static theological doctrine, the article analyzes its historical crystallization within specific social, political, and cultural environments of the ancient Near East. Focusing on Abraham as a transitional and foundational figure, the study situates him within the polytheistic milieu of early second-millennium BCE Mesopotamia and the Levant. It explores how the biblical narrative presents Abraham not as the sudden inventor of monotheism, but as a personality emerging from a West-Semitic religious landscape shaped by the worship of El and related divine titles. Within this environment, the gradual consolidation of exclusive devotion to one deity may be understood as a process of theological differentiation and reinterpretation. Drawing upon canonical texts, rabbinic midrash, Qur'anic tradition, and selected ethnographic materials collected by Larysa Karaliova during documented field research in Israel, the article examines how Abraham's image evolved across traditions. These living narratives, while not canonical, illuminate the continuing reinterpretation of Abraham as a symbol of divine unity. Special attention is given to the relationship between the West-Semitic high god El, titles such as El Elyon and El Shaddai, and the later consolidation of YHWH-centered monotheism. The study argues that the emergence of Abrahamic monotheism reflects not abrupt rupture but gradual theological crystallization within inherited religious language. Through historical, theological, and ethnographic analysis, this inquiry contributes to understanding how divine unity became articulated within the Abrahamic traditions and how Abraham's figure continues to function as a site of interpretative negotia-

tion across Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

Keywords

Abrahamic Traditions, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Covenant, Messianism

1. Introduction

In this study, “monotheism” (Smith, 2001) is understood not as an abstract philosophical assertion, but as the historical consolidation of exclusive allegiance to a single divine authority. “Abrahamic monotheism” refers to the later theological systems that emerged from this process within Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The term “crystallization” is used to describe gradual theological consolidation rather than sudden doctrinal invention. “Messianism” denotes the development of future-oriented redemptive expectations within institutionalized religious frameworks.

The present study builds upon established scholarship as well as original interdisciplinary research conducted by Larysa Karaliova (Figure 1). In addition to reviewing academic literature, Karaliova engaged in documented discussions with representatives of Jewish, Christian (Catholic and Orthodox), and Muslim communities during repeated research visits to Israel. These encounters included conversations in Jerusalem, Nazareth, Akko, and Qumran. Some of the materials incorporated in this study derive from these interactions and reflect living interpretative traditions. While such narratives do not possess canonical authority, they illuminate how Abrahamic origins continue to be understood and reinterpreted within contemporary religious communities.



Figure 1. Larysa Karaliova during field research in Jerusalem, 2015.

Elements of the Torah, in varying forms, are present across all Abrahamic scriptures. This shared textual foundation invites examination of the theological archi-

ture of the Torah itself. The Torah is not merely a liturgical document; it presents a comprehensive vision of creation grounded in a single divine source. In Genesis, this source is designated as Elohim. In Islamic tradition, the term *Allah* refers to the one God; linguistically, it derives from *al-ilāh* (“the God”). The Hebrew term *Elohim*, though morphologically plural, frequently governs singular verbs when referring to the God of Israel. This grammatical phenomenon has long generated debate. Some interpret the plural as a “plural of majesty,” while others view it as reflecting earlier stages of linguistic or theological development.

From the perspective of historical linguistics, *Elohim* derives from the Northwest Semitic root *El*. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch offers a homiletic interpretation connecting *Elohim* with the demonstrative pronoun אֵלֶּה (“these”) to emphasize multiplicity within unity (Hirsch, 1993). However, from the perspective of historical linguistics, *Elohim* is generally derived from the Northwest Semitic root אֱל (El), with the plural suffix -ים. The coexistence of plural morphology with singular verbal agreement remains a subject of scholarly discussion. In the broader West-Semitic religious environment, *El* appears as a high god within a polytheistic framework, most clearly attested in Ugaritic texts, where he presides over a divine council. This raises an important historical question: to what extent did early Israelite religion emerge in continuity with this West-Semitic religious landscape, and how did devotion to YHWH gradually become exclusive?

Rather than assuming that monotheism appeared fully articulated at a single historical moment, this study approaches it as a process. The biblical text itself preserves linguistic and conceptual layers that suggest gradual consolidation. Titles such as *El Elyon*, *El Shaddai*, and other divine epithets may reflect inherited religious vocabulary that was later integrated into an emerging YHWH-centered theology. In this sense, biblical monotheism can be understood as the crystallization of earlier West-Semitic religious conceptions within a distinct covenantal framework.

Textual and archaeological evidence further demonstrate the complexity of transmission. Ancient Near Eastern religions frequently included divine hierarchies and familial relationships among deities, such as those found in Ugaritic mythology involving El, Baal, and Asherah. Variations between the Masoretic Text, the Samaritan Pentateuch, and the Septuagint illustrate how textual preservation involves interpretative development. Within Judaism, the Hebrew text retains normative authority. Similarly, in Islamic tradition, the Arabic Qur’an holds canonical status, and translations are considered interpretative renderings rather than replacements of the original.

The present inquiry therefore moves on two levels simultaneously: historical reconstruction of the early West-Semitic religious milieu and analysis of the evolving theological interpretation of Abraham within Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. By examining both textual and living traditions, the study seeks to understand how the figure of Abraham became central to the gradual emergence of Abrahamic monotheism.

For methodological clarity, the present study distinguishes between three levels of evidence: 1) historical reconstruction based on archaeological and comparative textual data; 2) canonical textual analysis grounded in the Hebrew Bible and the Qur'an; and 3) interpretative and ethnographic materials, including rabbinic traditions and contemporary oral accounts. These categories are treated as complementary but not equivalent forms of evidence throughout the analysis.

2. Abraham and the West-Semitic Religious World

The designation “Abrahamic religions” is a retrospective theological and comparative construct. It does not describe the historical reality of the early second millennium BCE. In the period traditionally associated with Abraham, no Judaism, Christianity, or Islam existed as defined religious systems. What existed instead was a diverse West-Semitic religious environment shaped by polytheistic traditions, local cults, and regional high gods (Day, 2002).

According to the biblical narrative, Abraham was the son of Terah, originating from Ur of the Chaldeans (The Torah, 2010, Genesis 11:26-31). Ur was a major Mesopotamian urban center characterized by developed architecture, temple complexes, and institutionalized polytheistic worship. The text of Joshua 24:2 preserves an important theological memory: “Long ago your ancestors, including Terah the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the Euphrates and worshiped other gods.” This suggests that Abraham emerged from a religious milieu in which multiple deities were venerated.

The biblical text does not describe Abraham as born into monotheism. Rather, it presents him as a figure who gradually enters into a covenantal relationship with a single deity. Later interpretative traditions intensified this portrayal. Rabbinic midrash recounts episodes in which Abraham confronts idolatry, symbolically destroying his father's idols and exposing their impotence. Although such narratives do not appear in the canonical Genesis account, they reflect early Jewish efforts to portray Abraham as a conscious pioneer of exclusive devotion.

Within the historical context of the ancient Near East, devotion to a high god such as El was not unusual. What becomes distinctive in the Abrahamic narrative is not the existence of a high deity, but the exclusive and covenantal character of the relationship attributed to Abraham. The transformation from participation in a broader West-Semitic religious vocabulary to the consolidation of a single covenantal allegiance represents a crucial step in the development of what would later be understood as monotheism.

2.1. Migration, Covenant, and Religious Reorientation

The biblical text does not explicitly state the motive for the departure from Ur (The Torah, 2010, Genesis 11:31). Terah initiates the movement toward Haran; Abraham later continues toward Canaan. The canonical narrative frames this transition primarily as obedience to divine calling: “Go from your country, your kindred, and your father's house” (The Torah, 2010, Genesis 12:1).

This command implies more than geographical relocation. The phrase “your father’s house” may signify separation from inherited structures of identity—familial, economic, and potentially religious. In light of Joshua 24:2, which recalls ancestral worship of “other gods,” the migration may be read as symbolic movement away from religious plurality toward exclusive allegiance.

Yet the narrative remains restrained. It does not describe a philosophical manifesto against polytheism. Instead, it portrays a developing relationship marked by promise: land, descendants, and blessing. Monotheistic consciousness appears not as abstract doctrine, but as covenantal trust embedded in concrete historical movement.

Thus, Abraham’s departure may be understood as both theological and socio-political reorientation. The promise of land introduces a territorial dimension characteristic of ancient Near Eastern political theology. Divine election becomes intertwined with collective identity.

2.2. Lot

Lot accompanies Abram from Ur (*The Torah*, 2010, Genesis 11:31), following the death of his father Haran (*The Torah*, 2010, Genesis 11:28). The biblical narrative presents Lot initially as part of Abraham’s household, sharing in his migration and prosperity. The separation between them is explicitly attributed to economic tension between their herdsmen (*The Torah*, 2010, Genesis 13:6-7).

Nevertheless, the narrative framing introduces subtle contrast. Lot chooses the well-watered plain of the Jordan and settles near Sodom (*The Torah*, 2010, Genesis 13:10-12), a city described as morally corrupt (*The Torah*, 2010, Genesis 13:13). The text does not accuse Lot of idolatry, nor does it portray him as abandoning Abraham’s God. However, his proximity to Sodom situates him within an ethically ambiguous environment.

Abraham, by contrast, remains geographically and symbolically separate. He later intercedes before God for the preservation of Sodom (*The Torah*, 2010, Genesis 18), explicitly aware that Lot resides there. When the cities are destroyed (*The Torah*, 2010, Genesis 19), Lot is spared but does not rejoin Abraham’s household. The narrative offers no explanation for this absence.

While the Torah does not attribute the separation to theological disagreement, the literary structure invites reflection on differing trajectories: Abraham emerges as the bearer of covenantal continuity, whereas Lot’s line develops independently, becoming associated with the Moabites and Ammonites (*The Torah*, 2010, Genesis 19:37-38). In this sense, Lot functions as a narrative foil, highlighting the distinctiveness of Abraham’s developing covenantal identity.

2.3. Abraham as Transitional Figure

Abraham occupies an intermediate position between inherited West-Semitic religious language and later fully articulated monotheistic confession. In Genesis, divine titles such as El Elyon (*The Torah*, 2010, Genesis 14:18-20) and El Shaddai

(*The Torah*, 2010, Genesis 17:1) appear prior to the Sinai revelation of the Tetragrammaton's theological centrality.

This linguistic layering suggests continuity rather than rupture. The God who enters into covenant with Abraham is described using vocabulary already embedded in the broader Semitic religious world. Yet within the Abrahamic narrative, these titles begin to converge toward exclusivity. The process is gradual. The biblical text preserves traces of earlier religious forms while simultaneously reinterpreting them.

Rather than depicting monotheism as sudden invention, the Abraham cycle reflects a stage of theological consolidation. Exclusive devotion emerges within inherited language. The crystallization of YHWH-centered monotheism thus appears as historical development rooted in West-Semitic tradition.

2.4. Abraham before Law

It is significant that Abraham lives prior to the giving of the Torah at Sinai. There is no codified law, no Decalogue, and no institutionalized religious system. His relationship with God is personal, dialogical, and covenantal. He negotiates over Sodom (*The Torah*, 2010, Genesis 18), expresses doubt concerning offspring (Genesis 15), and acts within complex moral circumstances (*The Torah*, 2010, Genesis 12; 20).

This pre-legal context reinforces the transitional character of Abraham's faith. It is not yet doctrinal monotheism as later defined; it is relational allegiance grounded in promise. Later Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions would interpret this allegiance through their own theological frameworks. But within Genesis itself, Abraham stands at a formative moment—between inherited polytheistic environment and emerging exclusive devotion.

2.5. Abraham and Melchizedek: El Elyon and the Religious Horizon of Shalem

One of the most intriguing episodes in the Abraham narrative appears in Genesis 14, where Abraham encounters Melchizedek, described as “king of Shalem” and “priest of El Elyon” (*The Torah*, 2010, Genesis 14:18-20). This brief yet theologically dense passage has generated sustained reflection across Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions.

The identification of Shalem has traditionally been associated with Jerusalem. In the Amarna letters of the fourteenth century BCE, the city appears as *Urusalim*. Many scholars interpret this name as incorporating the West-Semitic element *Shalem*, likely referring to a deity associated with completeness, dusk, or peace. If so, the toponym originally signified “City of Shalem” rather than “City of Peace,” a later theological reinterpretation.

Such an etymology situates pre-Israelite Jerusalem firmly within the broader West-Semitic religious world. The city was not originally a monotheistic center in the later Israelite sense; it participated in the polytheistic environment of the Le-

vant. Yet Genesis 14 presents its king as priest of *El Elyon*—“God Most High.”

The title *El Elyon* is significant. The term *El* corresponds to the Northwest Semitic high god attested in Ugaritic texts, where El presides over a divine council. The epithet *Elyon* (“*Most High*”) functions as a superlative designation. In a polytheistic setting, such language could describe the highest among gods. Within the Abraham narrative, however, the title becomes increasingly singular in reference.

When Melchizedek blesses Abraham in the name of El Elyon, and Abraham subsequently attributes his victory to “the Lord, El Elyon, Creator of heaven and earth” (*The Torah*, 2010, Genesis 14:22), a subtle convergence appears. The narrative does not yet articulate philosophical monotheism, but it associates the high god of Jerusalem with Abraham’s covenantal deity. This identification may represent an early stage in the theological consolidation through which inherited West-Semitic divine vocabulary became integrated into emerging YHWH-centered devotion.

The figure of Melchizedek thus stands at a theological crossroads. He is neither Israelite nor outsider in a polemical sense. He represents a priestly tradition rooted in the broader Semitic religious landscape. Yet in the narrative, he recognizes and blesses Abraham’s God as universal creator. The episode suggests continuity and reinterpretation rather than abrupt rupture. Later traditions expanded the significance of Melchizedek. In Jewish interpretation, he became associated with priestly legitimacy. In Christian theology (*The Holy Bible*, 2010 Hebrews 7), he was presented as typological precursor to Christ’s eternal priesthood. These later developments demonstrate how a brief biblical encounter became a focal point of theological reflection.

From a historical perspective, Genesis 14 preserves a memory of interaction between mobile clan leadership and established urban priesthoods in the Levant. From a theological perspective, it illustrates how titles rooted in West-Semitic religion—*El, Elyon*—could become reoriented toward exclusive monotheistic confession. The crystallization of YHWH-centered faith did not require the erasure of earlier divine names; rather, it involved their reinterpretation within a developing covenantal framework (Day, 2002).

In this sense, the meeting between Abraham and Melchizedek symbolizes a transitional moment: the inherited language of *El* begins to converge with the emerging identity of Israel’s God. The transformation is gradual. The vocabulary remains ancient; the theological orientation becomes increasingly exclusive.

2.6. Jerusalem (Urusalim): Name, Memory, and Theological Reinterpretation

The identification of Shalem with Jerusalem invites further reflection on the development of sacred geography within the Abrahamic traditions. The city later became the central cultic and political center of Israelite religion, yet its origins precede Israelite settlement.

In the Amarna correspondence (14th century BCE), the city appears as *Urusalim*. Many scholars interpret this designation as combining a city determinative (*uru*) with the name *Shalem*, likely a West-Semitic deity. If so, the earliest stratum of the name may have referred to “the City of Shalem.” The later Hebrew form, *Yerushalayim*, underwent theological reinterpretation, often connected to the Hebrew root *š-l-m*, associated with completeness, wholeness, and peace (*shalom*). Such reinterpretation reflects a common ancient process: inherited place names acquire new theological meaning within evolving religious frameworks.

The transformation of Jerusalem from a city associated with a local deity to the exclusive center of YHWH worship illustrates the broader pattern described throughout this study. Religious development did not occur through wholesale cultural replacement, but through reinterpretation and consolidation. Earlier linguistic and cultic layers were not erased; they were reoriented.

Within the Abraham narrative, Jerusalem does not yet function as the capital of a monotheistic state. Instead, it appears as a city whose priest-king acknowledges *El Elyon* as “Creator of heaven and earth.” The universality embedded in that designation anticipates later theological developments. When Jerusalem later becomes the site of the Temple under David and Solomon, the city’s earlier identity is absorbed into a centralized YHWH cult.

This historical layering demonstrates that sacred geography, like divine nomenclature, undergoes theological crystallization. The city once embedded in a West-Semitic religious landscape becomes the symbolic heart of monotheistic confession. The continuity of location combined with transformation of meaning reflects the larger dynamic of El-to-YHWH consolidation.

Jerusalem thus embodies in geographical form what Abraham represents in personal form: transition within continuity. Neither the patriarch nor the city emerges from a vacuum. Both stand at the intersection of inherited religious language and developing monotheistic articulation.

2.7. Covenant, Renaming, and the Expansion of Identity

In Genesis 17, the relationship between Abraham and God reaches a decisive articulation. The divine self-identification appears in a significant form: “*I am El Shaddai; walk before me and be blameless*” and “*I will establish my covenant between me and you*” (The Torah, 2010, Genesis 17:1-2). The use of the title *El Shaddai* once again situates the covenant within inherited West-Semitic religious vocabulary. The narrative does not yet eliminate earlier divine designations; rather, it intensifies and reorients them.

The covenant is then formalized: “*As for me, this is my covenant with you: you shall be the father of a multitude of nations... No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations.*” (The Torah, 2010, Genesis 17:4-6).

The Hebrew expression (אֲבִי הָרַבִּיּוֹת) *av hamon goyim* (“father of a multitude of nations”) forms the narrative basis for the renaming. The term *goyim* is the

plural of *goy*, meaning “nation” or “people.” In biblical Hebrew, it is a general designation for collective entities and is not intrinsically limited to non-Israelites; Israel itself is described as a *goy* (The Torah, 2010, Exodus 19:6).

The earlier name *Abram* likely carried the meaning “exalted father.” The expanded form *Abraham* is interpreted within the text as “father of many nations.” Whether or not the etymology is philologically precise, its theological function is unmistakable: identity is transformed through covenant.

Importantly, the term *goyim* in biblical Hebrew simply means “nations” or “peoples.” It is not inherently restricted to non-Israelites; Israel itself is described as a *goy kadosh* (“holy nation,” Exodus 19:6). Thus, the promise embedded in Abraham’s renaming contains an inherent plurality. It does not linguistically limit his legacy to a single ethnic or political entity.

This plurality later becomes the foundation for divergent theological trajectories. Judaism emphasizes covenantal continuity through Isaac’s lineage. Christianity universalizes the promise through faith beyond genealogy (cf. Romans 4). Islam presents Abraham (Ibrahim) as a primordial monotheist preceding confessional divisions (The Koran, 1990, 3:67). Each tradition reads the same covenantal formula through its own interpretative horizon.

Within the Genesis narrative itself, however, the covenant does not abolish inherited divine language. The God who renames Abraham is still designated by titles rooted in earlier Semitic tradition. What changes is not vocabulary but exclusivity. The covenant establishes singular allegiance and relational obligation. The divine becomes not one among many, but the sole covenantal authority.

The renaming therefore symbolizes more than personal transformation; it marks a stage in the crystallization of monotheistic consciousness. Identity shifts from clan-based inheritance toward covenantal vocation. The promise extends beyond biological lineage into historical destiny.

In this way, Abraham’s new name anticipates the later development of Abrahamic religions. The narrative contains within itself both particularity and universality—tension and expansion—which subsequent traditions would interpret in distinct ways.

2.8. Ishmael, Isaac, and Divergent Lineages

The covenantal promise of Genesis 17 unfolds within a complex familial framework. Abraham’s identity as “father of many nations” is not abstract; it is embodied in concrete relationships—Sarah, Hagar, Ishmael, and Isaac.

In Genesis 16:2, Sarah proposes that Abraham take her Egyptian servant Hagar in order to obtain offspring through her:

“Behold now, the Lord has prevented me from bearing children; go in to my servant; it may be that I shall obtain children by her.”

The Hebrew phrase *ulai ibbaneh mimennah* reflects a legal idiom consistent with ancient Near Eastern surrogate practices. Comparable arrangements are attested in Mesopotamian law collections, including the Code of Hammurabi and

the Nuzi tablets. In such contexts, a child born to a servant could be legally recognized as belonging to the mistress of the household. The Genesis narrative thus reflects social patterns embedded within its historical milieu rather than isolated moral anomaly.

Ishmael is explicitly identified as Abraham's firstborn (*The Torah*, 2010, Genesis 16:15; 17:20). The text records that he receives divine blessing:

"As for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I have blessed him..." (*The Torah*, 2010, Genesis 17:20)

At the same time, the covenantal line is textually associated with Isaac (*The Torah*, 2010, Genesis 17:19-21). The narrative distinguishes between blessing and covenant without denying the legitimacy of Ishmael's descent. Divine favor is not restricted to a single branch, even if covenantal continuity is framed through a particular lineage.

This distinction becomes foundational for later religious interpretation. Judaism emphasizes covenantal transmission through Isaac. Christianity interprets the promise allegorically and theologically. Islam elevates Ishmael's role, presenting him as central to the sacred history of Mecca and as participant with Abraham in raising the foundations of the Kaaba (*The Koran*, 1990, 2:125-129).

The divergence between Isaac and Ishmael does not originate as interreligious polemic. Within Genesis itself, both sons stand under divine protection. The narrative tension emerges from questions of inheritance, identity, and promise. The plurality embedded in Abraham's fatherhood becomes historically differentiated.

It is precisely this plurality that later traditions struggled to interpret. In lived religious memory, attempts at reconciliation frequently appear. During her field research, Larysa Karaliova encountered narratives among Jewish and Muslim interlocutors emphasizing continued contact between Abraham and Ishmael, softening later constructions of absolute separation. These oral accounts do not replace canonical texts; rather, they reveal how communities seek to humanize and harmonize shared patriarchal memory.

The story of Abraham's household therefore illustrates both continuity and differentiation. The covenantal promise expands beyond singular descent while remaining textually particular. The figure of Abraham stands at the intersection of blessing, election, plurality, and theological interpretation.

2.9. The Near-Sacrifice: Divergent Sacred Memory and Theological Crystallization

The narrative of the near-sacrifice represents one of the most powerful and contested episodes in Abrahamic tradition. In Genesis 22, the son to be offered is explicitly identified as Isaac. The text describes a divine command, Abraham's obedience, and the ultimate interruption of the act through divine intervention. The episode functions within the Hebrew Bible as a supreme test of covenantal trust.

In the Qur'an (*The Koran*, 1990, 37:102-107), the son is not explicitly named.

Classical Islamic exegetical tradition, however, generally identifies the son as Ishmael. Within Islamic theology, this interpretation integrates Ishmael into the foundational narrative of Abrahamic obedience and associates the event with the development of ritual remembrance in the festival of Eid al-Adha.

The divergence between these traditions reflects not merely historical disagreement but distinct theological trajectories. In the Genesis narrative, the event consolidates the covenantal line through Isaac. In Islamic interpretation, the event affirms Ishmael's centrality within sacred history. Both traditions preserve Abraham as the model of radical obedience.

From a literary perspective, the Genesis account emphasizes interior tension: silence, ascent, questioning "**Where is the lamb?**" (Freedman & Simon, 1939), and substitution. The Qur'anic account focuses on dialogue between father and son, presenting consent and shared submission. Each text shapes the emotional and theological structure differently.

The divergence illustrates how a single patriarchal figure becomes the focal point of differentiated sacred memory. The event does not generate monotheism; rather, it intensifies already emerging exclusive devotion. Abraham's willingness to surrender what is most precious becomes emblematic of total allegiance to one God.

This Study Proposes an Alternative Interpretative Framework Concerning Abraham, His Historical Context, and His Family Traditions

This section introduces an alternative interpretative framework that integrates canonical texts, historical context, and ethnographic observations. Its purpose is not to replace textual analysis, but to demonstrate how Abrahamic narratives continue to be reinterpreted within living traditions. The inclusion of oral accounts is therefore methodological: they are treated as interpretative evidence reflecting contemporary religious understanding rather than as historical sources in a strict sense.

Each Abrahamic religion consists of canonical, apocryphal, written literary, and oral texts, without which it is difficult to fully understand the images of heroes, saints, prophets, and even God Himself as perceived by believers, as well as the development of the religion itself, its traditions, and rituals (Kugel, 1999; Levenson, 1993; 2012; Cohen, 1987). Larysa Karaliova has visited Israel numerous times, interviewing religious representatives of various faiths and ordinary believers. Some little-known or unknown stories are presented in this study because they provide a complete picture of the understanding of God and His works by representatives of each faith.

In Genesis 16:2, Sarah proposes that Abraham take her Egyptian servant Hagar in order to obtain offspring through her: "*And Sarai said to Abram, Behold now, the Lord has prevented me from bearing children; go in to my servant; it may be that I shall obtain children by her.*" Such surrogate arrangements were not uncommon in the ancient Near Eastern legal context, as reflected in Mesopotamian law collections (The Torah, 2010, Roth, 1997; Westbrook, 1988).

The Hebrew expression “*ulai ibbaneh mimennah*” reflects a legal formula known in the ancient Near Eastern world, where a barren wife could designate a servant to bear a child on her behalf. Comparable arrangements are attested in Mesopotamian legal texts, including the Nuzi tablets and the Code of Hammurabi (Roth, 1997; Westbrook, 1988). In such cases, the child could be legally recognized as belonging to the mistress of the household.

Anthropological parallels from Bedouin and other Near Eastern traditions have preserved symbolic practices in which childbirth could be ritually associated with another parental figure (Gardner, 1998), reflecting broader patterns of legal and social parenthood in pre-modern societies. While such customs cannot be directly equated with the Genesis narrative, they provide contextual insight into ancient concepts of lineage and belonging.

From this perspective, Ishmael’s birth initially fulfilled Sarah’s proposal. The narrative indicates that he was blessed by God (The Torah, 2010, Genesis 16:11-12; 17:20; 21:17-18). God directly blesses Ishmael (The Torah, 2010, Genesis 16:11-12; 17:20; 21:17-18) and makes a covenant through Abraham with Isaac, thus both sons of Abraham come under God’s blessing (The Torah, 2010, Genesis 17:19-21).

In Islamic tradition, Ishmael’s role is further elevated. The Qur’an presents him as participating with Abraham in the building of the Kaaba (The Koran, 1990, 2:125-129), thereby integrating him into the foundational narrative of Islamic monotheism.

Beyond these textual traditions, Karaliova encountered oral narratives seeking to reconcile tensions between the Genesis and Qur’anic accounts. One such narrative presents Abraham as maintaining repeated contact with Hagar and Ishmael in Arabia, without sustained hostility from Sarah. This interpretation challenges later polemical constructions of absolute familial rupture.

A second, more elaborate oral account reimagines the near-sacrifice episode in domestic and emotional terms. In this version, Abraham’s visible distress over the impending sacrifice arouses Sarah’s jealousy for Hagar. Upon learning that Ishmael is to be sacrificed as first-born son, Sarah is portrayed as provoking conflict with Hagar in order to expel her and with Ishmael, thereby redirecting on herself the burden for the divine test and protecting Abraham from direct responsibility.

This story does not appear in canonical Jewish or Islamic sources and should not be treated as historical reconstruction. Rather, it reflects living attempts within religious communities to reconcile divergent textual memories and to humanize the patriarchal figures.

From an ethnographic perspective, such narratives are significant not for textual authority but for interpretative function. They reveal how Abraham remains a dynamic figure through whom questions of obedience, jealousy, sacrifice, and divine justice continue to be negotiated. Sacred memory does not remain static; it crystallizes differently within each tradition.

The near-sacrifice episode therefore stands as a moment of theological intensi-

fication. It does not resolve plurality; it channels it. Abraham's figure becomes the interpretative field upon which distinct Abrahamic identities are consolidated.

2.10. Chronological and Archaeological Context: The Middle Bronze Horizon

Any attempt to situate Abraham historically must distinguish between literary chronology and archaeological strata. The patriarchal narratives were transmitted orally long before their final written redaction. Genealogical numbers in Genesis cannot therefore be treated as precise chronological instruments. What can be examined instead is whether the socio-economic world reflected in the narrative corresponds to a plausible historical environment.

Archaeological evidence from the southern Levant suggests that the period between approximately 2100 and 1800 BCE—corresponding to the transition from the Early Bronze Age IV to the Middle Bronze Age I - II—was characterized by demographic fluctuation, partial urban contraction, and increased semi-nomadic activity in highland and steppe regions. Rather than centralized empires, the region exhibited fluid political structures, fortified towns, and mobile pastoral networks.

This landscape corresponds in several structural respects to the world depicted in Genesis. Abraham appears neither as a settled urban monarch nor as an isolated desert wanderer. He functions as a mobile clan leader commanding retainers (*The Torah*, 2010, Genesis 14:14), negotiating grazing rights, forming alliances, and interacting with urban rulers. Such patterns are consistent with what archaeologists describe as transhumant pastoralism integrated with urban economies during the Middle Bronze Age.

Tell es-Sultan (Jericho) provides a relevant example. After destruction at the end of the Early Bronze Age (ca. 2300 BCE), the site experienced phases of reduced occupation before renewed fortification in the Middle Bronze period. During transitional phases, Jericho may have functioned as a modest regional center rather than a dominant fortified metropolis. The absence of emphasis on Jericho in the Abraham narratives therefore does not imply its nonexistence; it may reflect shifting regional significance.

The broader Syro-Mesopotamian corridor also exhibits patterns of movement consistent with the Genesis account. Migration from Upper Mesopotamia—via Haran and inland routes toward Damascus and the Beqa Valley—would have been geographically plausible for clan-based groups. The reference to “Eliezer of Damascus” (*The Torah*, 2010, Genesis 15:2) indicates awareness of established urban centers in the region.

Particularly illuminating in this context are the archives of Mari (Tell Hariri), dated primarily to the nineteenth and eighteenth centuries BCE. The Mari tablets document interactions between urban authorities and semi-nomadic tribal confederations identified as Amorite and other West-Semitic groups. These texts describe extended kinship structures, shifting alliances, seasonal mobility, and oath-

based political agreements.

Several structural parallels with the patriarchal narratives may be noted: tribal units organized around patriarchal leadership, mobile pastoral groups interacting with fortified towns, treaty formulas and oath practices resembling covenantal language, west-semitic personal names embedded in a broader cultural matrix.

The Mari material does not confirm the historicity of Abraham as an individual. Rather, it demonstrates that the social world described in Genesis—a mobile clan leader operating between Mesopotamia and Canaan—belongs to a historically plausible Middle Bronze Age environment.

When read against this archaeological and documentary background, the Abraham traditions may preserve memory of a cultural milieu consistent with the early second millennium BCE. This proposal does not depend upon literal chronological calculations derived from later textual traditions. Instead, it recognizes that theological narratives can preserve historically resonant social structures even when composed centuries later.

In this framework, Abraham emerges not as an anachronistic figure projected backward from the Iron Age, but as a personality situated within the dynamic West-Semitic world from which later monotheistic crystallization would arise.

3. לא תשא אֶת-שֵׁם-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשׁוֹן. **Thou Shalt Not Take the Name of the Lord thy God in Vain (Exodus 20:7)**

In Jewish tradition, several names of God are regarded as sacred and treated with particular reverence. Rabbinic literature commonly identifies seven primary divine names that are considered especially holy and not to be erased or casually pronounced. Among these are YHWH (the Tetragrammaton), Elohim, El, Eloah, Shaddai, Tzevaot, and Ehyeh. The Tetragrammaton (יהוה) is traditionally not pronounced; instead, substitute forms such as Adonai (“Lord”) are used in liturgical reading. In everyday speech, observant Jews often employ circumlocutions such as *HaShem* (“the Name”) to avoid pronouncing the sacred name directly. In Exodus 3:14, when Moses asks for the divine name, the response given is “*Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh*,” commonly translated as “*I am who I am*” or “*I will be what I will be*,” a phrase that has generated extensive theological and philosophical interpretation (Freedman & Simon, 1939). From a historical-critical perspective, scholars distinguish different compositional strata within the Pentateuch, partly based on the usage of divine names. The variation between YHWH and Elohim in different textual passages has played a central role in documentary hypotheses concerning the formation of the Torah.

3.1. Structure of Ancient Semitic Names

Understanding the structure of ancient Semitic personal names is important for the analysis that follows. Many names in the Hebrew Bible are theophoric, meaning they incorporate a divine element. One common component is *-el* (אל), referring to the Northwest Semitic high god El. Such names do not merely indicate

“holiness,” but reflect a cultural pattern in which divine identity is embedded within personal names. For example, *Eliezer* (אֱלִיעֶזֶר) combines *El* (“God”) and *‘ezer* (“help”), yielding the meaning “*God is help*” or “*My God is help*.” Similarly, *Gabriel* (גַּבְרִיֵּאל) derives from the root *g-b-r* (“strength, might”) and *El*, and is commonly interpreted as “God is my strength” or “Mighty one of God.” According to standard Hebrew lexicons (Kautzsch, 2008), the name Gabriel derives from the root *g-b-r* (“strength”) combined with the theophoric element *El* (Kautzsch, 2008). The name *Israel* (יִשְׂרָאֵל) is traditionally explained in Genesis 32:28 as “he who struggles with God,” reflecting the verb *ś-r-h* (“to strive”). However, scholars continue to debate its precise morphological origin. The name *Abraham* (אַבְרָהָם) is interpreted within the biblical narrative (The Torah, 2010, Genesis 17:5) as “father of many nations” (*av hamon goyim*). From a historical-linguistic perspective, the earlier form *Abram* (אַבְרָם) likely meant “exalted father,” with the later form reflecting theological reinterpretation within the narrative.

3.2. Main Symbols of the Abrahamic Religions and the Historical Context of Their Emergence

Polytheistic religions of the ancient world frequently employed visible symbols associated with particular deities, cosmic forces, or political authority. In both the ancient Near East and the Mediterranean world, religious iconography was closely intertwined with cosmology and kingship.

The emergence of monotheistic traditions did not occur in cultural isolation. Israelite religion developed within the broader environment of Northwest Semitic and Egyptian civilizations, where religious ideas, symbols, and political theology interacted across regions. The reform of Pharaoh Akhenaten in the fourteenth century BCE, for example, represents a notable attempt at centralized devotion to a single solar deity (Aten), though its relationship to later Israelite monotheism remains debated and uncertain.

Archaeological and textual evidence indicates that the ancient Near East was characterized by significant cultural exchange. Groups such as the Hyksos, as well as various Semitic-speaking populations, moved between Mesopotamia, the Levant, and Egypt. However, the precise transmission of specific theological ideas remains difficult to establish with certainty.

It is also important to recognize that religious symbols often acquire new meanings over time. The hexagram, later associated with Judaism as the “Star of David,” appears in various ancient cultures before its medieval Jewish adoption. The cross, central to Christianity, emerged from the historical reality of Roman crucifixion but later developed rich symbolic theology. The crescent, frequently associated with Islam in the modern period, predates Islam and became widely used in Islamic political contexts only centuries after the Prophet Muhammad.

These examples suggest that monotheistic traditions, while asserting theological uniqueness, developed within historical contexts shaped by earlier symbolic and cultural forms. The continuity and transformation of symbols illustrate that

religious identity evolves through reinterpretation rather than absolute rupture.

3.3. From Clan Identity to Universal Monotheism: Naming, Election, and Expansion

The designation of a people reflects more than genealogy; it encodes social structure, political organization, and theological self-understanding. The early Israelite community did not adopt the name “Abrahamites,” despite Abraham’s foundational status. Instead, the dominant biblical self-designation became “Israel”—derived from Jacob’s renaming (*The Torah*, 2010, Genesis 32:28)—and later “Judah” or “Jews,” following the southern kingdom.

This development suggests that early identity formation operated within a clan-based and tribal framework. The covenant was transmitted through particular lineage: Abraham → Isaac → Jacob → the tribes of Israel. The narrowing of descent through Isaac, and later through specific tribal structures, reflects patterns common in ancient Near Eastern kinship societies, where legitimacy and inheritance were tightly controlled within defined genealogical lines.

The Merneptah Stele (ca. 1208 BCE), discovered in Egypt, contains one of the earliest extrabiblical references to “Israel.” Significantly, the determinative used in the inscription identifies Israel not as a territorial state but as a people-group. This suggests that early Israel functioned as an *ethnos* rather than a centralized monarchy. The name therefore reflects socio-political consolidation within a defined collective.

In such a context, a broader designation such as “Abrahamites” would have emphasized universal ancestry rather than covenantal particularity. The textual tradition, however, consistently narrows covenantal transmission. Abraham is described as “father of many nations” (*The Torah*, 2010, Genesis 17:5), yet the covenant is textually linked to a specific line. The tension between plurality and election becomes structurally embedded in the narrative.

This pattern contrasts with later developments in religious universalization. Early Christianity reinterpreted Abrahamic promise as accessible through faith rather than lineage (*The Holy Bible*, 2010, Romans 4). Islam adopted an explicitly universal self-designation: *muslim* (“one who submits to God”), framing religious identity in confessional rather than genealogical terms. By grounding communal identity in submission rather than descent, Islam articulated a model capable of rapid expansion beyond tribal boundaries.

The movement from clan-based covenant to universal monotheistic community represents a significant historical transition (Smith, 2001). In the earliest stage, divine allegiance was intertwined with kinship structures and territorial promise. Over time, theological consolidation enabled expansion beyond genealogical limitation. Monotheism, once crystallized around exclusive divine unity, proved capable of transcending tribal frameworks.

This transition does not imply deliberate restriction in its earliest phase; rather, it reflects the social logic of ancient kinship societies. The subsequent universal-

zation within Christianity and Islam demonstrates how inherited Abrahamic memory could be reinterpreted within broader political and civilizational contexts.

Thus, the history of Abrahamic monotheism reveals a dynamic interplay between particular election and universal aspiration—between clan identity and global religious community.

4. Divine Names and the Gradual Crystallization of YHWH

The question of divine names occupies a central place in understanding the development of Abrahamic monotheism. Within the Hebrew Bible, multiple designations for God appear: El, Elohim, El Elyon, El Shaddai, YHWH (the Tetragrammaton), and others. Rather than indicating theological confusion, this plurality may reflect historical layering.

In Jewish tradition, certain divine names are treated with particular reverence and are not casually pronounced. The Tetragrammaton (יהוה) is traditionally not vocalized; substitute forms such as *Adonai* (“Lord”) are used in liturgical reading, and in everyday speech observant Jews often employ the circumlocution *HaShem* (“the Name”). This reverential practice underscores the sacred centrality of the divine name while simultaneously preserving distance.

From a historical-critical perspective, variation in divine names has played a major role in discussions concerning the compositional strata of the Pentateuch. Some passages predominantly employ *Elohim*, while others emphasize *YHWH*. Classical documentary hypotheses interpreted this variation as evidence of distinct literary sources. While source theory remains debated, the textual phenomenon itself is undeniable: the biblical narrative preserves multiple divine designations.

It should be noted that an alternative scholarly model proposes that YHWH was originally distinct from El and only later identified with him within Israelite religion. According to this perspective, early Israelite belief may have involved the convergence of separate divine traditions rather than direct continuity. While this model remains debated, its inclusion highlights the complexity of the El-YHWH relationship and underscores that the consolidation of monotheism was not a uniform or linear process.

The term *El* belongs to the broader Northwest Semitic religious vocabulary. In Ugaritic texts, El appears as the high god presiding over a divine council. The plural form *Elohim*, though grammatically plural, frequently governs singular verbs when referring to the God of Israel. Linguistically, it derives from the root *El*, with a plural suffix. The coexistence of plural morphology with singular reference has generated diverse interpretations—ranging from plural of majesty to vestige of earlier conceptual plurality.

The name YHWH, by contrast, acquires distinctive theological centrality within Israelite tradition. In Exodus 3:14, the divine self-identification “*Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh*” (“*I am who I am*” or “*I will be what I will be*”) introduces a relational and

dynamic dimension to divine identity. The narrative presents YHWH not merely as a high god among others, but as the singular covenantal presence guiding Israel's history.

Yet the transition from El-language to YHWH-centrality does not occur through abrupt replacement. Earlier titles such as *El Shaddai* and *El Elyon* continue to appear in patriarchal narratives. This suggests continuity within transformation. The inherited West-Semitic vocabulary is not erased; it is reinterpreted and absorbed into an increasingly exclusive theological framework.

This process may be described as crystallization. The conceptual world in which El functioned as high deity becomes progressively consolidated around YHWH as the sole object of covenantal allegiance. Linguistic layers remain visible, but their theological orientation shifts. The divine council imagery found in earlier Semitic traditions gradually yields to exclusive monotheistic confession, though traces of earlier cosmology persist within poetic and prophetic literature.

The development of monotheism, therefore, appears less as sudden rupture and more as historical consolidation. The vocabulary of El provides continuity with the West-Semitic past; the centrality of YHWH articulates a new level of exclusivity. The biblical text preserves both memory and movement—evidence of theological maturation embedded within inherited language.

In this light, Abraham stands not at the end of monotheistic development but near its formative threshold. His covenantal relationship with El-designated deity anticipates the later crystallization of YHWH-centered faith. The divine names themselves testify to historical depth and theological transformation.

4.1. Creation Narratives and Theological Layering

The development of monotheistic consciousness is not only reflected in divine names but also in the structure of the Creation narratives themselves. The opening chapters of Genesis present two distinct yet interconnected accounts of creation (*The Torah*, 2010, Genesis 1-2). Their coexistence within a single canonical framework has long invited scholarly reflection.

Genesis 1 presents a highly structured cosmological account organized in seven days. Creation unfolds through divine speech: "Let there be...". Humanity appears collectively—"male and female He created them" (*The Torah*, 2010, Genesis 1:27)—within a universal and ordered cosmic framework. In Genesis 1:27 (Hirsch, 1993), humanity is described collectively: "male and female He created them" (zachar and nekevah). The narrative emphasizes classification, symmetry, and completion, culminating in the declaration that creation was "very good" (*The Torah*, 2010, Genesis 1:31).

Genesis 2 shifts perspective. In Genesis 2, however, the narrative shifts its focus to the formation of *ha-adam* from the dust of the ground, followed by the creation of the woman from his side (traditionally translated as "*rib*"), later named Eve (*The Torah*, 2010, Genesis 2:7; 2:21-22) and (Hirsch, 1993). The focus narrows from cosmic architecture to the formation of *ha-adam* from the dust of the

ground, followed by the development of relational life within Eden. The narrative unfolds anthropologically rather than cosmologically. Human identity emerges through relationship, vocation, and moral awareness.

These differences have often been explained within source-critical scholarship as reflecting distinct compositional traditions. Yet beyond questions of literary sources, the preservation of both narratives within a unified text suggests theological intentionality. The redactors did not eliminate tension; they preserved plurality.

This plurality may reflect stages of theological articulation. Genesis 1 emphasizes divine transcendence and universal order. Genesis 2 portrays divine immanence and relational engagement. Together they present a layered understanding of creation—cosmic and personal, structured and dialogical.

The coexistence of both accounts also raises anthropological questions that later readers have explored. Discussions concerning Cain's marriage and early genealogical continuity, for example, arise from the narrative transition between universal humanity (*The Torah*, 2010, Genesis 1) and the localized lineage of Adam's descendants (*The Torah*, 2010, Genesis 2-4). Rather than forcing harmonization, it may be more accurate to recognize that the text itself preserves broader conceptual horizons than later literalist readings sometimes assume.

The preservation of narrative tension reflects the broader dynamic traced throughout this study. Monotheistic confession did not require uniform textual flattening. Instead, theological consolidation occurred alongside the retention of inherited narrative complexity. The unity of God coexists with textual plurality.

In this sense, the Creation narratives mirror the El-to-YHWH transition: inherited linguistic and conceptual layers remain visible even as theological orientation becomes increasingly exclusive. The biblical canon embodies both continuity and development, memory and crystallization.

4.2. Defining Monotheism: From Early Exclusivity to Theological Consolidation

The historical emergence of monotheism cannot be understood as a sudden intellectual invention. Rather, it appears as a gradual process of consolidation within earlier religious environments that already contained hierarchical or centralized divine structures.

One of the earliest known experiments in centralized or exclusive worship in the ancient Near East is associated with Pharaoh Akhenaten (Amenhotep IV, reign ca. 1353-1336 BCE). During the Amarna period, Akhenaten elevated the solar disk Aten above traditional Egyptian deities and promoted a form of royal monolatry that marginalized the older pantheon. The so-called Aten "revolution" did not produce philosophical monotheism in the later biblical sense, nor did it survive beyond his reign. Nevertheless, it demonstrates that concepts of singular divine supremacy were conceivable within the broader ancient world prior to the crystallization of Israelite monotheism.

Whether any historical contact existed between Atenism and early Israelite religion remains debated. Most scholars caution against assuming direct influence. The Amarna reform, however, illustrates that theological centralization had precedents in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Within the Levant, titles such as *El Elyon* (“*God Most High*”) reflect a West-Semitic religious vocabulary in which El functioned as supreme deity within a broader divine assembly. The encounter between Abraham and Melchizedek ([The Torah, 2010](#), Genesis 14:18-22) preserves such terminology. The language of supremacy predates the later prophetic articulation of exclusive divine uniqueness.

The earliest extrabiblical reference to Israel appears in the Merneptah Stele (ca. 1208 BCE), an Egyptian victory inscription discovered at Thebes. The inscription states: “*Israel is laid waste; his seed is no more.*” Significantly, the hieroglyphic determinative used for “*Israel*” identifies it not as a territorial state but as a people-group. The stele confirms the existence of a group named Israel by the late thirteenth century BCE, though it does not allow conclusions regarding its theological self-understanding.

Taken together, these sources indicate that early Israelite religion emerged within a complex environment of divine hierarchies, regional cults, and political theology. The patriarchal narratives reflect a stage prior to the codification of Mosaic law and prior to the prophetic articulation of absolute divine uniqueness.

In Genesis, Abraham’s covenantal relationship appears personal and clan-oriented. It binds his immediate lineage but does not yet function as universal legislation. The revelation of the divine name YHWH in Exodus ([The Torah, 2010](#), Exodus 3:14-15; 6:2-3) is presented as a later theological clarification. Exodus 6:3 explicitly distinguishes earlier knowledge of God as *El Shaddai* from the fuller disclosure of YHWH, suggesting editorial awareness of historical-theological development.

This textual layering indicates progression rather than contradiction. Patriarchal devotion to a high deity—expressed in El-language—represents an early stage of exclusive allegiance. The later prophetic declaration, “*I am the Lord, and there is no other*” ([The Torah, 2010](#), Isaiah 45:5), articulates a more explicit ontological monotheism.

The near-sacrifice narrative ([The Torah, 2010](#), Genesis 22) further illustrates pre-legal theological context. Leviticus 18:21 in which the Lord commanded: “*You shall not give any of your children to offer ...*”. Later Mosaic legislation explicitly prohibits child sacrifice ([The Torah, 2010](#), Leviticus 18:21). The coexistence of these texts reflects historical stratification rather than theological incoherence. The patriarchal narrative dramatizes radical obedience; the later legal corpus defines ethical boundaries within an increasingly systematized monotheistic framework.

Similar developmental patterns appear in later Abrahamic traditions. Christianity universalizes covenantal promise beyond genealogical descent. Islam proclaims uncompromising divine unity (*tawhid*) while incorporating ritual forms

embedded within Arabian history. In each case, monotheism crystallizes within inherited cultural structures rather than emerging in conceptual isolation.

Monotheism, therefore, may be defined not merely as belief in one God, but as the historical consolidation of exclusive divine allegiance within evolving social, political, and theological contexts. Abraham stands near the formative threshold of this process—neither the inventor of philosophical monotheism nor a participant in fully systematized law, but a transitional figure in the gradual crystallization of divine unity.

4.3. Inquiry: Abraham, Abrahamic Religions and Messianism

Abraham occupies a foundational position within Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Yet, historically and textually, he precedes all confessional identities. He was neither Jew, nor Israelite in the later national sense, nor Christian, nor Muslim. In the biblical narrative he emerges as a West Semitic patriarch originating from Mesopotamia—traditionally identified as a Chaldean—whose religious commitment predates the formation of institutional religion.

This chronological priority has theological implications. Abraham's devotion, as portrayed in Genesis, is directed exclusively toward a singular divine authority without mediation through codified law, temple institution, prophetic canon, or messianic expectation. His covenantal relationship is personal, dialogical, and immediate. Divine authority acts directly: God promises, commands, judges, blesses, and intervenes without delegation of salvific sovereignty to a future redemptive figure.

In later Abrahamic traditions, however, monotheism becomes intertwined with messianic expectation. Judaism develops diverse strands of messianic hope, sometimes envisioning a Davidic ruler, sometimes a divinely appointed agent. Christianity centralizes the figure of Jesus as the incarnate redeemer whose atoning sacrifice becomes the axis of salvation history. Islam affirms prophetic succession culminating in Muhammad, while rejecting any division of divine sovereignty and maintaining strict *tawhīd*. Yet even within Islam, eschatological expectation remains central to theological structure.

Messianism, therefore, becomes a defining feature of institutional Abrahamic religion. Salvation, redemption, eschatological judgment, and ultimate justice are articulated through future-oriented frameworks that extend beyond Abraham's immediate covenantal experience.

This development raises a critical distinction: Abraham's monotheism appears structurally non-messianic. In Genesis, divine authority is neither postponed nor transferred. God Himself determines judgment and mercy—as in the destruction of Sodom (*The Torah*, 2010, Genesis 18-19)—without reliance on a redemptive intermediary. Angels execute divine will, but sovereignty remains undivided.

By contrast, later theological systems increasingly systematize salvation through mediating frameworks: law, prophecy, messiah, atonement, eschatological judgment. The consolidation of monotheism thus becomes intertwined with

institutional and soteriological structures.

This distinction does not invalidate later traditions. Rather, it suggests a developmental trajectory. Abraham represents an early form of exclusive allegiance to one God—a pre-legal, pre-messianic monotheism grounded in direct covenantal obedience. Later Abrahamic religions transform this exclusive allegiance into structured theological systems that integrate historical narrative, legal codification, and eschatological expectation.

To recognize this developmental movement is not to deny faith, but to differentiate historical layers. Abraham may be understood not as the founder of fully articulated confessional monotheism, but as a transitional threshold figure whose uncompromising devotion to one God precedes and conditions the later emergence of institutional messianism.

If so, Abraham's faith represents a form of radical monotheistic concentration—God alone as sovereign—prior to the elaboration of redemptive frameworks that later define the Abrahamic religions.

5. Discussion: Covenant, Territory, and Competing Interpretations

Following Sarah's death, Genesis records that Abraham married Keturah and fathered additional sons ([The Torah, 2010](#), Genesis 25:1-6). The text states that he sent these sons "eastward, to the east country," suggesting the diffusion of Abrahamic lineage beyond Canaan. Later traditions across various cultures have associated eastern peoples with Abrahamic descent, though such claims remain matters of ethnographic and legendary transmission rather than established historical evidence.

The territorial promise given to Abraham is articulated in Genesis 15:18: "from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates." This formulation has generated diverse interpretations across Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions. The text itself does not define permanent political sovereignty but expresses covenantal geography within an ancient Near Eastern framework.

Genesis 17:20 promises that Ishmael will become the father of twelve princes, establishing him as progenitor of significant tribal formations. Islamic tradition further develops Ishmael's status, emphasizing his role in Arabian sacred history. These parallel trajectories illustrate how covenantal language becomes differently actualized within later religious memory.

The Qur'an recognizes the Torah as divine revelation ([The Koran, 1990](#), 5:44) and affirms God's historical relationship with the Children of Israel. At the same time, Islamic theology emphasizes that ultimate sovereignty remains exclusively God's and is not delegated in a manner that compromises divine unity.

Interpretive divergence concerning covenant, land, and lineage has shaped both theological reflection and political imagination in the Near East. Rather than demonstrating inherent contradiction, these variations reveal how sacred texts are integrated into evolving communal identities.

A historical reading suggests that Abraham's covenantal faith preceded later institutional and territorial claims. His monotheism appears focused on exclusive allegiance to one sovereign God rather than on defined geopolitical boundaries. Subsequent traditions developed more elaborate theological and territorial interpretations in response to changing historical circumstances.

Recognizing this layered development may help distinguish between ancient covenantal language and modern political claims. The consolidation of monotheism did not eliminate plurality of interpretation; rather, it generated competing theological trajectories grounded in a shared patriarchal origin.

Covenant, Messianism, and the Transformation of Abraham' Devotion to Single Lord into the Abrahamic Monotheism

The discussion of covenantal geography and competing interpretations of lineage naturally returns us to the central question raised in § 4.3: the relationship between Abraham's personal monotheism and the later emergence of structured messianic systems.

In Genesis, the covenant with Abraham is immediate and relational. It does not yet contain institutional priesthood, centralized temple theology, codified law, or developed eschatology. Divine sovereignty operates directly. God promises land, descendants, and blessing; He judges Sodom, protects Hagar, blesses Ishmael, and confirms Isaac. No redemptive mediator stands between divine will and human destiny.

By contrast, later Abrahamic traditions embed monotheism within increasingly elaborate theological architectures. The covenant becomes nationalized, ritualized, codified, and eventually eschatologized. Messianic expectation transforms covenant from a clan-based promise into a future-oriented redemptive framework. Salvation, judgment, and ultimate justice are projected into historical culmination.

The territorial promises discussed in § 5.0 illustrate this transformation. What appears in Genesis as covenantal geography within an ancient Near Eastern context later becomes theological symbol, communal identity marker, and, in some cases, a foundation for competing political interpretation. Similarly, the distinction between Isaac and Ishmael evolves from familial narrative into divergent civilizational memory.

This shift does not negate Abraham's faith. Rather, it demonstrates how exclusive allegiance to one God undergoes historical expansion and theological systematization. Abraham's devotion is structurally pre-messianic; later traditions transform that devotion into doctrinally articulated messianism.

Thus, the question is not whether later traditions are invalid, but whether they represent development beyond the original patriarchal horizon and interpretations of the Lord's words by clerics.

This study acknowledges several limitations. The historicity of Abraham remains a matter of scholarly debate, and archaeological parallels provide indirect

rather than direct evidence. The ethnographic materials presented are limited in scope and are not intended to represent all contemporary religious perspectives. These constraints do not invalidate the analysis but define its interpretative boundaries.

6. Conclusion, Abraham and the Contemporary Crystallization of Abrahamic Religions

This study has argued that monotheism did not emerge as an abstract philosophical axiom, but as a historical process of consolidation within pre-existing religious structures. From the hierarchical divine assemblies of the Levant to the centralized experiment of Atenism in Egypt, the ancient Near East already contained conceptual frameworks capable of elevating one deity above others. Israelite religion did not arise in isolation but within this complex environment.

Abraham stands at a formative threshold within that process. Textually, he precedes Sinai, prophetic universalism, temple centralization, and systematic theology. His covenant is personal rather than institutional; his devotion exclusive but not yet juridically codified; his obedience radical yet not embedded in developed messianic expectation.

The patriarchal narratives reflect a stage of exclusive divine allegiance prior to ontological universalization. The later prophetic declarations—"I am the Lord, and there is no other"—articulate monotheism with philosophical clarity. Judaism develops covenantal national theology; Christianity frames redemption through Christological mediation; Islam proclaims uncompromising *tawḥīd* while integrating Abraham into a restored primordial monotheism. In each case, monotheism crystallizes within evolving theological and socio-political structures.

Messianism becomes central to these later systems. Redemption, eschatological justice, and final restoration structure religious identity across traditions. Yet in Genesis, divine sovereignty remains undivided and unmediated. God Himself determines judgment and mercy. Angels act, but authority is not transferred. No salvific intermediary defines Abraham's faith.

If "pure monotheism" is understood as exclusive and undivided allegiance to one sovereign God without institutional mediation or eschatological systematization, then Abraham may be viewed as embodying such a stage. He is neither the architect of later confessional religion nor the bearer of fully articulated doctrinal monotheism. Rather, he represents a concentrated form of covenantal devotion at the threshold of theological development.

To recognize historical development does not diminish faith. It clarifies layers. It distinguishes patriarchal devotion from later institutional elaboration. It allows Abraham to be understood not as the founder of fully formed religious systems, but as a transitional figure in the gradual crystallization of divine unity within human history.

In this sense, the Abrahamic religions do not contradict Abraham; they extend him (Reynolds, 2018). Yet the extension introduces theological architecture—law,

messiah, redemption, eschatology—that moves beyond the immediate horizon of Genesis. The tension between original exclusivity and later systematization remains one of the defining dynamics of Abrahamic religious history. Abraham's devotion reflects exclusive allegiance to a singular sovereign deity, not yet systematized into later doctrinal monotheism Abrahamic religions.

Abraham, therefore, stands at the culmination of real monotheism, at its formative edge.

The contemporary transformation, therefore, represents merely institutional expansion and interpretation of Lord's words and theological adaptation to national traditions—from relational Abraham's devotion to single Lord as an early form of concentrated and exclusive monotheistic devotion, to Abrahamic religions, Abrahamic religions these are the mixture of institutional interpretation of Lord's words and messianism.

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The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare regarding the publication of this paper.

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