It is at this stage of the investigation that we have to change track. So far, we have looked at the melding of Canaanite and Israelite deities from the purely textual perspective of the Bible. While this is both enlightening and a necessary starting point, it is far from the whole story. The greater portion of the modern evidence for the evolution of Israelite culture and religion lies in modern archaeology, not in isolated textual study. This evidence has been elegantly presented by the archaeologist William G. Dever in his book, *Who Were the Early Israelites and Where Did They Come From?*

The first Biblical episode that we have any hope of investigating archeologically is the exodus from Egypt led by Moses, which culminated in the conquest of Canaan by his successor Joshua. This story of large-scale conquest should be apparent in the archaeological record as the point where Canaanite culture, dominant since Abraham, was replaced by the Israelite culture of Moses's followers. This is convenient, because another mystery of the Bible is intricately tied up with Moses: this is the divine name, "Yahweh," which he was the first to learn.

Etymologically, it is a mystery, with no grammatically obvious meaning in Hebrew. Even the early Israelites seem to have regarded it as something of a mystery, as is apparent from the first encounter between Moses and his newly discovered deity:

But Moses said to God: "If I come to the Israelites and say to them, "The God of your ancestors has sent me to you", and they ask me, "What is his name?" what shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, "I am who I am." (Exodus 3:13)

As many Biblical translators have pointed out, "I am who I am" is simply an idiomatic way of saying: "Do not concern yourself with who I am." This verse seems to reflect a genuine confusion among the Israelites as to the identity of their new deity named Yahweh. This would make perfect sense if the Israelites were indeed originally Canaanites, since Yahweh was not one of the gods of Canaan. In that case, we are left with the conclusion that Yahweh was a new god, perhaps a foreign god. So how did Yahweh become the main name of the Israelite God? Dever has interesting answers toboth these questions.

Investigating the archaeological record of Palestine at the time which should correspond with Moses, Dever surveys all the major excavations and finds no evidence for any invasion of Canaan by conquering Israelites. He does, however, locate a point in history at which existing Canaanite settlements are disbanded or depopulated, and new ones, Israelite ones, created in their place.

However, it turns out that there is no evidence at all of this change being caused by an armed invasion by Israelites. Rather, it seems to be the result of indigenous social disruption which accompanied the transition from late Bronze Age to early Iron Age, around 1300-1200 BC. Possibly over-taxed and oppressed by the despotic rulers of Bronze Age Canaan, the peasantry seem to have voted with their feet by abandoning both, the rulers and their large settlements.

These were replaced by new, smaller Iron Age Israelite settlements. But there is no indication of large-scale invasion causing this change. Dever recounts that archaeological evidence, in particular the continuity of pottery style evolution, indicates that there was no new ethnic group taking over Canaan during this transition. Rather, the indication is that Canaanite culture evolved into Israelite culture during this period.

"Although potting techniques ... may change from Late Bronze II to Iron I, virtually all of the individual forms that we do have exhibit a strong, and I would say direct, continuity. Thus our early Israelites look just like Canaanites." (Dever, p. 121)

This fits in very well with the continuity that we have seen between Canaanite imagery of El and Baal and Biblical imagery of Yahweh. Dever also notes evidence for the origin of Yahweh. Moses is depicted as having first encountered Yahweh while he journeyed in Median, or the desert areas ranging from the Sinai peninsula (between Egypt and Palestine) to northern Arabia. Egyptologists have found several ancient texts indicating a possible origin of Yahweh in this region. The dates of the Egyptian texts (roughly 1500 - 1200 BC) also correspond roughly in date to when Moses would have had to live in order for his followers to migrate to Canaan at the end of the Bronze Age.



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According to Redford, the early Israelites were simply a contingent of the Shasu Bedouin of southern Canaan, well known to us from the 18th-19th Dynasty Egyptian records. There are several rather detailed descriptions of the Shasu, placing them principally on the semi-arid borders of Egyptian lands. Several fascinating texts make reference to a deity, "Yhw (in) the land of the Shasu," recalling the Biblical tradition that also