

worshiped as mother and daughter at that time. But Asherah is also identified with Ashtoreth, who was deeply revered in Tyre and Sidon under that name. One text of northern Canaan describes Asherah as follows: "He arrived at the shrine of Asherah of the Tyrians, Yea, of the Goddess of the Sidonians." In the texts of Ugarit, Asherah was known as the "Creator of all Deities."

The defection from Yahweh, as described above, continued throughout the biblical accounts, as we shall see. But a most revealing passage is in the book of Jeremiah. This incident took place in a Hebrew colony in Egypt at about 600 BC. Here the religion of the Goddess and the reverence paid to Her, even by the Hebrews of that time, was described not as a new religion that they had recently adopted, but one that these Hebrews had followed before—in Jerusalem. It also strongly hints that this was a religion of women, though the Levite writer carefully depicted the husbands as having authority and exhibits an obvious insistence upon male lineage in the answer given even by the worshipers of the Queen of Heaven:

At this time all the men who knew their wives offered incense to alien gods and all the women who were standing there, a large assembly with all the people living in Pathros in the land of Egypt, answered Jeremiah as follows, we have no intention listening to this word you have spoken to us in Yahweh's name but intend to go on doing all that we have vowed to do, offering incense to the queen of heaven and pouring libations in her honor as we used to do, we and our fathers, our kings and our leaders in the town of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem. We had plenty of food then, we lived well, we suffered no disasters. But since we have given up offering incense to the queen of heaven and pouring libations in her honor we have been destitute and have perished either by sword or by famine. The women added, when we offer incense to the queen of heaven and pour libations in her honor, do you think we make cakes for her with her features on them and pour libations to her without our husband's knowledge? [Jeremiah 44:15-19]

Professor Hooke asked, "What are we to say when we find in the record the gardens of Adonis, Ezekiel's chambers of imagery, women declaring that since they ceased baking cakes for the Queen

of heaven nothing has gone well with them, the masseboth, the asheras, the divinations . . . and the numerous other practices?" and answered, "It is surely impossible to deny that these are foreign elements, some Canaanite, some presumably Assyro-Babylonian, and some possibly Egyptian and that all these enter into the picture of the religion of Israel as it appears in the Old Testament."

Professor Widengren, as if in additional answer, observed, "Now this Queen of Heaven(s) cannot possibly be any other goddess than Astarte, who accordingly as late as c. 600 enjoyed official worship in the kingdom of Judah."

Many Bible passages report that idols of the female deity, referred to as *asherah* (in lower case), were to be found on every high hill, under every green tree and alongside altars in the temples. They were a symbol identified with the worship of the Goddess as Asherah and may have been a pole or a living tree, perhaps carved as a statue. Arthur Evans wrote that "the biblical records again and again attest the cult of the asherah either as a living tree or its substitute, the dead post or pole before which the Canaanite altars were set."

I suspect that the *asherim* (plural) were actually fig trees, the sycamore fig, the tree that was in Egypt considered to be the "Body of the Goddess on Earth." There are many reasons to believe that this is so, evidence that we shall examine more thoroughly in unraveling the myth of Adam and Eve—evidence that perhaps explains the symbolism of the tree in the Paradise myth.

Continuing our exploration of the presence of the Goddess in Canaan, biblical accounts tell us that the *asherim*, though their association with Asherah as the Goddess is never explained, were to be found everywhere. "And the people of Israel did secretly against the Lord their God things that were not right. They built high places, set up pillars and asherim on every high hill and under every green tree, they served idols, made molten images of two calves, they made an asherah and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the Lord" (II Kings 17:9).

As the Levites declared that it was the Hebrew mission to de-

stroy these symbols of the religion they so often refer to as "their gods," wherever they were found, this is exactly what they did. The Levite priests wrote that the destruction had been commanded by Yahweh: "You shall surely destroy all the places where the nations whom you shall dispossess served their gods, upon the high mountains and upon the hills and under every green tree you shall tear down their pillars and burn their asherim with fire" (Deut. 12:2, 3); "You shall not plant any tree as an asherah beside the altar of the Lord" (Deut. 16:21).

But despite the warnings of the Levite priests, the *asherim* were continually erected and worshiped. In I Kings 16:13 we read that at about 850 BC the Hebrew king Ahab, husband of Jezebel, made an *asherah*. Isaiah, sometime in the eighth century BC, spoke of *asherim* in the city of Damascus. Gideon, in the period of Judges, destroyed the *asherah* of one temple, using its wood as a burnt offering to Yahweh.

It was threatened that "The Lord will smite Israel because they have made their asherim." King Hezekiah, who reigned about 715-690 BC, "did what was right in the eyes of the Lord." He broke the pillars and cut down the *asherah*. It was this same Hezekiah who destroyed a bronze serpent which had been kept at the temple in Jerusalem from the time of the arrival of the Hebrews in Canaan. After Hezekiah, his son Manassah, who ruled for fifty-five years, once again erected the *asherim* as did his son Amon who succeeded him.

In II Kings 23:4-15 the Levite priest Hilkiah, who served King Josiah at about 630 BC, took the vessels made for Asherah and Baal out of this same temple in Jerusalem. He removed the *asherah*. "He defiled the high place which Solomon had built for Ashtoreth." "He broke in pieces the pillars and cut down the asherim and filled their places with the bones of men."

Though again the religion of the Goddess is never mentioned, further evidence of Her worship in Canaan during late biblical times was revealed by the presence of the mourners for Her son/lover Tammuz. In the book of Ezekiel we read of the women

weeping for Tammuz at this same temple in Jerusalem at about 620 BC, continuing to practice the mourning ceremonies of the religion of the Goddess, known so well from the Babylonian accounts of Ishtar. As previously quoted, Professor Widengren asserted that a ritual mourning took place in Israel, commemorating the death of Tammuz, just as it did in Mesopotamia.

I. Epstein, in his history of Judaism written in 1959, wrote of the influx of "pagan" ideas, especially at the time of Solomon, blaming Solomon's wives for his idolatrous ways. There is a strong possibility that Solomon's habit of collecting foreign princesses for his harem (seven hundred of them, according to the Bible) may have been a politically motivated system of securing the ultimate right to rule over the conquered lands by marrying the heiresses. The relationship of the rights to many a throne in the Near East to the matrilineal descent pattern of the Goddess-worshiping people may explain the great number of royal foreign women—all listed as legal wives of Solomon—and the accepted presence of the religions which they brought with them.

After Solomon's reign, when the Hebrew tribes divided into two separate nations, the worship of the Goddess continually appeared. This is evident in Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom, Israel, during the period of Ahab and Jezebel (about 869-850 BC); the worship of Ashtoreth and Her Baal was apparently flourishing there at that time. The marriage of the Hebrew Ahab to Jezebel, the daughter of the queen and king of Sidon, who also served as high priestess and priest to Ashtoreth and Baal, may also have brought to him a more legitimate right to the throne. But even King Jeroboam, before that time (about 922-901 BC), had made golden calves, symbols of the Goddess religion.

In Judah, the southern Hebrew kingdom whose capital was Jerusalem, Rehoboam, at about 922-915 BC, and his son Abijam, both perhaps reigning as husbands of Queen Maacah, were said to have practiced "pagan idolatries." As we know, Queen Maacah worshiped Asherah and was eventually dethroned for having made an idol of Her. At about 842 BC Queen Athaliah ruled in Jerusalem

and with her reign the "pagan" religion continued to flourish. As Jezebel's daughter, we may once again question if, in the eyes of many of the people of Canaan, Athaliah held the right to rule as the granddaughter of the high priestess and priest of Ashtoreth in Sidon. At about 735-727 BC King Ahaz also followed the ancient religion, committing "evil in the eyes of the Lord." At about 620 BC the women of Ezekiel's time were seen weeping for Tammuz at the temple in Jerusalem, while in Jeremiah's day, about 600 BC, rebellious women openly announced their intention of continuing to revere the Queen of Heaven.

SUMMARY

As a result of archaeological evidence, which helps to explain many of the obscure references, despite the evasive wording and lack of explanation in the Bible, there is no question that in biblical periods of Canaan the Levite priests of the Hebrews were in continual contact with the religion of the Goddess. Though the commanded destruction of artifacts has probably resulted in fewer archaeological finds in southern Canaan than the rest of the Near East, masses of evidence of the extensive worship of the Goddess have been unearthed in all the other lands in which the Hebrews either lived or were in close contact, lands such as Egypt, Babylon, Sinai and northern Canaan. Surrounding the Hebrews in southern Canaan were the original inhabitants of Canaan, people who lived in the cities that had not been destroyed and who had revered the female divinity from the most ancient times.

As revealed by the Bible itself, the adoration of the Goddess, even in the Hebrew capitals of Samaria and Jerusalem, even by those who were considered to be members of the tribes that followed the new religion of Yahweh (most especially their royalty and rulers, who do not seem to have been chosen from the Levite tribe), appears to be one of the major influential factors in the development of the Judaic and later the Christian attitudes. The possibility that the Levites may originally have been related to

the Indo-European Luvians, while the other tribes may have been descendants of the Mediterranean Goddess-worshipping peoples, may help to explain this division between the Levite priests and prophets and the continual "waywardness and defection" of the Israelite people who appear to have drifted toward the ancient religion time and again.

The Levite priests declared, "There shall be no cult prostitutes of the daughters of Israel." Yet, as we have already seen, the ancient sexual customs continued. It seems to have been the very nature of the sexual customs, so inherent and integral a part of the female religion, allowing for and possibly encouraging matrilineal descent patterns to continue, that aroused the most violent reactions among the Levite patrilinealists.

Once aware of the continual presence of the Goddess religion, a careful reading of the accounts in the Old Testament (in which the Hebrew woman was initially assigned to the secondary status of obedient assistant), reveals extensive passages spent in continuous threat, at times veiled or hidden in symbolism, against the worship of the Goddess. But some of the threats were more open. They were aimed at those who continued to practice the ancient religion, revealing even within the records of the Bible accounts of slaughter and massacre of those who dared to pray to "other gods."

As we shall see in the following chapter, the insistent and repetitious sexual imagery allows us to observe the Levite attitudes toward the sexual customs of the Goddess religion and the sexual autonomy of women generally, autonomy that had for thousands of years helped to allow women to retain their independence economically, socially and legally. Thus into the laws of the Levites was written the destruction of the worship of the Divine Ancestress, and with it the final destruction of the matrilineal system.

9

And the Men of the City Shall Stone Her with Stones

So antagonistic were the Levite priests toward the religion of the Goddess in Canaan (though the term "other gods" is evasively used in each passage) that laws were written prohibiting the worship of these "other gods." The laws were so severe that they commanded the members of the Hebrew religion to murder even their own children if they did not worship Yahweh. The Levite laws of the Bible ordered: "If your brother or son or daughter or wife or friend suggest serving other gods, you must kill him, your hand must be the first raised in putting him to death and all the people shall follow you" (Deut. 13:6).

This order was obviously directed only toward men, for the one relative it did not suggest killing was the husband. Not only relatives were to be kept under watchful surveillance, for the Levites also wrote, "If the inhabitants of a town that once served the Lord your God, now serve other gods, you must kill all the inhabitants of that town" (Deut. 13:15).

Once aware of the identity of the Queen of Heaven and the extent of Her worship as it existed in Canaan, even among the

Hebrew royalty, we may gain a deeper insight into the political motivations of the Levites by becoming more familiar with the imagery of women in the Bible and the specific laws concerning them.

The Hebrew prophets and priests, the Levites, wrote with open and scornful contempt of any woman who was neither virgin nor married. They insisted that all women must be publicly designated as the private property of some man, father or husband. Thus they developed and instituted the concept of sexual *morality*—for women.

In a forword written by Bible historian I. Epstein in 1935, which prefaces a version of the Hebrew Talmud, he suggests that this was the major reason for the Hebrews being so threatened by the surrounding religions:

Experience soon proved how great was the temptation to imitate the religious practices of surrounding nations, even at a time when the Israelites inhabited a land of their own. The difficulty of resisting alien influence grew much more severe in periods of dispersion when Jews were living in a heathen environment and the rabbis had to give serious attention to the problem of how to counteract the forces of assimilation which threatened to submerge the Jewish communities settled in countries where idol worship was the state religion.

It is important to understand that the vehement opposition to idolatry which distinguishes the legislation of the Bible and later of the Talmud was not merely the antagonism of one theological system to another. Fundamentally it was a conflict of ethical standards. Heathen people practised abominations against which the scriptures earnestly warned Israel. Idolatry was identified with immoral conduct, an identification which was too often verified by experience.

This "conflict of ethical standards" and "immoral conduct" appears to be primarily the Levite perception of the sexual customs, known to have existed at all periods of biblical history. The lack of concern for the paternity of children among the Hebrew people who continued to revere the Queen of Heaven, thus allowing matrilineal descent patterns to continue as a result of the sexual customs, appears to have been the crux of the persecution

of the ancient beliefs by the priests of the Hebrew tribes. It was surely apparent to Levite leaders that if a religion existed alongside their own, a religion in which women owned their own property, were endowed with a legal identity and were free to relate sexually to various men, it would be much more difficult for the Hebrew men to convince their women that they must accept the position of being their husband's property. Hebrew women had to be taught to accept the idea that for a woman to sleep with more than one man was evil. They had to be taught that it would bring disaster, wrath and shame from the almighty—while it was simultaneously acceptable for their husbands to have sexual relationships with two, three or fifty women. Thus premarital virginity and marital fidelity were proclaimed by Levite law as divinely essential for all Hebrew women, the antithesis of the attitudes toward female sexuality held in the religion of the Goddess.

Yet the influence and prestige of the ancient religion was ever present. As we have seen, there are continual biblical reports of "paganism" in every era; it loomed as a constant problem, described throughout the Old Testament. The prophet-priests of Yahweh threatened. They scolded. The Levite writers labeled any sexually autonomous women, including the sacred women of the temple, as whores and harlots and demanded the enforcement of their own patriarchal attitudes concerning the sexual ownership of women. Once having invented this concept of "morality," they flung accusations of "immorality" at the women whose behavior and lives, in accordance with their own most ancient beliefs, were of the highest and most sacred nature.

"BUT THOU HAST PLAYED THE HARLOT WITH MANY LOVERS"

Most revealing was the symbolic analogy they drew between any women who refused to abide by the laws of the new morality—

continually referred to as harlots and adulteresses—and the waywardness and defection of the entire Hebrew people in their constant lack of fidelity to Yahweh. The use of female sexual infidelity as the ultimate sin—so serious that it was regarded as analogous to the betrayal of Yahweh—affords us some insight into the Levite attitude toward the sexually autonomous woman. The two parts of the analogy are often tightly intertwined, sometimes in a rather obscure fashion, but as the prophets of Yahweh railed at the Hebrews who dared to worship "other gods," the attack upon any woman who refused to be the property of a specific man was made simultaneously and automatically. As we have seen, despite the constant threats, Hebrew women and men alike, even their royalty, did indeed continue to worship the Queen of Heaven. In doing this they were symbolized by the priests as the "Daughter of Zion" and as this daughter denounced as an unfaithful harlot.

Jeremiah, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Hosea and Nahum all used the sexual metaphor extensively. Jeremiah, a Levite priest, put it this way: "They say if a man put away his wife and she goes from him and becomes another man's shall he return to her again? Shall not that land be greatly polluted? But thou hast played the harlot with many lovers; yet return again to me saith the Lord." In another passage he again compared the defection of the Hebrews to an unfaithful woman, saying, "Surely as a wife treacherously departeth from her husband, so have ye dealt treacherously with me, O House of Israel, saith the Lord." In yet another tirade he accused the Hebrews of "playing the harlot on every high mountain or under every green tree."

Angrily he spoke as Yahweh, asking, "How can I forgive you for all this? Your sons have forsaken me and sworn by gods that are no gods. I gave them all they needed, yet they preferred adultery and haunted the brothels" (Jer. 5:7). And once again the analogy was used as in Jer. 3:6-10 we read, "In the reign of King Josiah, the Lord said to me, Do you see what apostate Israel did? She went up to every hill top and under every spreading tree and there she played the whore. Even after she had done all this, I said to her,

Come back to me, but she would not. That faithless woman, her sister Judah, saw it all; she saw too that I had put apostate Israel away and given her a note of divorce because she had committed adultery. Yet that faithless woman, her sister Judah, was not afraid; she too has gone and played the whore. She defiled the land with her thoughtless harlotry and her adulterous worship of stone and wood." (Jeremiah's words were spoken about a century after the defeat of the northern kingdom, Israel, by Sargon II of Assyria in 722 BC.)

The Levite priest-prophet Ezekiel told his congregation, "The word of the Lord came to me: Man, he said, there were once two women, daughters of the same mother. They played the whore in Egypt, played the whore while they were still girls; for there they let their breasts be fondled and their virgin bosoms pressed. The elder was named Oholah, her sister Oholibah. They became mine and bore me sons and daughters. Oholah is Samaria; Oholibah is Jerusalem." The entire section of Ezek. 23 describes the "lewd" sexual behavior of these two sisters, symbolizing the two Hebrew capitals, during which Ezekiel says, "So I will put a stop to your lewdness and the way in which you learnt to play the whore in Egypt." He finally summarizes with "Thus I will put an end to lewdness in the land, and other women shall be taught not to be as lewd as they. You shall pay the penalty for your lewd conduct and shall be punished for your idolatries, and you will know that I am the Lord God." In still another passage Ezekiel warned, "And they shall burn thy houses with fire and execute judgments upon thee to cease from playing the harlot and thou shalt give no hire anymore."

Nahum, speaking of the city of Nineveh, a religious center of the Babylonian Goddess Ishtar, struck out against the Goddess and her sexuality in this way: "Because of the multitudes of the whoredom of the well favored harlot, the mistress of witchcrafts, that selleth nations through her whoredoms and families through her witchcrafts; Behold I am against thee, saith the Lord of Hosts, and I will discover thy skirts upon thy face, and I will show the nations

thy nakedness and the kingdoms thy shame."

But the first few sections of the book of Hosea most clearly depict the outrage of the Hebrew man with the wife who refused to be his private property. First we read that Yahweh told Hosea, "Take yourself a wife of harlotry and have children of harlotry, for the land commits great harlotry by forsaking the Lord." Hosea then spoke to his daughter of the "whoredom" and "lewdness" of her mother Gomer, who was apparently a sacred woman of the temple. Later Gomer was told to put away her harlotry and adultery, to which she defiantly replied, "I will go after my lovers." In response to this rebellion the male deity threatened to thwart her activities until such time as she would finally say in desperation, "I will go and return to my first husband."

It is not clear whether these were intended to be the words of Hosea or Yahweh, for they are initially presented as the words of Hosea to his wife, but we read, "I will put an end to all her rejoicing, her feasts, her new moons, her sabbaths and all her solemn festivals. I mean to make her pay for all the days when she offered burnt offerings to the baals and decked herself with rings and necklaces to court her lovers, forgetting me. It is Yahweh who is speaking." Hosea then goes on to say: "Your daughters play the harlot and your brides commit adultery for the men go aside with harlots and sacrifice with cult prostitutes.

"AND THEY WENT FORTH AND THEY SLEW IN THE CITY"

Not only were those women insulted, but violent threats were also made. In the book of Jeremiah, that prophet angrily threatened the "daughter of Egypt, Tyre, Sidon and Ascalon," a symbolic reference, judging by the cities mentioned, to the Goddess. In another passage he warned the women who openly announced their intention to continue their worship of the Queen of Heaven that they would meet with famine, violence and total destruction as a result of their religious beliefs.

The prophet Isaiah, distraught with the situation, moaned, "As for my people, children are their oppressors and women rule over them." Exploding with derisive accusations at "the daughter of Babylon," again a reference to Ishtar, he insulted Her for Her self-assurance and Her sexuality, as well as Her magical powers and spells. Over what appears to be the independence of the Hebrew women, apparently influenced by the freedom of the women all about them, Isaiah listed all their jewelry and seductive apparel with the greatest contempt and then threatened, "The men shall fall by the sword and thy mighty in war and she being desolate shall sit upon the ground. And in that day seven women shall take hold of one man and say, only let us be called by thy name, to take away our reproach."

Thus the Hebrew prophet looked forward to the day of male glory when all independent women would choose to be the property of a man, as they may have been forced to be in the desert, or as their towns were burnt and their families killed and the earliest Israelite wives were taken as prisoners of war by the Hebrew tribes. In the struggle for male kinship, Isaiah dreamed of the day that women would say, "only let us be called by thy name."

In section eight of the book of Ezekiel we again find the religion of the Goddess under attack, as Ezekiel recalls this event: "Entering at the temple gate, I broke through a wall, there was a door. A mysterious figure was leading, apparently a messenger from the male deity. The figure said, 'Go in and look at the filthy things they are doing inside.' I went in and looked: all sorts of images and snakes and repulsive animals and all the idols of the House of Israel drawn on the walls all around." According to Ezekiel, the "filthy" things the worshipers inside this temple were doing were facing to the east, bowing to the sun and raising a branch to their nostrils. This was probably a branch of the sacred tree known as the *asherah*. Ezekiel continues, "He next took me to the north gate of the temple of Yahweh, where women were sitting, weeping for Tammuz." This remark, more clearly than any other, reveals that he was observing the religion of Ashtoreth/Ishtar—still in practice at the temple in Jerusalem.

The mysterious figure then said, "Son of man, do you see that?" This appellation, "Son of man," was used repeatedly throughout the book of Ezekiel, perhaps to remind its readers that Levite priests, such as Ezekiel, no longer considered themselves as the sons of women. Later, turning on the women who prayed in this manner, the figure ordered, "And you, son of man, turn to the daughters of your own people who make up prophecies out of their own head [unlike the Levite prophets of Yahweh, who apparently had a direct line with the proper source], prophesy against them."

Threats and insults to the native inhabitants of Canaan and the Hebrews who had joined in their customs were not all that was used to frighten and discourage people from following the religion of the Queen of Heaven. For next we read of accounts of cold-blooded massacres, merciless slaughters of those who still refused to accept Yahweh. The Bible itself records that any Hebrew who dared to worship in the ancient religion of the Queen of Heaven and Her Baal were the victims of a violent religious persecution.

The words and threats of Ezekiel, as well as the other prophets, were translated into murder and destruction, explained as having been commanded by Yahweh. They are recorded in this way in the pages of the Old Testament:

And the Lord said unto him, "Go through the midst of Jerusalem and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that are done in the midst thereof." And to the others he said in mine hearing, "go ye after him through the city and smite. Slay utterly, both old and young, both maids and little children and women, but come not near any man upon whom is the mark; and begin at my sanctuary." Then they began at the ancient men who were before the house. And he said unto them, "defile the house and fill the courts with the slain; go ye forth." And they went forth and they slew in the city [Ezek. 9:4-7].

An earlier account of a callous slaughter in the name of Yahweh aimed at the religion of the Goddess occurred during the reign of Ahab. Elijah exhibited the same self-righteous attitude that throughout history has allowed the commission of mass murder in the name of a principle, whether political, religious or a combina-

tion of the two. Referring to four hundred people who worshiped in the ancient religion, the passage states, "And Elijah said unto them, take the prophets of Baal, let not one of them escape. And they took them and Elijah brought them down to the Brook Kishon and slew them there."

This particular passage is the version given in the Revised Standard Version of the Old Testament. But in the New English Bible, published in 1970 by the Bible Societies of Scotland and England, which retranslated many of the old texts from the original Hebrew and Greek, we read the story in a slightly different way. In fact, in this version of the Old Testament, many of the references to Asherah, Ashtoreth and the *asherim* are more explicitly explained. In the New English Bible we read that Elijah confronts the ancient religion as that of Asherah. It tells us in I Kings 18:19 that these four hundred people were "four hundred prophets of the goddess Asherah, who are Jezebel's pensioners."

It is most evident in the story of Jezebel, who has long been presented as the epitome and symbol of the treacherously evil woman, that her real crime was her refusal to accept the worship of Yahweh, choosing instead the religion of her own parents, that of the Queen of Heaven and Her Baal. Her parents, as queen and king of Sidon (some say Tyre), held high positions in the ancient religion as high priestess and priest. Not only did Jezebel herself follow the ancient religion, but according to the Bible, as a result of her influence her husband Ahab, a Hebrew king of Israel, adopted the pagan ways as well, erecting *asherim* in the temple. Jezebel's supposed crime, that of starting a rumor that resulted in the death of a man, becomes questionable when we realize that it was her husband who actually desired the dead man's property and it was with letters signed with Ahab's name that she was accused.

Jezebel was murdered in the most gruesome manner, described in morbid detail in the Bible, surely intended as a warning to all other "treacherous" women. The execution was carried out by the avenging Hebrew hero Jehu. But Jehu's motives become frighteningly clear when, after the death of the "pagan" queen, he arranged

a massacre of those who "ate at her royal table" and then later claimed the throne of Israel as his own.

Shortly after the murder of Jezebel, Jehu called for a solemn assembly of the people who paid homage to Ashtoreth and Baal, tricking them in this way into gathering together at their own temple at an appointed time. The holy shrine was described as being full from one end to the other. It was then reported in the Bible, "And when they went to offer sacrifices and burnt offerings, Jehu appointed four score men without and said, if any of the men that I have brought into your hands escape, he that letteth him go, his life shall be for the life of him." So it was recorded in the book of II Kings that Jehu and his men murdered every member of the congregation and then finally made a "latrine" of the building itself. And when the massacre and desecration was completed, Jehu is recorded to have heard Yahweh say, "Thou hast done well that which is right in mine eyes" (II Kings 10:18-31).

"THEN LET HIM WRITE HER A BILL OF DIVORCEMENT"

The evidence is abundant. The religion of Ashtoreth, Asherah or Anath and Her Baal—and the accompanying female sexual autonomy—were the enemies. No method was considered too violent to bring about the desired goals. To clarify even further the underlying goals of the Levites, alongside these massacres we confront the rules that the Levite priests declared for all Hebrew women. Upon reading the Levite laws it becomes apparent that the sexual autonomy of women in the religion of the Goddess posed a continual threat. It undermined the far-reaching goals of the men, perhaps led or influenced by Indo-European peoples, who viewed women as property and aimed at a society in which male kinship was the rule, as it had long been in the Indo-European nations. This in turn required that each woman be retained as the possession of one man, leaving no doubt as to the identity of the father of the children she might bear, especially of her sons. But male kinship lines remained

impossible as long as women were allowed to function as sexually independent people, continuing to bear children whose paternity was not known or considered to be of any importance.

Laws, speeches and even the divine word had apparently been insufficient when freedom had been known so long. Thus severe punishments were designed and meted out to bring about the total sexual control of Hebrew women. Any deviation was sin, in many cases punishable by disgraceful and agonizing death. (Though these laws appear in the books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy, said to have been written at the time of Moses, Bible scholars generally date their writings to between 1000 and 600 BC.) According to the Levite laws, all women were to remain virgins until marriage. Once legally married, a woman was to relate sexually only to the one man who was designated as her husband, probably a man chosen by her father. This husband may already have possessed, or could acquire in the future, any number of other wives or concubines and was free to add a new one at any time.

In Lev. 20:10 we read that if a woman committed adultery, both she and her lover were to be put to death. In Deuteronomy the Levites wrote of the Israelite bride: "But if this thing be true and tokens of virginity not found for the damsel: then they shall bring out the damsel to the door of her father's house and the men of the city shall stone her with stones that she die because she hath wrought folly in Israel to play the whore in her father's house, so shall thou put away evil from among you" (Deut. 22:20-22). Thus a young Hebrew girl might be dragged from the house and brutally stoned to death—for having made love, or even for having lost her virginity through some other activity or accident, while her Canaanite contemporaries would have been considered holy for taking part in the sacred sexual customs.

So determined were the Levites that a reverent regard for the paternity of children be developed that among them even violent rape was equated with marriage, much as it was among the Indo-European-controlled Assyrians. In Levite law, the rape of a virgin was honored as a declaration of ownership and brought about a

forced marriage. As the victim of rape, a woman automatically lost the right to continue her life as a single woman or to become a wife in a more carefully arranged and probably more desirable marriage. The law reads, "If a man find a damsel that is a virgin which is not betrothed and lay hold on her and they be found, then the man that lay with her shall give unto the damsel's father fifty shekels of silver and she shall be his wife" (Deut. 22:28, 29).

For Levite daughters it was decreed, "And the daughter of any priest, if she profane herself by playing the whore, she profaneth her father and shall be burnt with fire" (Lev. 21:9). Since it was the Levite priests who wrote the laws, this willingness to burn their own daughters to death perhaps most clearly reveals the intensity of the Levite attitude toward the sexual autonomy of women.

Perhaps just as astonishing is the law that tells us that if the victim of a rape was a married or betrothed woman she was to be killed—for having been raped. The law states that, if a betrothed woman or a married woman was sexually violated, she and the man were both to be stoned to death (Deut. 22:23-25). The rape was regarded as an affront to the male who owned her. Only in the deserted countryside might a woman be "excused" for having been raped, since perhaps she had called for help and had not been heard.

Though the Bible repeatedly announced that a woman who dared to make love to a man other than her husband was a shameful and profane degradation to the entire faith, Hebrew men went about honorably collecting as many women as they could economically afford. The records of the Hebrew kings reveal that they kept large harems and most Hebrew men appear to have taken several wives; yet each of these women was expected to be totally faithful to the fragment of the husband to whom she was assigned. A lack of fidelity on the part of the male appears to have been taken for granted, unless the other woman was already married or betrothed. This was regarded as sinful because it was a legal infringement upon the property of some other man. It was hardly a romantic fidelity for both partners of the marriage that was deemed as im-

portant or sacred, but only for the woman that premarital virginity and sexual fidelity became "moral" issues, attitudes we see reflected even today.

But the position of a married woman who had been faithful was also precarious. In Deut. 24:1 the plight of the married woman was made clear. "When a man hath taken a wife and it come to pass that she find no favor in his eyes because he hath found some uncleanness in her; then let him write her a bill of divorcement and give it in her hand and send her out of *his* house." As we read previously, under the Levite law only the husband could ask for or demand divorce; in fact, all he had to do was write a note. We may see this as a very different society from that of the Sumerian Eshnunna, where if a man took a second woman after the first had borne children, he was to be put out of the house without any possessions.

Here the advantages of male kinship and male inheritance lines, not only for royalty or the priesthood but even for the average male, become clear. A woman who had lived in the house with her husband, probably given birth to children, performed domestic services, perhaps added to or enhanced the value of the house, property and land by her efforts, no matter what her age or state of health, had no legal rights or claims to any of it. She could simply be handed a notice and sent on her way. The husband then assumed ownership of all the products of her time and efforts, and if he had not already done so, probably soon afterward replaced her with another wife or two. Having lost her virginity, she was probably nearly worthless as marriage material.

Such divorces may not have happened frequently, though we have no records with which to judge, but the laws allowing such divorce probably resulted in the woman, fearful at the possibility of being dismissed, becoming a submissive servant, the archetype of the "good wife" who obediently, smilingly caters to her husband's slightest whim or desire.

"I HAVE COME TO DESTROY THE WORKS OF THE FEMALE"

Over the centuries the suppression and persecution of the religion of the female deity continued. In the *Abodah Zarah*, a book of the Hebrew Talmud compiled in about the fifth century AD, directions were given to the pious worshiper so that he might understand how to destroy the powers of an "idol." This could be done by knocking off the tip of its ear or nose (which may account for the missing noses of so many statues). The entire book was filled with specific laws and regulations describing the relationship the Hebrews were to have with the "idolators."

The civilizations that worshiped the Goddess, which had flourished for thousands of years, bringing with them in earliest times inventions in methods of agriculture, medicine, architecture, metallurgy, wheeled vehicles, ceramics, textiles and written language, were gradually stamped out. Though the Indo-Europeans had initiated a great many changes, it was later the duty of every Hebrew and then of every Christian to suppress and destroy the worship of the female deity wherever it still existed.

If the Hebrews followed the commands in Deuteronomy, the massacres described in the Old Testament may have been only a symbolic portion of the murder and destruction that was actually committed. As the literature and tenets of the Levite-Hebrew religion were incorporated into the new faith, which eventually developed as Christianity, the persecution of the religion of the Goddess continued. The power and influence of the new Church grew, Levite law now juxtaposed to a revised image of the familiar legend of the mother and the dying son—and with it came the even more extreme suppression of the female religion.

In 1971 R. E. Witt wrote *Isis in the Graeco-Roman World*. In it he points out that the worship of the Goddess as Isis and Artemis, names that had become widely used by the time of Christ, was the target of the apostle Paul. He explains that

Both in Palestine and in Syria, as in Asia Minor on which so much of Paul's apostolic zeal was concentrated, the cult of the female deities was deep rooted and very old . . . the sermon attacking the idolatry shown by the Ephesians towards the Great Goddess Artemis has not survived in detail. We need not doubt that Paul had taken the measure of the female deities of whose influence he had had long experience, especially Artemis and Isis . . . Paul could tell that here was a dangerous rival . . . Clearly the Pauline view of Isiacism [the worship of Isis] was penetratingly critical. Paul's world was a patriarchy, his religion was Christological and monotheistic, and God was found in fashion as a man. Isis was female . . . The obvious foe of the Church in its early ecumenical struggles was the cult of Isis and her temple companions. This is made clear even before the death blow which paganism received from Theodosius.

Witt also quotes perhaps the most revealing line in the story of the destruction of the Goddess religion, telling us that "Clement of Alexandria reproduces a saying from *The Gospel according to the Egyptians*. Christ's words are interesting and in such a context they are almost certainly directed against the current worship of Isis: 'I have come to destroy the works of the female.'"

In about AD 300 the Emperor Constantine brought an end to the ancient sanctuary of Ashtoreth at Aphaca and generally suppressed the worship of Ashtoreth throughout Canaan, claiming that it was "immoral." He is said to have seen a vision of Christ during a battle and to have heard the words. "In this sign, conquer." Strange words for the Prince of Peace.

In AD 380 the Emperor Theodosius closed down the temple of the Goddess at Eleusis, the temples of the Goddess in Rome and the "seventh wonder of the world," the temple of the Goddess then known as Artemis or Diana at Ephesus in western Anatolia. It was said that he despised the religion of women. This great Christian emperor may be better remembered for his massacre of seven thousand people in Thessalonica.

In Athens, the Parthenon of the Acropolis, a sacred site of the Goddess since the Mycenaean times of 1300 BC, was converted into a Christian church in AD 450. In the fifth century the Emperor Justinian converted the remaining temples of Isis into Christian churches.

In Arabia of the seventh century, Mohammed brought an end to the national worship of the Sun Goddess, Al Lat, and the Goddess known as Al Uzza, whose name might have been related to the ancient Ua Zit. Professor J. B. Pritchard writes that Al Lat was originally much the same deity as Asherah in Arabic religion. Mohammed brought about the worship of Allah as the supreme god. Allah actually means god, as Al Lat means Goddess. Though it is not always realized in western society, Mohammed incorporated many of the legends and attitudes of the Old and New Testaments into the Muslim Koran, the bible of Islam. In the Koran, Sura 4:31 tells us, "Men have authority over women because God has made the one superior to the other and because they spend their wealth to maintain them. So good women are obedient, guarding the unseen parts as God has guarded them."

As late as the sixteenth century AD, Hebrew scholars compiled a text known as the Kabbalah. The name of Lilith, once described in a Sumerian tablet as "the hand of Inanna" who brought men into the temple, a name also found in some Hebrew literature as the first wife of Adam who refused to lie beneath him and to obey his commands, appeared once again. In the Hebrew Kabbalah, Lilith was presented as the symbol of evil, the female devil. G. Scholem wrote that in the Zohar, a part of the Kabbalah, it was stated that "Lilith, Queen of the demons, or the demons of her retinue, do their best to provoke men to sexual acts without benefit of a woman, their aim being to make themselves bodies from the lost seed."

It gave the warning that Lilith hovered about, just waiting for available sperm from which she created demons and illegitimate children. The Kabbalah cautioned that, with the help of Lilith, the illegitimate children come. Was this a remote reference to the ancient *qadishtu*, their image now embodied in the wicked demon Lilith? The major factor in avoiding the dangerous Lilith was once again a matter of inheritance. This is apparent in the description of the actions of the illegitimate children, once their father has died.

Scholem tells us that

Wishing along with the other children to have a part in the deceased as their father, they tug and pluck at him, so that he feels the pain, and God himself when he sees this noxious offspring by the corpse, is reminded of the dead man's sins . . . All the illegitimate children that a man has begotten with demons in the course of his life appear after his death to take part in the mourning for him and in his funeral . . . the demons claim their inheritance on this occasion along with the other sons of the deceased and try to harm the legitimate children.

SUMMARY

We have seen that the orders for the destruction of the religion of the Goddess were built into the very canons and laws of the male religions that replaced it. It is clear that the ancient reverence for the female deity did not simply cease to be but that its disappearance was gradually brought about, initially by the Indo-European invaders, later by the Hebrews, eventually by the Christians and even further by the Mohammedans. Along with the ultimate acceptance of the male religions throughout a large part of the world, the precepts of sexual "morality," that is, premarital virginity and marital fidelity for women, were incorporated into the attitudes and laws of the societies which embraced them.

There is no question about the antagonism expressed by the Levite patriarchs toward the religion of the female deity. Accounts, perhaps originally remembered in oral form, taken from other Hebrew scripts or even some other language, became part of the biblical texts which are assumed to have first been written as we know them in about 1000 BC. From the time of Moses onward, the Levites appear to have made the decision to destroy the shrines and sanctuaries of the earlier worship. From that time on until the fall of the two Hebrew nations in 722 and 586 BC, we read in the Bible of the actual massacres and desecrations, claimed to be executed at the command of the male deity. We cannot avoid observing the continual emphasis upon female sexuality as acceptable only when women were safely designated as the property of one specific male and that any deviation from that rule was denounced as harlotry or adultery and subject to punishment by death, making the sexual customs of the older religion rather difficult to follow.

It is then, perhaps, not overly speculative to suggest that the myth of Adam and Eve, the myth which Professor Chiera tells us shows evidence of having been "produced in scholarly circles," may have been intentionally written and included in the creation story of the Bible as yet another assault upon the Goddess religion.

Within the legend of the creation of all existence and life by Yahweh, the story which supposedly explained what happened at the very beginning of time, the image of woman as the dangerously seductive temptress, who brought about the fall of all humanity, may have been inserted. Knowing all that we do about the sacred sexual customs in the religion of the Goddess, the continual presence of these customs among the Hebrews even in Jerusalem, the use of dragon or serpent myths, often in conjunction with creation stories, by the Indo-Europeans and the vestiges of the Leviathan myth in the Old Testament, we may gain a most clarifying and enlightening insight into the symbolism and message contained in the biblical myth of Adam and Eve.

The examination of the symbolic imagery of the Goddess religion and that of the Genesis tale of creation in the following chapter provides some surprising information. We may begin to understand what it means when the Bible tells us that Eve defied the male deity and instead accepted the word and advice of the serpent. We may indeed find that the seemingly innocent myth of Paradise and how the world began was actually carefully constructed and propagated to "keep women in their place," the place assigned to them by the Levite tribe of biblical Canaan.