known as Jacob) said to them,..."[M]ay El Shaddai grant you mercy." (Genesis 43:11-14)

And Jacob said to Joseph, "El Shaddai appeared to me... and he blessed me." (Genesis 48:3-4)

In addition to the repeated naming of El-Shaddai above, Abraham also worships his deity with various other names, including El-Olam (Hebrew for "eternal El") and El-Elyon ("El the most high").

Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beer-sheba, and called there in the name of the Lord, El-Olam. (Genesis 16:33)

But Abraham said to the king of Sodom, "I have sworn to the Lord, El-Elyon, maker of heaven and earth." (Genesis 14:22)

The above make it apparent that the early Israelites worshipped a deity whom they called El. But who exactly was El? Modern historians of religion identify this name with one of the deities of the early Canaanites, the polytheists among whom the early Israelite monotheist immigrants were depicted as residing. While the Bible provides little insight into the beliefs of the Canaanites, archaeological excavations of the ancient Canaanite city of Ugarit (at Ras Shamra, in modern-day Syria) have provided us with a great deal of knowledge of Canaanite myths. These feature a Canaanite pantheon which includes the gods El (meaning "deity") and Baal (meaning "lord").

But a later step in the development of Israelite monotheism came with an altogether new name for the deity, which ultimately supplanted the older El-based ones. Several centuries after the time of Abraham, the Bible depicts Moses as meeting a deity named Yahweh at the burning bush. Yahweh affirms having been the deity previously known as El-Shaddai, in spite of the unfamiliar name now used.

God also spoke to Moses and said to him: "I am Yahweh. I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as El-Shaddai, but by my name Yahweh I did not make myself known to them." (Exodus 6:2-4)

But even with the advent of Yahweh, traces of Canaanite religion persist. El is the elder deity of the Canaanite pantheon; he is pictured as being the king of the gods, and presiding over a divine council. Yahweh is portrayed similarly in the Biblical text below:



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"Let the heavens praise your wonders, O Yahweh, your faithfulness in the assembly of the holy ones. For who in the skies can be compared to Yahweh? Who among the heavenly beings is like Yahweh, a God feared in the council of the holy ones, great and awesome above all that are around him?" (Psalms 89:5-7)

Furthermore, the Canaanite god El was given the title "Bull El" due to his strength and fertility. It's no coincidence that the Bible denounces Moses's followers for slipping into polytheism by worshipping a golden calf; they were obviously worshipping Canaanite El. But remarkably, the Biblical book of Genesis refers to Yahweh as the "Bull of Jacob," presumably a title which has been inherited from El:

"Joseph is a fruitful bough... The archers fiercely attacked him; Yet his bow remained taut ... by the hands of the Bull of Jacob." (Genesis 49:22-24)

Nor is the remnant of the Canaanite pantheon only to be seen in the association of Yahweh with El, the ancient king of the gods. There are also Biblical traces of Baal, the youthful Canaanite warrior-god of storm and sky. Baal's epithet was "rider of the clouds," which is also applied to Yahweh in the Biblical passage below:

"Sing to God, sing praises to his name; lift up a song to him who rides upon the clouds his name is Yahweh be exultant before him." (Psalms 68:4)

The depiction of Yahweh as a sky and warrior god is very clear in the following Biblical text celebrating the escape from the Pharaoh of Egypt, and sometimes called the Song of Moses.

Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to Yahweh:

"I will sing to Yahweh, for he has triumphed gloriously;
horse and rider he has thrown into the sea ...
Yahweh is a warrior;
Yahweh is his name.
Pharaoh's chariots and his army he cast into the sea;
his picked officers were sunk in the Red Sea.
The floods covered them ...
your right hand, O Yahweh, shattered the enemy ...
you sent out your fury, it consumed them like stubble.