

A COMPARISON OF THE VALUE PATTERNS OF
EARLY HEBREWS AND EARLY GREEKS

by

Barbara C. Law

A THESIS

Approved:

Committee

Approved: 1 1

Dean of the Graduate School

A COMPARISON OF THE VALUE PATTERNS OF
EARLY HEBREWS AND EARLY GREEKS

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of English
Sam Houston State College

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Barbara C. Law
May, 1968

ABSTRACT

Law, Barbara C., A Comparison of the Value Patterns of Early Hebrews and Early Greeks. Master of Arts (English), May, 1968, Sam Houston State College, Huntsville, Texas. 87 pp.

Purpose

It was the purpose of this study to explore the differences and similarities in the value patterns of the early Greeks and the early Hebrews. Five topics concerning the value patterns of these cultures were considered: (1) the view of life; (2) the view of death and the after-life; (3) the relationships between gods and men; (4) the characteristics of heroes; and (5) the status of women.

Methods

The methods used to obtain data for this study were (1) close textual analysis of primary source material; and (2) comparison of conclusions with those of secondary sources.

Findings

From the evidence presented in this study the following conclusions appear to be in order:

1. The value patterns revealed in the Homeric epics are, of course, more consistent than those of the early books

of The Old Testament because the latter reflect various cultural levels and practices over a longer period of time.

2. Although many similarities existed between early Greek culture as revealed by Homer in his epics, and Hebrew culture as revealed in The Old Testament, these similarities generally were those which unite all cultures. Certain basic differences in philosophical outlook were found which sharply divided the early Greek mind from that of the Hebrew.

3. The early Greek culture contained the seed of humanism which so characterized Golden Age Athenian culture, and which has been the social and political motivating force in European civilization since the onset of the Renaissance. Hebrew culture and concepts, on the other hand, furnished the impetus toward the metaphysical and toward ethical monotheism which has guided European civilization as strongly as has Greek humanism.

Approved:

Supervising Professor

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. INTRODUCTION	1
Statement of the Problem	1
Purpose of the Study	1
Limitations of the Study	1
Methods of Investigation	2
II. VIEW OF LIFE	3
Importance of Individual Achievement	5
Attitude Toward Material Possessions	6
Evidences of Class Consciousness	14
Concept of an Ordered Universe	18
Joy and Sorrow in Life	24
III. VIEW OF DEATH AND THE AFTER-LIFE	27
Concepts of the Underworld	27
Funeral Practices	30
Communication with the Dead	30
IV. RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN GODS AND MEN	42
Contractual Vs. Covenantal Relationships	42
Characteristics of the Respective Deities	46

CHAPTER	PAGE
Role of Prophets and Seers	52
Concepts of Prayer	55
Role of Priests	59
V. CHARACTERISTICS OF HEROES	64
Physical Characteristics	64
Leadership Capabilities	65
Motivating Forces	69
Conventional Weaknesses	70
VI. STATUS OF WOMEN	76
Social Role in the Respective Cultures	76
Participation in Religious Rites	80
Influence on Affairs of State	81
VII. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS	84
BIBLIOGRAPHY	86
VITA	88

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

The early Hebrews and the early Greeks developed the two systems of values which eventually fused to form the basis of European culture. A comparison of the value patterns existing in these two cultures should lead to a better understanding of the cultural currents which have most profoundly affected the civilization in which we live today.

Purpose of the Study

It is the purpose of this study to explore the differences and similarities in the value patterns of the early Greeks and the early Hebrews concentrating upon these major areas: (1) the view of life; (2) the view of death and the after-life; (3) the relationships between gods and men; (4) the characteristics of heroes; and (5) the status of women.

Limitations of the Study

This study is limited to the use of three primary sources: The Iliad, The Odyssey, and the first nineteen books of The

Old Testament, with the addition of secondary source material available through the Estill Library at Sam Houston State College.

Methods of Investigation

The following methods were used to obtain data for this study: (1) the close textual analysis of the primary source material cited above; (2) a comparison of conclusions with those of the authors of selected secondary sources available in the college library.

All primary source references are to the Revised Standard Version of The Old Testament (New York, 1953) and to the Penguin editions of Homer's The Iliad and The Odyssey, translated by E. V. Rieu (Baltimore, 1966). All subsequent references will be to these editions and will be enclosed in parentheses in the text.

CHAPTER II

VIEW OF LIFE

The early Greeks and the early Hebrews developed views of life which were divergent in many ways. The Greeks, for example, exalted human achievement while the Hebrew way of life demanded humility and the acceptance of the will of God. The people of both cultures valued material possessions. The Greeks, however, desired such possessions for personal use and self-aggrandizement while the Hebrews dedicated a large portion of their wealth to building and decorating the tabernacle and later the temple for God. The Hebrews valued the belief that they were God's chosen people; there was no corresponding belief recorded in the Greek epics. Although the Greeks had no clear picture of family or tribal origin, the Hebrews kept detailed historical or genealogical records. The highly stratified society and patent class consciousness of the Greeks contrasted sharply with the almost classless society of the Hebrews and their concern for the well-being of the whole tribal group.

The views of life developed in these two cultures were not, however, different in all respects. Neither the early Greeks nor the early Hebrews developed their cultures in

isolation. As early as the sixteenth century B.C., and then in the late eighth and seventh centuries B.C., Greece was in close touch with the cultures of the Near East. There were settlements of Greeks in Canaan during both the Bronze Age and the Iron Age.¹ Although there are no records to indicate direct contact between Greeks and Hebrews, shared characteristics are obvious in Greek, Canaanite and Hebrew myths. Both Greeks and Hebrews believed in the concept of an ordered universe. The Greeks thought of man's life as being governed by both fate and the gods, and God was the controlling force according to Hebrew thought. While Greek thought developed toward polytheism and that of the Hebrews toward monotheism, one aspect of religious thought was the same in both cultures: Unlike other cultures whose gods were astral, zoomorphic, dendromorphic or composite manifestations,² both the Greeks and Hebrews developed the concept of a god who transcended nature. The power of Zeus and of Yahweh could be indicated in terms of natural manifestations, but these deities actually controlled and transcended natural forces. Another idea shared by early Greeks and Hebrews was the recognition that man's

¹Samuel Noah Kramer, ed. Mythologies of the Ancient World (Garden City, New York, 1961), 260.

²William F. Albright, From the Stone Age to Christianity (Garden City, New York, 1957), 264.

earthly life was brief and valuable because the after-life promised only a dull, shadowy existence. We may infer from the evidence that men of both cultures shared the realization that joy and sorrow are integral and inseparable parts of human existence.

Because they realized the ephemeral nature of earthly life, Greek heroes attempted to gain enough glory during a lifetime to insure undying fame. The acclaim of one's comrades was the only reward desired by such heroes as Achilles, who said, "'And I too shall lie low when I am dead But for the moment glory is my aim'" (Iliad XVIII.340). According to Greek ideas, men were the apex of creation. As Chapter V will demonstrate, a Greek hero felt that his highest loyalty belonged to his own sense of honor. Human achievements were exalted in athletic competition and in battle. The Greeks admired feats of physical strength and acts of bravery.

Although the Hebrews admired strength and courage, they did not develop a concept of the importance of individual achievement. While the athletic and military exploits of Greek leaders added greatly to their individual glory, and were sources of fame and even of vainglory, a Hebrew leader such as Moses was referred to by the Israelites as "the servant of the Lord" (Joshua xviii.7). Rather than giving honor and glory to persons, the Hebrews gave all the credit for their achievements to God: "Declare his glory among the nations,

his marvelous works among all the peoples!" (I Chronicles xvi.25). Compared to the accomplishments of God, man's attainments were recognized as insignificant: "When I look at thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou hast established, what is man that thou art mindful of him and the son of man that thou dost care for him?" (Psalm viii.3,4). In the Hebrew culture a man did not achieve greatness because of his exploits or because of his position in society, for as G. E. Wright explains, "The worth of a man was seen not so much as a natural possession or right, as it was a right conferred by or derived from God. Personality achieved its true depth and stature in a relation of faith, love, and unqualified obedience to God."³

Another contrast between the attitudes of the early Greeks and those of the early Hebrews may be seen in their ideas concerning material possessions. The epics furnish ample evidence of the Greek love of beautiful material objects. The characters in these epics took pleasure in owning and using beautiful household furnishings, clothing, and military equipment. When Telemachus visited Helen, he observed that she used "a golden spindle and a basket that ran on castors and was made of silver finished with a rim of

³G. E. Wright, The Old Testament Against Its Environment (London, 1957), 68.

gold" (Odyssey IV.67). These objects were gifts to Helen from the Egyptians; but in his own home Telemachus was also accustomed to beautiful articles. In entertaining a visitor in his hall he used "a carved chair," "a handsome golden jug," "a silver basin," "a polished table," and "gold cups" (Odyssey I.28,29). Even when engaged in the siege at Troy, the Greeks managed to live in comfort, surrounded by lovely belongings. There were many feasts where "they all helped themselves to the good things spread before them" (Iliad IX.167). In preparing a bed for Phoenix, women "spread fleeces and a rug and a sheet of fine linen on a bedstead . . ." (Iliad IX.178). After quarreling with Agamemnon, Achilles passed the time playing on "a tuneful lyre, a beautifully ornamented instrument with a silver crossbar . . ." (Iliad IX.166), and he kept "tunics, wind-proof cloaks and thick rugs" in a "beautiful inlaid chest" (Iliad XVI.298). The early Greeks also showed their interest in material goods by having their gods possess the same objects as those valued in human society. Iron was still a rare and valued commodity among the Achaeans; so Here's chariot was described specifically as having an "iron axle-tree." This chariot was "a wonderful piece of work" with wheels made of bronze and gold, and "a platform of gold and silver straps tightly interlaced" (Iliad V.111). As evidenced in the prizes awarded by

Achilles at the funeral games, material objects must have been considered more valuable than persons (or at least more valuable than women):

For the winner there was a big, three-legged cauldron to go on the fire--it was worth a dozen oxen by Achaean reckoning--and for the loser he brought forward a woman trained in domestic work, who was valued at four oxen in the camp

(Iliad XXIII.431).

The Greeks' appreciation of beautiful possessions obviously did not extend to the workers who created these objects. One of Homer's most frequently used adjectives is "well-made." This term is applied to a variety of objects including furniture and armor. Patroclus borrowed Achilles' "well-made helmet" (Iliad XVI.295), and Helen and Paris "lay down together on the well-made wooden bed" (Iliad III.75). The early Greeks obviously not only appreciated and delighted in material goods but also coveted them and quarreled over them. During the funeral games Antilochus protested, "You are proposing to rob me of my prize I will not give up this mare. Anyone who cares to try can come and fight me for her with his fists" (Iliad XXIII.427). Material belongings helped to make life comfortable and pleasant, and gave added status to the extremely status-conscious Achaean. Eye appeal, comfort, pure physical delight were the desires of the Greeks, for they, like the Phaeacians, seemed to believe: "[T]he things in which we take a perennial delight are the

feast, the lyre, the dance, clean linen in plenty, a hot bath, and our beds" (Odyssey VIII.128).

That the early Hebrews were not unaware of the value or importance of material possessions may be seen in injunctions against stealing and covetousness recorded in Exodus and Deuteronomy. Such injunctions would have been unnecessary in a society which placed no value on material property. Indeed the eighth commandment, "'You shall not steal'" (Exodus xxi.15), is a recognition of the value of and right to material property. Although these early Hebrews are usually thought of as simple nomadic herdsmen who valued only livestock, other varieties of wealth are often mentioned, as in the account of Abraham's choice of a wife for Isaac:

And the servant brought forth jewelry of silver and of gold, and raiment, and gave them to Rebekah; he also gave to her brother and to her mother costly ornaments

(Genesis xxiv.53).

When the Israelites left Egypt, they were given "jewelry of silver and of gold, and clothing" (Exodus xii.35). Their treasuries were increased with the wealth of defeated nations:

And the people of Israel took captive the women of Midian and their little ones; and they took as booty all their cattle, their flocks, and all their goods
(Numbers xxxi.19).

The early Hebrews obviously did not always live in abject poverty. During the reign of Solomon, their material wealth reached even greater heights:

Now the weight of gold that came to Solomon in one year was six hundred and sixty-six talents of gold, besides that which the traders and merchants brought; and all the kings of Arabia and the governors of the land brought gold and silver to Solomon

(II Chronicles ix.13,14).

There are numerous references to gold and silver in the early books of the Old Testament, but most of them mention the use of these materials in the construction or decoration of the tabernacle or the temple:

And Solomon overlaid the inside of the house with pure gold, and he drew chains of gold across, in front of the inner sanctuary, and overlaid it with gold. . . . Also the whole altar that belonged to the inner sanctuary he overlaid with gold

(I Kings vi.21,22).

Because the Hebrews believed that God deserved the credit for all that was accomplished, they honored Him by giving material possessions to His temple. Even before Solomon's time the people were accustomed to giving a portion of their wealth to God:

So they came, both men and women; all who were of a willing heart brought brooches and earrings and signet rings and armlets, all sorts of gold objects, every man dedicating an offering of gold to the Lord

(Exodus xxxv.22).

There is no evidence that most early Hebrews could be described simply as materialistic even though they did possess and covet a certain amount of wealth. Solomon lived in magnificent surroundings, but earlier kings seemed to have led a much simpler life. When King David received gifts of gold, silver, and bronze, "[T]hese also King David dedicated

to the Lord . . ." (I Chronicles xviii.11). This statement emphasizes the greatest difference between the Greek ideas concerning material goods and the ideas of the Hebrews. The Hebrews dedicated a large portion of their wealth to God, while the Greeks, for their own personal pleasure and glory surrounded themselves with beautiful possessions.

Another aspect of Hebrew thought which differed from that of the early Greeks was the Hebrew belief that Israel was especially chosen by God: "'For you are a people holy to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his own possession, out of all the peoples that are on the face of the earth'" (Deuteronomy vii.6). Because the Hebrews considered themselves to be God's chosen people, they viewed their nation as being set apart from all others: "'Is it not in thy going with us that we are distinct, I and thy people, from all other people that are upon the face of the earth?'" (Exodus xxxiii.16). Such a view involved both privileges and obligations. God promised:

"Before all your people I will do marvels, such as have not been wrought in all the earth or in any nation; and all the people among whom you are shall see the work of the Lord"

(Exodus xxxiv.10).

Moses warned the Hebrews, however, that they must obey God "by keeping all his statutes, which I command you, all the days of your life . . ." (Deuteronomy vi.2). Although they had no notion of being a "chosen" people, the Achaeans of

the Homeric epics were intensely loyal to their various homelands and specific tribal groups. Odysseus told the Phaeacians: "And I, for one, know of no sweeter sight for a man's eyes than his own country" (Odyssey IX.139). The early Greeks were aware of having developed a society which was superior to the societies of their less civilized neighbors. Odysseus' account of the savagery of the Cyclopes emphasized the characteristics despised by the Greeks. The Cyclopes were described as "'a fierce, uncivilized people who never lift a hand to plant or plow.'" Odysseus also reported, "'The Cyclopes have no assemblies for the making of laws, nor any settled customs, . . . nobody cares a jot for his neighbors'" (Odyssey IX.142). Such traits were the antitheses of those valued by the Achaeans.

The early Greeks, in contrast to the early Hebrews, had only vague notions of the history of their people. Myths were used to back claims of territory and to support claims of divine parentage. The influence of the Mycenaean age is obvious in early Greek myths and epics:

[T]he chief Mycenaean contribution is the concept of a heroic age, of great deeds done in the past that cannot be duplicated today, but in a real, not a fantastic, past, set by Greek tradition in a few generations of what archeologists today recognize as the late Bronze Age; the scenes are the cities and palaces of that time, the actors are conceived of historic dynasts,

sometimes claimed as ancestors by later nobles.⁴

Many of the characters in the Homeric epics were descended from gods and goddesses. Helen was referred to as a "child of Zeus" (Odyssey IV.69), and Achilles' mother was "the divine Thetis of the Silver Feet" (Iliad XVIII.340). The Trojans also claimed divine parentage. Aeneas, for example, was the son of Aphrodite, and Sarpedon was the son of Zeus.

The Hebrews also used myths to explain the early history of the world, but they did not claim divine parentage. There are, however, some passages in the Old Testament which indicate mythical descent, or the union of angels with earthly women: "[T]he sons of God saw that the daughters of men were fair; and they took to wife such of them as they chose." The children of these unions were a race of giants called the Nephilim and described as "the mighty men that were of old, the men of renown" (Genesis vi.2,4). The Hebrews kept genealogical lists and records of the history of their tribes. The Israelites were interested in their history because they believed it to be one source of knowledge about God, and the tribes were thus bound together through the knowledge of a common heritage. Just as Dr. Heinrich Schliemann's excavations proved the existence of Homeric

⁴Kramer, Mythologies of the Ancient World, 232.

Ilium,⁵ archaeologists have proved that the historical records contained in the Old Testament are amazingly accurate:

There can be no doubt that archaeology has confirmed the substantial historicity of Old Testament tradition. Divergencies from basic historical fact may nearly all be explained as due to the nature of oral tradition, to the vicissitudes of written transmission, and to honest, but erroneous combinations on the part of Israelite and Jewish scholars. These divergencies seldom result in serious modifications of the historical picture.⁶

The early Hebrews, then, had an accurate historical orientation which finds no real parallel in the Greek culture.

Although the Achaeans of Homer's epics lacked accurate historical data, they were very conscious of aristocracy and important lineage. Thousands of common men took part in the Trojan War, but The Iliad is concerned almost entirely with the exploits of a few heroic figures of the ruling class. Men of the lower classes are usually either ignored or described in derogatory terms. When ordering a man to rejoin the ranks of soldiers, Achilles said, "' . . . [G]et back now, join the rabble'" (Iliad XX.371). Homer's description of the commoner, Thersites, as "the ugliest man" and "the

⁵Thomas Day Seymour, Life in the Homeric Age (New York, N.Y., 1963), 548.

⁶William F. Albright, Archaeology and the Religion of Israel (Baltimore, 1956), 176.

meanest wretch" to come to Ilium (Iliad II.45,46) does not present a flattering picture. The contempt with which the people of the upper class viewed Thersites and his peers is obvious in Odysseus' reprimand: "'You drivelling fool, how dare you stand up to the kings?'" (Iliad II.46). In The Odyssey some people of the lower classes are represented as having more dignity. Odysseus' servant, Eumaeus, is described as a "friendly herdsman," a "prince among swineherds," a "man of sound principles," and a "careful steward" (Odyssey XVI.216,218,226,229). It was also mentioned, however, that he had been a prince before he was captured and sold as a slave. Eurycleia, Odysseus' old nurse, was also portrayed as a loyal servant who had a place of responsibility in the household. Such complimentary portrayals of common people are, however, subordinate details of both epics. Only noblemen were considered to be important; so the story-teller was primarily concerned with descriptions of the exploits of rulers and heroes.

The early Hebrews, in contrast to the early Greeks, were a nomadic people whose tribal groups formed an almost classless society. As W. F. Albright explains:

. . . [T]he Israelites had neither a class system (except in so far as the Aaronids and the children of clan leaders represented class) nor aristocratic ancestry. Among the Israelites there were few

craftsmen and scant respect for the amenities of civilization. . . .⁷

This early classlessness gradually changed after the tribes demanded a king, and Saul was anointed. By the time of Solomon's reign, the Israelites could scarcely have been considered totally lacking in the "amenities of civilization." Even though their society gradually changed, the Hebrews retained a concern for the whole tribal group, a characteristic uncommon among the existing cultures of their time:

[T]he emphasis in Israel on the equality of all persons in the law, while not unknown elsewhere, possessed overtones which were increasingly emphasized as time passed. The poor, the weak, the defenceless received a consideration unknown elsewhere.⁸

Hebrew laws had specific provisions regarding the poor:

"If you lend money to any of my people with you who is poor, you shall not be to him as a creditor, and you shall not exact interest from him" (Exodus xxii.25). Those who could not afford to give the usual sacrifices to God were given special consideration:

"But if he is poor and cannot afford so much, then he shall take one male lamb for a guilt offering to be waved, to make atonement for him . . . also two turtle-doves or two young pigeons, such as he can afford . . ."
(Leviticus xiv.21,22).

⁷William F. Albright, The Biblical Period (New York, N.Y., 1949), 17.

⁸Wright, The Old Testament Against Its Environment, 68.

Hebrew landowners were commanded to be considerate of those less fortunate:

"And you shall not strip your vineyard bare, neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and for the so-journer"

(Leviticus xix.10).

The laws stressed the idea that the poor needed understanding as well as material goods: "'[Y]ou shall not harden your heart nor shut your hand against your poor brother . . ."

(Deuteronomy xv.7). There were other similar injunctions concerned with the welfare of defenseless people: "'You shall not afflict any widow or orphan'" (Exodus xxii.22).

Although slavery was not forbidden, Hebrew people who served as slaves were to be freed after serving for six years, and a later injunction states: "'[O]ver your brethren the people of Israel you shall not rule, one over another, with harshness'" (Leviticus xxv.46). Such laws, of course, were concerned only with the well-being of the Hebrew people; little consideration was given to outsiders. Hebrews were reminded, however, that even strangers were to be treated equitably: "'You shall not oppress a stranger; you know the heart of a stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt'" (Exodus xxiii.9). Because their God required justice, fair treatment, and consideration for others, the Hebrews did develop a respect for the innate worth of an individual which the early Greeks apparently lacked. The

Israelites' own experiences as slaves and captives were vividly preserved in their history. These records, coupled with injunctions from God, were obviously potent forces in shaping Hebrew thought in regard to equality in human relationships.

Although their views of life differed in many respects, both the early Greeks and the early Hebrews believed in the concept of an ordered universe. The Achaeans thought of man's life as being governed by the power of fate as well as by the will of the gods. This view often seems contradictory and confusing, as B. C. Dietrich states:

. . . [T]his fate sometimes apparently clashes with the will of the gods, so that it is not always clear whether in Homer the gods or fate constitute the supreme force which determines the affairs of men.⁹

In the Homeric epics there was actually no supreme power which absolutely controlled man's will and actions. Death, of course, was inevitable for everyone, but a man's own actions influenced his destiny. Achilles knew that he had a choice about his own future: "' . . . Destiny has left two courses open to me on my journey to the grave'" (Iliad IX.172). Although the gods did not control men, they could determine the outcome of specific events. In a council of the gods Zeus announced,

" . . . [I]t remains for us to consider what shall happen next. Are we to stir up this wicked strife

⁹B. C. Dietrich, Death, Fate and the Gods (University of London, 1965), 328.

again, with all the sound and fury of war; or shall
we make the Trojans and Achaeans friends?"
(Iliad IV.77).

The early Greeks also believed that the gods could give or withhold good fortune from men. Achilles mentioned the two jars from which Zeus chose either evils or blessings to send to men, and Eumaeus voiced the same idea: "'It's the way of the gods to bestow or withhold their favours according to their own sweet will--and there's nothing to prevent them'" (Odyssey XIV.227). Fate and the gods were not always in accord as to what should happen to men. Zeus complained to Here, "'Fate is unkind to me--Sarpedon, whom I dearly love, is destined to be killed by Patroclus . . .'" (Iliad XVI.304). This quotation would seem to prove that the power of Fate decided the moment of a man's death. A contradictory view was presented in a conversation between Thetis and Achilles: "'As for my death, when Zeus and the other deathless gods appoint it, let it come'" (Iliad XVIII.340). Patroclus, also, was "'struck down by the will of heaven'" (Iliad XIX.354). In discussing the fate of the suitors, Athene said, "' . . . [S]uch matters, of course, lie on the knees of the gods'" (Odyssey I.32). Some decisions of the gods seemed to be based on trivial considerations, but the decision as to the fate of Odysseus was motivated by a sense of justice. Odysseus deserved a safe return to Ithaca; so the gods made his homecoming possible. Throughout the epics Fate is a

framework for men's lives--not a compelling force from which they cannot escape. Dietrich explains this concept of fate:

[M]en in the Homeric epic to a large extent become themselves responsible for their own fate or welfare. Fate is, as it were, constructed on the level of human affairs: the expressions for Fate in Homer are more and more frequently employed to define a system according to which man should comport himself.¹⁰

The early Hebrews, too, believed that the universe was ordered, but their concept of fate was directly related to the will of God: "'I know that thou canst do all things, and that no purpose of thine can be thwarted'" (Job xxxiii.1,2). In their concept of God the Hebrews embodied all the provinces and powers of Greek Fate and Greek gods. God was thought to rule the world personally and directly; everything and everyone belonged to Him: "The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein; . . ." (Psalm xxiv.1). Just as the Achaeans had a responsibility for their own destinies, the Israelites had the choice of following or ignoring the will of God for their lives. They did not always choose to follow God's will, and Moses characterized the Hebrews as being "a stiff-necked people" (Exodus xxiv.9). A psalmist's attitude was more in accord with the ideas of most Israelites: "I delight to do

¹⁰Ibid., 333.

thy will, O my God; thy law is within my heart" (Psalm xl.8). Because God created both man and the universe, man's life was in God's hands: "Know that the Lord is God! It is he that made us, and we are his; . . ." (Psalm c.3). Even though man's life was subject to the will of God in some respects, each person was free to make choices which affected his destiny:

While the Jews believed in fore-ordination, . . . it was always maintained so as to leave man ultimately responsible for his destiny. God, in his providence, determines what shall befall a man, but not whether he shall be righteous or wicked.¹¹

While many aspects of religious thought were quite different in the cultures of the early Greeks and early Hebrews, it is interesting to note that both groups developed a concept of a god who was separate from the forces of nature. Unlike the sun god Re of the Egyptians or the Babylonian storm god, Baal, Zeus (and other Greek gods such as Poseidon) and Yahweh transcended nature and actually controlled natural forces. Zeus was referred to as "Gatherer of the Clouds" (Iliad V.112), "the Thunderer," and "Lord of the Lightning Flash" (Iliad VII.142,143). Just as Zeus ruled the heavens, Poseidon had control over the sea. When Poseidon saw Odysseus escaping from Calypso's island, "[H]e

¹¹The Interpreters' Dictionary of the Bible, Vol. 2, 244.

marshalled the clouds and seizing his trident in his hands he stirred up the sea" (Odyssey V.95). The fact that Yahweh controlled natural forces was recognized by the Hebrews. Since "God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis i.1), He was naturally in charge of them. God's power over the universe is extolled in the thirty-eighth chapter of Job in which God is said to have "commanded the morning," "entered the storehouses of snow," "sent [t] forth lightnings," and "given birth to the hoarfrost of heaven." While the Hebrews marvelled at these manifestations of God's power, they realized that God was greater than all natural phenomena and was not wholly contained or embodied in any one of them.

This idea was illustrated by Elijah's experience:

And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake, a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice

(I Kings xix.11,12).

A more detailed discussion of the characteristics of the Greek gods and the Hebrew God will follow in Chapter IV. From the evidence cited, however, conjectures may be made as to the importance of the similarities in the Greek and Hebrew concept of divinities which transcended nature. Since these two cultures were apparently the only ones to develop such an idea during the Bronze Age, its significance

should not be ignored. It is possible that this basic agreement in religious thinking led the Greeks toward a more monotheistic view and made it easier for them to adopt the concepts of Christianity a few centuries later.

Another similar view of life lay in the acknowledgment by people of both cultures that life is brief. Such a conclusion about human existence could hardly be avoided, but the statements in the literature of the Greeks and that of the Hebrews are almost identical. The Greeks believed:

"Men in their generations are like the leaves of the trees. The wind blows and one year's leaves are scattered on the ground; but the trees burst into bud and put on fresh ones when the spring comes round. In the same way one generation flourishes and another generation nears its end"

(Iliad VI.121).

The Old Testament contains several passages which are quite similar: "As for man, his days are like grass; he flourishes like a flower of the field; for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more" (Psalm ciii. 15,16). The Greek quotation sounds a more optimistic note, reflecting their appreciation for life and suggesting their belief in the continued importance of man in the universe. Although the wording of the Hebrew quotation is similar, there is a note of resignation and of the acknowledgement that man is no more than grass in comparison with God.¹²

¹²H. D. F. Kitto, The Greeks (Chicago, 1964), 61.

Life's brevity, however, only increased its value. Both the early Greeks and the early Hebrews appreciated earthly life and had little to anticipate in the after-life. A comparison of their views of the after-life will be made in Chapter III.

Achaeans and Israelites recognized joy and sorrow as integral parts of human existence. This duality in life was mentioned by Helen: "'[E]ach of us has his happy times, and each has his spells of pain--Zeus sees to that in his omnipotence'" (Odyssey IV.70). The Greek epics do not offer many examples of human happiness; human suffering is a more recurrent theme. The ending of The Odyssey does, however, indicate that a return to one's homeland and family offered the greatest human happiness to an Achaean. When Odysseus returned to Ithaca, "So happy did the sight of his own land make him that he kissed the generous soil, . . ." (Odyssey XIII.211). Later he wept for joy as he held Penelope in his arms. The Greeks often blamed the gods for their troubles, as Penelope did when she said, "'All our unhappiness is due to the gods . . .'" (Odyssey XXIII.346). Zeus, however, had a different opinion about the source of man's sorrow:

"What a lamentable thing it is that men should blame the gods and regard us as the source of their troubles, when it is their own wickedness that brings them sufferings worse than any which destiny allots them."

(Odyssey I.26).

The Hebrews were also aware of the element of sorrow in man's life and were concerned about its source: "'For affliction does not come from the dust, nor does trouble sprout from the ground; but man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward'" (Job v.6,7). Human sinfulness and disobedience to God's laws were thought by the Hebrews to be causes of man's trouble. The Israelites were warned of the consequences of disobedience:

"The Lord will send upon you curses, confusion, and frustration, in all you undertake to do, until you are destroyed and perish quickly, on account of the evil of your doings, because you have forsaken me"
(Deuteronomy xxvii.20).

Since men were to expect sorrow in their lives, Odysseus' advice was that a man could only "'steel himself and bear it.'" The wisest course was . . . "'never to disregard the laws of god but quietly enjoy whatever blessings Providence may afford'" (Odyssey xviii.279,280). The Hebrews recognized that blessings and misfortunes did not always come to people in the proportions which they deserved. Job, a righteous man who lost everything, saw the injustice which existed in the world: "'Why do the wicked live, reach old age, and grow mighty in power?'" (Job xxi.7). Although the Hebrews could find no satisfactory answer to the question of why joy and sorrow come to people, they found consolation in the belief that God's ways were inscrutable to men. Human happiness lay in following the injunction: "Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him and he will act" (Psalm xxxvii.5).

The basic difference in the views of life developed in the Greek and Hebrew cultures is explained by Matthew Arnold in his essay "Hebraism and Hellenism":

The uppermost idea of Hellenism is to see things as they really are, the uppermost idea with Hebraism is conduct and obedience. Nothing can do away with this ineffaceable difference. . . . The governing idea of Hellenism is spontaneity of consciousness; that of Hebraism, strictness of conscience.¹³

¹³George K. Anderson and William Buckler, editors, The Literature of England (Glenview, Illinois, 1966), 850-851.

CHAPTER III

VIEW OF DEATH AND THE AFTER-LIFE

It is impossible to understand the views of life held by either the Greeks or the Hebrews without some knowledge of their beliefs concerning death and the after-life. Ideas of life and death are incontrovertibly bound together. People of both cultures valued earthly life and thought of the after-life in terms of a shadowy existence in the underworld. Because Greek society was highly stratified, the Greek concept of the underworld mirrored this stratification and was more complex than the concept of Sheol, the underworld of the Hebrews.

The Hebrew idea of the underworld evolved gradually. Their earliest recorded concepts indicate a belief in the finality of death. Such a belief may be illustrated in a passage concerning the death of King David: " . . . [M]y lord the king sleeps with his fathers . . ." (I Kings i.21). There is no direct indication of any life after death. The idea of finality was expressed more strongly and directly by a psalmist: "Their graves are their homes forever; their dwelling places to all generations . . ." (Psalm xlix.11).

A later development in Hebrew eschatology was the idea of Sheol. The word Sheol literally denoted a deep capacious cistern with a narrow opening at the top.¹ Sometimes the term "Pit" was used interchangeably with Sheol: "Thou hast put me in the depths of the Pit, in the regions dark and deep" (Psalm lxxxix.6). The region of Sheol seemed to be even beyond the jurisdiction of God: "For in death there is no remembrance of thee; in Sheol who can give thee praise?" (Psalm vi.5). Another less common word used to denote death or the grave was Abaddon, a cognate of the verb "to perish"²: "Is thy steadfast love declared in the grave or thy faithfulness in Abaddon? Are thy wonders known in the darkness or thy saving help in the land of forgetfulness?" (Psalm lxxxviii. 11,12). Descriptions of Sheol almost always include terms such as "darkness" and "forgetfulness" to indicate the nature of existence there.

The beliefs of the early Greeks paralleled those of the Hebrews in some respects. The Greeks, too, evolved a concept of a shadowy underworld for departed spirits. The Greeks referred to their underworld, as the Hebrews did, by various terms: "The Halls of Hades and Persephone the Dread"

¹Interpreter's Bible, Vol. 3, 954.

²Ibid., Vol. 4, 476.

(Odyssey X.168), "Hades' Kingdom of Decay" (Odyssey X.169), "the western gloom" (Iliad XXIII.413), "the world below" (Iliad XXIII.418), or "the hateful Chambers of Decay" (Iliad XX.368).

There was certainly nothing comforting in the early Hebrew view of the after-life; there was little or no more comfort in the Greek view. Unless a Greek had won special favor with the gods, he, too, had very little to look forward to after departing this life. In the stratified underworld of the Greeks an earthly hero was still regarded as a hero in the after-life, and he was entitled to dwell on the Elysian plain which was a pleasant spot resembling a meadow. The Hebrews had no such promises of recognition or reward: "For when he dies he will carry nothing away; his glory will not go down after him" (Psalm xl.17). When Odysseus met the Greek hero Achilles in the underworld, he thought Achilles fortunate:

For in the old days when you were on earth we Argives honored you as though you were a god; and now, down here, you are a mighty prince among the dead. For you, Achilles, Death should have lost his sting
(Odyssey XI.184).

Achilles, however, reaffirmed the value of earthly life when he said,

. . . [S]pare me your praise of Death. Put me on earth again, and I would rather be a serf in the house of some landless man, with little enough for himself to live on, than king of all these dead men that have done with life
(Odyssey XI.184).

Even life on the Elysian plain could not make existence in Hades welcome or desirable. Menelaus was also fated to dwell on that plain after his death. The old Sea Prophet assured Menelaus that such a fate awaited him as a reward for being the son-in-law of Zeus:

. . . [T]he immortals will send you to the Elysian plain at the world's end . . . the land where living is made easiest for mankind, where no snow falls, no strong winds blow and there is never any rain, but day after day the West Wind's tuneful breeze comes in from the ocean to refresh its folk
(Odyssey IV.79).

While some Greeks, depending upon status, could look forward to a better existence in the after-life than others, the Hebrews of early time had no concept of rewards awaiting mortals in another world. Their value system was based on the idea that rewards or punishments were given in this world, not in the underworld.³ In Sheol good and bad spirits were not separated; the same fate awaited all:

Like sheep they are appointed for Sheol. Death shall be their shepherd; straight to the grave they descend, and their form shall waste away; Sheol shall be their home
(Psalm xlix.14).

The idea of material or spiritual reward is inherent in funeral practices which honor the dead. A key to the nature of beliefs concerning life and the after-life may be found in a comparison of the funeral customs of the early Hebrews and those of the early Greeks. Death was a sorrowful event

³Ibid., Vol. 3, 880.

for people of both cultures. The Hebrew attitude may be illustrated by the account of the death of Sarah, Abraham's wife: "And Sarah died at Kiriatharba (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan; and Abraham went in to mourn for Sarah and weep for her" (Genesis xxiii.2). Since Abraham was a stranger in Hebron, he arranged to buy a cave to use as a burial place. In the traditions of Hebrew culture: "Wealthy people were buried in caves hollowed out of hill-sides, but poor folk were buried in a common graveyard--a large death pit."⁴ Burial caves were usually referred to as tombs or sepulchres. Another account of Hebrew burial and mourning is given in the account of the death of Abner:

Then David said to Joab and to all the people who were with him, "Rend your clothes and gird on sackcloth, and mourn before Abner." and King David followed after the bier. They buried Abner at Hebron, and the king lifted up his voice and wept at the grave of Abner; and all the people wept

(II Samuel iii.31,32).

There is an account of the burial of Rachel which mentions a marker for a grave: "And Jacob set up a pillar on her grave . . ." (Genesis xxxvi.20), but there is no evidence that this practice was common. Even the death of a great leader did not call for elaborate ceremonies, although there was an extended period of mourning. When Moses died, " . . . [T]he people of Israel wept for Moses on the plains

⁴Ibid., Vol. 3, 321.

of Moab thirty days" (Deuteronomy xxxiv.8). The most common accounts of deaths recorded in early Hebrew literature are just factual statements such as the one concerning the death of King Josiah: "And he died, and was buried in the tombs of his fathers" (II Chronicles xxxv.24). From the recorded evidence then, one must assume that the funeral practices of the early Hebrews were relatively simple. Such simple practices indicate a lack of belief in "preparation" for any sort of after-life and correspond to the sense of finality about death already mentioned.

In contrast to the simplicity of Hebrew funeral practices, the Greeks often held elaborate ceremonies. The splendor of the funeral reflected the amount of fame or glory achieved by the individual during his lifetime and showed the desire of his family and friends for his proper placement in Hades. Achilles' spirit in the underworld was gratified to hear the account of the superb funeral accorded him after his death:

"For seventeen days and seventeen nights we mourned for you, immortal gods and mortal men alike; and on the eighteenth day we committed you to the flames, with a rich sacrifice of fatted sheep and shambling cattle at your pyre. You were burnt in the clothing of the gods, in lavish unguents and sweet honey; and an armed company of Achaean nobles, on foot or in their chariots, moved in procession round the pyre where you were burning and filled the air with sound . . ."

(Odyssey XXIV.352).

The narrator also told Achilles how his bones were laid in unmixed wine and oil and then placed in a golden urn with the bones of Patroclus and Antilochus, Achilles' closest friends. The proper procedure in these funeral practices was of the greatest importance to the early Greeks. Gulick emphasizes the significance of their rituals:

The burial customs of the Greeks were remarkable for the scrupulous care with which every detail, enjoined as it was by religion, was carried out. Without burial, it was believed that the unfortunate spirit of the dead must wander in eternal unrest, visiting with reproach his neglectful kinsmen.⁵

Because the burial of the dead was so important for the after-life, Achilles' treatment of Hector's body was considered a "shameful outrage" (Iliad XXII.407). Troy wept not only for the death of its hero but also because Hector could not go peacefully into the underworld until he had been given a proper burial. A similar problem faced Elpenor, whose body remained at Circe's palace during Odysseus' voyage to the underworld. Elpenor's spirit, wandering about in Hades, accosted Odysseus: "' . . . I beg you to remember me then and not sail away and forsake me utterly nor leave me there unburied or unwept, or the gods may turn against you when they see my corpse'" (Odyssey XI.173). As soon as

⁵Charles Gulick, The Life of the Ancient Greeks (New York, 1902), 292.

Odysseus returned from the underworld, he granted Elpenor's request:

We quickly hewed some billets of wood, and then, with the tears streaming down our cheeks, gave him solemn burial on the summit of the boldest headland of the coast. When the corpse was burnt, and with it the dead man's arms, we built him a barrow, hauled up a stone for monument, and planted his shapely oar on top of the mound

(Odyssey XXXI.189).

Such burial mounds, used as a mark of honor by the Greeks, provide a contrast to the unmarked graves or simple tombs of the early Hebrews, and indicate an interest in a man's memory among the living as well as his honor among the dead.

Another contrast between the customs of the two cultures may be noted in the signs of grief or mourning they displayed. The Hebrews wept and sometimes wore sackcloth at the death of a friend or relative, but did not ordinarily go into frenzies of grief such as those displayed by Achilles when he heard of Patroclus' death:

He picked up the dark dust in both his hands and poured it on his head. He soiled his comely face with it, and filthy ashes settled on his scented tunic. He cast himself down on the earth and lay there fouling his hair and tearing it out with his own hands

(Iliad XVIII.337).

Other mourners wept and beat their breasts while Achilles "uttered piteous groans" (Iliad XVIII.345).

Because their own bodies were important to the early Greeks, the care of the dead body was a matter of concern.

Achilles made arrangements for the proper treatment of Patroclus' body:

. . . [T]hey washed the corpse, anointed it with olive oil and filled the wounds with an unguent nine years old. Then they laid it on a bier and covered it from head to foot in a soft sheet, over which they spread a white cloak

(Iliad XVIII.346).

The body of Hector was protected by the gods:

. . . [T]he dogs were not given access to the corpse of Hector. Day and night, Zeus' daughter Aphrodite kept them off, and she anointed him with ambrosial oil of roses, so that Achilles should not lacerate him when he dragged him to and fro

(Iliad XXIII.417).

According to Hebrew tradition, a dead body was unclean, and anyone who came in contact with the body was also unclean: "'He who touches the dead body of any person shall be unclean seven days . . .'" (Numbers xix.11). Even certain objects could be contaminated when they were associated with death: "'And every open vessel, which has no cover fastened upon it, is unclean'" (Numbers xix.15). Touching a man's bones or a grave could also make a person unclean according to the Hebrew law. Rules were given for ritual cleansing and were strictly followed. The penalty for failure to complete the rites of purification was ostracism, one of the worst punishments existing in ancient cultures. A person who did not cleanse himself after contact with a dead body "' . . . defiles the tabernacle of the Lord, and that person shall be cut off from Israel . . .'" (Numbers xix.13).

The cleansing and preparation of a corpse for burial were accomplished by the family of the dead person, and those so involved had to go through a process of purification to rid themselves of the stigma of having touched the dead.

Funeral games were another characteristic of early Greek funeral practices which had no counterpart in Hebrew customs. After the ritual of the funeral, the Greeks held games, or contests, in which prizes were given for skill in such activities as chariot-racing, boxing, wrestling, foot-racing, and javelin-throwing. The prizes awarded were usually quite valuable. For Patroclus' funeral games Achilles provided: " . . . [C]auldrons and tripods; horses, mules, and sturdy cattle; grey iron and women in their girdled gowns" (Iliad XXIII.419). Competition, of course, was keen and often engendered arguments and wagers among participants or spectators. Funeral games might be considered as a means of reaffirming the value of earthly life. The Greeks were aware that life is brief, but they rejoiced in the physical world and did not brood over thoughts of death.⁶

Even proper burial with elaborate funeral rites and games could not make the after-life a welcome existence for the Greeks. There is reference to "the dread hand of Death which stretches all men out at last" (Odyssey XXIV.354).

⁶Edith Hamilton, The Greek Way (New York, 1930), 23.

Existence in Hades was believed to be sorrowful. Odysseus reported, "From this multitude of souls, as they fluttered to and fro by the trench, there came a moaning that was horrible to hear" (Odyssey XI.172). Descriptions of the Hebrews' Sheol were equally forbidding: " . . . I go whence I shall not return, to the land of gloom and deep darkness" (Job x.21). In this dismal place it was believed, "the shades tremble" (Job xxvi.5). Often death and Sheol were depicted as traps awaiting men: "The snares of death encompassed me; the pangs of Sheol laid hold on me; I suffered distress and anguish" (Psalm cxvi.3). Once one was unfortunate enough to enter Sheol, there was no escape: "As the cloud fades and vanishes, so he who goes down to Sheol does not come up . . ." (Job vii.9).

The underworlds of both the Hebrews and the Greeks had several attributes in common. Both Sheol and Hades were pictured as dark and dismal places where existence was sorrowful. Although the Greeks believed that the dead retained a semblance of the fame they achieved on earth, in general they would have agreed with the Hebrews who believed that Sheol was simply a land of forgetfulness where all earthly hopes and activities come to ruin.⁷ Departed spirits were usually referred to as shades or shadows. This wraith-like

⁷Interpreter's Bible, Vol. 4, 476.

existence is mentioned whenever Homer describes the after-life. When the ghost of Patroclus appeared, " . . . Achilles reached out his arms to clasp the spirit, but in vain. It vanished like a wisp of smoke and went gibbering underground" (Iliad XXIII.414). After this experience, Achilles concluded,

. . . [I]t is true that something of us does survive even in the Halls of Hades, but with no intellect at all, only the ghost and semblance of a man; . . .
(Iliad XXIII.414).

When Odysseus visited the underworld, he, too, learned how insubstantial the spirits were. After talking with the spirit of his mother, he tried to embrace her:

Thrice, in my eagerness to clasp her to me, I started forward with my arms outstretched. Thrice, like a shadow or a dream, she slipped through my arms and left me harrowed by an even sharper pain
(Odyssey XI.176).

Achilles thought that Persephone was playing a trick on him, but his mother explained:

You are only witnessing here the law of our mortal nature when we come to die. We no longer have sinews keeping bones and flesh together, but once the life-force has departed from our white bones, all is consumed by the fierce heat of the blazing fire, and the soul slips away like a dream and flutters on the air
(Odyssey XI.177).

Conversations with spirits would seem to be acceptable and even desirable among the Greeks. Odysseus was commanded to go to the underworld in order to consult Teiresias, the blind prophet. When a Hebrew, King Saul, wished to consult

the spirit of the prophet Samuel, he had to make the arrangements stealthily:

So Saul disguised himself and put on other garments, and went, he and two men with him; and they came to the woman at night. And he said, "Divine for me by a spirit, and bring up for me whomever I shall name to you"

(I Samuel xxviii.8).

The woman protested, reminding Saul that mediums and wizards had been "'cut off . . . from the land'" (I Samuel xxviii.9). Evidently journeys and conversations between this world and the underworld were not encouraged in the Hebrew culture.

Another contrast in views of the underworld may be seen in ideas regarding its exact location. The Hebrews visualized a gloomy pit, but there are no references to its exact location or to its actual appearance. The Greeks, however, had more complex notions of the location of their underworld and its entrances. Circe gave Odysseus explicit directions for his journey:

Set up your mast, spread the white sail and sit down in the ship. The North Wind will blow her on her way; and when she has brought you across the River of Ocean, you will come to a wild coast and to Persephone's Grove, where the tall poplars grow and the willows that so quickly shed their seeds. Beach your boat there by Ocean's swirling stream and march into Hades' Kingdom of Decay

(Odyssey X.169).

The spirits of the suitors took another route to Hades after their battle with Odysseus:

With such shrill discord the company set out in Hermes' charge, following the Deliverer down the dark paths of

decay. Past Ocean Stream, past the White Rock,
past the Gates of the Sun and the region of dreams
they went, and before long they reached the meadow
of asphodel, which is the dwelling-place of souls,
the disembodied wraiths of men

(Odyssey XXIV.351).

Rather than viewing the underworld as a deep pit (as the Hebrews did) the early Greeks thought that the spirits existed in a land very similar to the real world. Even though Hades was as gloomy as Sheol, the Greek underworld provided some variety in its scenery:

There the River of Flaming Fire and the River of Lamentation, which is a branch of the Waters of Styx, unite round a pinnacle of rock to pour their thundering streams into Acheron

(Odyssey X.169).

Although the Hebrew funeral practices and their concepts of the underworld were less complex than those of the Greeks, they had the faint beginnings of the concept of immortality of the soul:

For thou dost not give me up to Sheol nor let thy godly one see the Pit. Thou dost show me the path of life; in thy presence there is fulness of joy, in thy right hand are pleasures for evermore

(Psalm xvi.10,11).

Such passages are so isolated that they might be considered expressions of man's longing for immortality, but their infrequency would seem to indicate that such statements were not the generally accepted beliefs.

The most prevalent Hebrew belief seemed to be that man found immortality only through the lives of his descendents

in future generations. The Greeks hoped for an immortality in fame and the glory of honor as typified by the life and death of Achilles: "Thus even death, Achilles, did not destroy your glory and the whole world will honor you forever" (Odyssey XXIV.353). Because earthly life was valuable to the people of both cultures, they found no pleasure in contemplating a wraith-like existence in a shadowy underworld.

CHAPTER IV

RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN GODS AND MEN

A comparison of Greek and Hebrew ideas concerning the relationships between gods and men should provide insight into the basic value patterns which existed in each culture. Since the early Greeks worshiped many gods and the Hebrews worshiped only one deity, a major difference in the religious thinking of the two groups is quite obvious. Another point of comparison is offered by the business-like relationship developed between the Achaeans and their deities, and the covenant established between the Israelites and their God. A portion of this chapter will concern the gods' attitudes toward men and the behavior which the gods expected of men. The characteristics which men of each culture ascribed to their divinities will be helpful. Both the Greeks and the Hebrews attempted to understand the mind of God through means of prophets or seers, and were concerned with dreams and omens. A comparison of the forms of worship in each culture will include discussions of prayers, sacrifices, places of worship, and the varying roles of priests in each culture.

Although the Greeks later developed a trend toward

Monotheistic religious thought, the characters in the Homeric epics held completely polytheistic concepts. Zeus was acknowledged " . . . to be the best and greatest of gods . . ." (Iliad XXIII.413), but numerous other gods and goddesses were also worshiped. The Achaean Greeks thought themselves to be surrounded by deities and other subordinate supernatural beings. As Mireaux explains,

Homer's universe thus appears as full of an infinite number of hidden mysterious beings who reside in the natural objects which are their servants; these beings can be either benevolent or dangerous, and in any case it is never worth risking a slight or an offence where they are concerned.¹

Like the Greeks, the Hebrews in some stages of their religious history acknowledged the existence of many gods. Several passages in The Old Testament illustrate the belief that there were gods other than Yahweh: "God has taken his place in the divine council; in the midst of the gods he holds judgment" (Psalm lxxxii.1). When Moses and the Israelites sang a song in praise of God, they asked, "Who is like thee, O Lord, among the gods?" (Exodus xv.11). Although the early Hebrews believed in the existence of other gods, only one God was to be worshiped. All other gods were believed to be inferior to Yahweh, the Lord of Israel. Foreigners might worship whatever gods they chose, but the

¹Mireaux, Daily Life in the Time of Homer, 27.

Hebrews were to obey the commandment given by God: "'You shall have no other gods before me'" (Exodus XX.3). That such a proscription appears in the commandments is an indication of earlier polytheistic practices. They were even instructed: "[M]ake no mention of the names of other gods . . ." (Exodus xxiii.13).

In its contractual nature, the relationship of the early Greeks to their deities had some similarity to the relationship established by the covenant which the Hebrews made with God. Certain responsibilities as well as privileges were present in both relationships. The Greeks maintained a business-like arrangement with their pantheon of gods. Mortals were expected to sacrifice to the gods, and, in return, the gods might grant men favors. Zeus felt obligated to aid Odysseus, who had been " . . . the most generous in his offerings to the immortals who live in heaven" (Odyssey I.27). As G. Lowes Dickenson explains: "The whole relation between man and the gods is of the nature of a contract."² The Hebrews also had a contract or covenant with their God, but it involved more than a system of sacrifices and favors. God promised the Israelites that he would provide such blessings as plentiful crops, victory, and peace, but, in

²G. L. Dickenson, The Greek View of Life (Garden City, New York, 1931), 22.

return, He commanded them to "' . . . [W]alk in my statutes and observe my commandments and do them'" (Leviticus xxvi.3). When these conditions were met, God promised: "And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and you shall be my people" (Leviticus xxvi.12). God's requirement that men should obey certain statutes and commandments emphasizes a major difference between Greek and Hebrew religious concepts: It is that essential difference between non-ethical polytheism and ethical monotheism. Homer's Zeus did not seem to expect men to regulate their behavior on the basis of any strict moral code established by the gods. Considering the example set by the gods, men had little incentive to appreciate morality. Zeus did, however, expect men to remember the obligations of hospitality. The duties of a host to his guests and the considerations which they owed him in turn were basic values in Greek culture. Each person was responsible for offering his hospitality freely to any visitor. As Eumaeus told Odysseus, " . . . [S]trangers and beggars all come in Zeus' name, and a gift from folk like us is none the less welcome for being small" (Odyssey XIV.216). A guest was expected to show his appreciation for the hospitality, and as Paris learned, one should never abuse the privileges of hospitality. Nestor's son reminded Telemachus, "A guest never forgets the host who has treated him kindly" (Odyssey XV. 231). Although the Greek gods did not present a long list of

rules and regulations to govern the lives of men, it was understood that they advocated a certain standard of behavior: "Yet the blessed gods don't like foul play. Decency and moderation are what they respect in men" (Odyssey XIV.217). The goddess Athene prized Odysseus because he mirrored the traits she valued. He was " . . . so civilized, so intelligent, so self-possessed" (Odyssey XIII.211). Since the relationship between the Greek gods and men was on a contractual basis, there seemed to be no indication that gods actually cared about what happened to any mortal unless the person was a relative or a favorite. Although Zeus expressed pity for men: "For of all creatures that breathe and creep about on Mother Earth there is none so miserable as man" (Iliad XVII.328), he was seldom concerned with helping them. The lives of mortals and immortals were separated, and the gods felt no real responsibility toward men.

Although the gods seemed to admire characteristics such as "decency" or "moderation", they gave no ethical laws to men, and morality as such was not the special or essential concern of the gods. The gods admired in men (and required of men) what a mortal Greek admired in other mortal Greeks. A man was generally not wrong or right because of what the gods required, but because of what society itself required. Zeus is by no means man's creator, and the epics reveal no

concept of man as the "child" of the Olympian gods. Prometheus is the creator of man in most traditions, although Homer does not mention Prometheus as creator. When Homer refers to "Father Zeus", the "father" part of the phrase seems to derive from Zeus' fatherhood among the gods only, to his patriarchal place on Olympus, and not to any such position among men.

In contrast to this attitude, the Hebrew God is shown to feel a deep commitment toward men because he had created them. He was vitally concerned about the lives of his people and expected obedience from them. The code of ethics acceptable to Yahweh involved a man's thoughts as well as his actions. As God explained to Samuel, " . . . [T]he Lord sees not as man sees; man looks on outward appearance but the Lord looks on the heart" (I Samuel xvi.6). The Hebrews, like the Greeks, were expected to offer hospitality to all who desired it. The obligations of a host were even stronger than some family ties. When Lot was entertaining strangers in his house, the men of Sodom demanded that he turn the visitors over to them. Lot replied,

"Behold, I have two daughters who have not known man; let me bring them out to you, and do to them as you please; only do nothing to these men for they have come under the shelter of my roof"

(Genesis xix.8).

Because the Hebrews were God's chosen people, they were placed under an obligation to Him: "'And you shall love the

Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your might'" (Deuteronomy vi.5).

The concept of loving a god who loved one in return was foreign to Greek religious thinking. Obedience to Zeus in certain matters was required, and respect for him was necessary, but "love" was not part of the Greek vocabulary of theology. Gods might befriend mortals, but they were guided by emotions and whims just as people were. Kitto explains: "The gods, to the Greek, were not necessarily benevolent. If they are offended they hit out implacably."³ Greek gods could not always be depended upon to keep their promises to mortals or to each other. Athene complained about Ares' behavior:

"Do you know that only the other day that pestilential, double dealing villain gave Here and myself his word to fight against the Trojans and help the Argives? And now he has forgotten all he said and is fighting on the Trojan side"

(Iliad V.114).

Trickery and deceit were characteristics commonly ascribed to gods. They enjoyed disguising themselves when appearing before mortals, and were even deceitful in their relations to each other. Here tricked Zeus and distracted him in order that Poseidon might aid the Argives (Iliad XIV). In The Odyssey, a bard told a story of Aphrodite's clandestine

³Kitto, The Greeks, 60.

affair with Ares and of the trap which Hephaestus laid for the lovers. The reaction of the gods to the infidelity and trickery of Ares and Aphrodite revealed their characteristic lack of interest in personal morality. Their rather flippan't reaction to libertinism is clearly expressed in the comment, " . . . A fit of uncontrollable laughter seized these happy gods" (Odyssey viii.131).

Another characteristic of the Greek gods was their lack of dependability. A sacrifice to one of them did not always guarantee a blessing in return:

Thus Agamemnon prayed, but Zeus was not prepared to grant him what he wished. He accepted his offering, but in return he sent him doubled tribulation
(Iliad II.51).

Olympian deities could move from place to place quickly, but they could not be everywhere at once. Even Zeus was not omnipresent; the course of human events could change without his knowledge. Zeus was referred to as "the all-seeing Son of Cronos" (Iliad XV.275), but such an epithet was obviously an exaggeration. As mentioned in Chapter I, the Greek gods were anthropomorphic and exhibited on a grand scale the emotions and reactions of men. Often these gods appeared to be jealous and quarrelsome, even childish. Some commentators have attempted to use these uncomplimentary descriptions as proof that Homer was indicating a lack of respect for the gods' reality or power. Samuel N. Kramer

disagrees with such a view:

On the contrary, as we have seen, the men of the poems are all too well aware of the gods' strength: all the destruction and suffering of the Iliad was simply accomplishing the will of Zeus.⁴

Some of the characteristics which the Hebrews ascribed to God were similar to those ascribed to the Greek deities. Yahweh was also thought of in anthropomorphic terms. As W. F. Albright explains:

Yahweh . . . is virtually always referred to in the earlier sources in a way which suggests His human form though His body was usually hidden in a refulgent envelope called His Glory.⁵

In Genesis it is recorded that God created man in his own image; so the Hebrews had a basis for thinking of God as having some human characteristics. Unlike the Greek gods, however, Yahweh did not usually reveal Himself to men in His own form. A degree of mystery surrounded God as He spoke from "a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush" (Exodus iii.2) or "a thick cloud" (Exodus xix.9). Moses was one of the few men permitted to look upon the face of Yahweh: "Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend" (Exodus xxxiii.11). The Hebrews were forbidden to make statues to represent God or

⁴Kramer, Mythologies of the Ancient World, 251.

⁵Albright, From the Stone Age to Christianity, 264.

any other deity: "'You shall not make yourself a graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth . . .'" (Exodus xx.4). Although God had many human characteristics, He had no complementary feminine counterpart. As C. E. Wright explains: "The duality of male and female is to be found only in the created world; it is not a part of the Godhead, which is essentially sexless. Biblical Hebrew has no word for goddess."⁶ God's human characteristics did not include the human weaknesses exhibited by Greek gods and goddesses. Early Hebrews thought of their God as having a capacity for love and hatred, joy and sorrow, revenge and remorse, but these emotions were on a heroic rather than a human plane.⁷ The early books of The Old Testament contain many references which indicate that the Hebrews thought of God as having emotions similar to those of men: "And the Lord's anger was kindled against Israel . . ." (Numbers xxxii.13); "' . . . I the Lord your God am a jealous God . . .'" (Exodus xx.5); "And the Lord repented of the evil which he thought to do to his people" (Exodus xxxii.14). In contrast to the capricious natures of the Greek deities, Yahweh was just and dependable. He was

⁶Wright, The Old Testament Against Its Environment, 23.

⁷Albright, From the Stone Age to Christianity, 264.

always concerned about His people and described Himself to Moses in these terms: "' . . . A God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness . . .'" (Exodus xxxiv.6). A psalmist mentioned other characteristics ascribed to God: "He loves righteousness and justice . . ." (Psalm xxxiii.5).

Early Hebrew beliefs regarding God's presence were similar to the ideas of the Achaeans. God was not thought to be omnipresent; He could be found only in certain holy places such as Shiloh or Mount Sinai. The people were commanded to build an ark as a sanctuary for God so that He could "dwell in their midst" (Exodus xxv.8). When the Philistines later captured the ark, the Hebrews were in despair because they believed that God was no longer with them: "'The glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured'" (I Samuel iv.22). Later writers indicated a change in this idea of limited physical locality, and characterized God as ". . . the Lord of all the earth" (Psalm xcvi.5) whose spirit was omnipresent:

If I ascend into heaven, thou art there! If I make
my bed in Sheol, thou art there! If I take the
wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost
parts of the sea, even there thy hand shall lead me,
and thy right hand shall hold me
(Psalm cxxxix.8,9).

Prophets or seers were a part of both the early Greek and early Hebrew cultures. Men with the ability to interpret

dreams and omens and to foretell the future were highly esteemed by the Greeks. Calchas was honored because he interpreted the omen which predicted the outcome of the Trojan war. The Trojans had a similar man, Polydamas, "the only man among them who could look into the future as into the past" (Odyssey XVIII.343). Theoclymenus belonged to a family of prophets. Apollo had made them seers, and Theoclymenus was able to prophesy the deaths of the suitors in The Odyssey. These prophets held an important place in the culture because the will of the gods was often revealed in dreams or omens which had to be interpreted. Penelope clarifies the Greek ideas concerning dreams, calling them

" . . . awkward and confusing things: not all that people see in them comes true. For there are two gates through which these insubstantial visions reach us; one is of horn and the other of ivory. Those that come through the ivory gate cheat us with empty promises that never see fulfilment; while those that issue from the gate of burnished horn inform the dreamer what will really happen"
(Odyssey XIX.302).

Among the Greeks great importance was attached to omens as well as to dreams. Omens were most often in the forms of thunder, lightning, or birds in flight. Omens which appeared to the right were considered favorable: "There was a flash of lightning on our right he [Zeus] meant that all would be well" (Iliad II.49). In attempting to understand the mind of a god, oracles were sometimes consulted. In one of his stories Odysseus mentioned going " . . . to Dodona

to find out the will of Zeus from the great oak tree that is sacred to the god . . .'" (Odyssey XIX.295).

The Hebrews also relied on prophets or seers and believed that God's will was revealed through dreams and oracles. One of the earliest prophets in Israel was Samuel. Samuel was famous because whatever he prophesied came to pass: "' . . . [H]e is a man that is held in honor; all that he says comes true'" (I Samuel ix.6). His gift was especially valuable because " . . . [T]he word of the Lord was rare in those days; there was no frequent vision" (I Samuel iii.1). Dreams are mentioned in The Old Testament as another means by which God revealed his plans to men. Joseph's dreams of greatness aroused his brothers' jealousy and were instrumental in his being sold as a slave into Egypt. Joseph's ability to interpret dreams later brought him to the attention of Pharaoh. As one of Pharaoh's servants remembered: "' [H]e interpreted our dreams to us giving an interpretation to each man according to his dream. And as he interpreted to us, so it came to pass . . .'" (Genesis xxxi.12,13). The early Hebrews also consulted oracles as the Greeks did. Neither Saul nor David would take any important step without first consulting an oracle to find out God's will. Sometimes a system of casting lots (known as Urim and Thummim) was used to find the answer to a question.

In consulting the oracle, Saul said, "'If this guilt is in me or in Jonathan my son, O Lord, God of Israel, give Urim; but if the guilt is on thy people Israel, give Thummim'" (I Samuel xiv.41). Sometimes God's voice spoke directly from the Ark in answer to questions. God also used omens occasionally to reveal His will. Gideon asked for a sign that God really intended for him to deliver Israel:

"I am laying a fleece of wool on the threshing floor; if there is dew on the fleece alone, and it is dry on all the ground, then I shall know that thou wilt deliver Israel by my hand, as thou hast said." And it was so

(Judges vi.37,38).

The Hebrews differentiated between prophets and oracles which concerned God, and those which dealt in magic or derived from other religions. The early laws stated this differentiation clearly:

"There shall not be found among you . . . anyone who practices divination, a soothsayer, or an auger, or a sorcerer, or a charmer, or a medium, or a wizard, or a necromancer. For whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord . . ."

(Deuteronomy xviii.10,11,12).

Punishments also extended to those who consulted such people:

"If a person turns to mediums and wizards . . . I will set my face against that person, and I will cut him off from among his people"

(Leviticus xx.6).

Prayers were a form of worship in both Greek and Hebrew cultures. In praying to the gods on Olympus, an Achaean usually raised his hands toward heaven. It was not necessary

to kneel or to go into a temple in order to pray. When praying to Zeus, Odysseus " . . . lifted up his hands in prayer . . ." (Odyssey XX.306). Instead of praying to the Olympian deities, Meleager's mother prayed to the gods of the underworld as she cursed her son:

"He had killed her brother, and she in grief had importuned the gods to kill her son, falling on her knees, deluging her lap with tears, and beating the bountiful earth with her fists, as she called on Hades and august Persephone"

(Iliad IX.176).

Prayers could be offered by an individual or by a group. Before the duel between Hector and Paris, "The watching armies prayed with their hands raised to the gods . . ." (Iliad III.72). Phoenix presented an interesting idea about prayers, an idea which is in keeping with the Greek tendency toward personification: "'Do you not know that prayers are Daughters of almighty Zeus? They are wrinkled creatures, with a halting gait and downcast eyes, who make it their business to follow Sin about'" (Iliad IX.174). Phoenix explained that Sin was stronger and quicker than the prayers and thus was able to bring grief to mankind. Then the prayers "come after and put the trouble right'" (Iliad IX.174).

The early Hebrews maintained such a close relationship with their God that their prayers were actually conversations with God rather than ritualistic statements or petitions.

Later, prophets and priests addressed God on behalf of the people. Ezra was appalled at the lack of faith shown by the returning exiles. He said,

"And at the evening sacrifice I rose from my fasting, with my garments and my mantle rent, and fell upon my knees and spread out my hands to the Lord my God, saying, O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift my face to thee, my God, for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has mounted up to the heavens"

(Ezra ix.5,6).

Such a prayer for forgiveness was completely foreign to the Greek concept of religion. Even their sacrifices were gifts to the gods rather than offerings of atonement. Since the Olympian gods did not condemn "sin" in the Hebrew sense, they were not called upon to forgive it. As Thomas Day Seymour explains,

Men not only have no idea of inherited sin or natural sinfulness, but even when they have done a wrong they have no vivid and painful sense of guilt and their offering⁸ of sacrifice to the gods has no deep ethical meaning.

Although they may have lacked ethical meaning, sacrifices or offerings to the gods were certainly an integral part of the Greek culture. Drink offerings were always made before men tasted the wine: " . . . [T]hey poured wine on the ground from their cups. Not a man dared drink before he had made a libation to the almighty Son of Cronos" (Iliad vii.144).

⁸Seymour, Life in the Homeric Age, 498.

Another type of sacrifice was a cereal offering: "Penelope . . . filled a basket with sacrificial grains, and prayed to Athene . . ." (Odyssey IV.84). Grain was also a part of the sacrifice which Odysseus made to the dead. He also poured libations "' . . . first with mingled honey and milk, then with sweet wine, and last of all with water'" (Odyssey XI.171). The most frequent sacrifices (other than libations) were burnt offerings of animals: " . . . [T]hey offered a rich sacrifice of bulls and goats . . . and savoury odours mixed with the curling smoke, went up into the sky" (Iliad I.31). When the Greeks sacrificed an animal, they customarily burned the thighs of the animal as a sign of special favor to Zeus.

Sacrifices in the Hebrew religion were either peace offerings, sin offerings, burnt offerings, or guilt offerings. Each type of sacrifice was made according to a specific ritual, and there were strict regulations as to what items were appropriate as an offering. Often the exact amount to be offered was specified. "A tenth of an ephah of fine flour" (Leviticus vi.20), for example, was the regular cereal offering. Sacrifices were to be made only by the priests and only at certain appointed places.

" . . . Any man of the house of Israel . . . who offers a burnt offering or sacrifice, and does not bring it to the door of the tent of meeting to sacrifice it to the Lord; that man shall be cut off from his people"
(Leviticus xvii.8).

Such a law contrasted sharply with the less rigid customs of the Greeks, who were free to sacrifice in any place they chose. The clearest contrast, of course, lay in the significance attached to the sacrifices. When the Greeks sacrificed an animal, they had a feast in honor of the gods. The Hebrews gave a portion of their sacrifices to their priests, but the people did not eat the remainder of their offerings; on the contrary, such offerings were holy, atoning for the sins of those who made the sacrifice. A sacrifice could not be looked upon merely as a gift to God, because the earth and all living creatures already belonged to him. As Hebrew religious ideas developed more complexity, another concept was introduced:

And Samuel said, "Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold to obey is better than to sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams"
(I Samuel xv.22).

A psalmist emphasized the same idea--God demanded more than a ritual of sacrifice: "The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise" (Psalm li.17).

In conducting sacrifices and other religious ceremonies the characters in the Homeric epics seemed to ignore the role of priests, although a priest was to be treated with respect. When Agamemnon disregarded this precept in his discourteous

treatment of Chryses, the priest of Apollo, the god sent a deadly plague on the Achaean army. Priests in general, however, seemed to have remained in the background during the period pictured in the epics. As Edith Hamilton states, "The priest plays no real part in either the history or the literature of Greece. . . . The Trojan war was fought out by gods and men with no intermediaries."⁹

In contrast to the negligible role of the priests in the Greek culture, the role of Israelite priests was of primary importance. Because the rituals for offerings and sacrifices were so complicated, truly professional priests were essential, and amounted to a true clergy, which the Greeks never had. Priests were chosen by God and acted as intermediaries between God and His people:

"You are to distinguish between the holy and the common and between the unclean and the clean; and you are to teach the people of Israel all the statutes which the Lord has spoken to them by Moses"
(Leviticus x.10,11).

In addition to their duties at the temple, Hebrew priests were also responsible for examining diseased people and for conducting the necessary rites of purification. There were hundreds of ordinances which governed the lives of the Israelites, and the priests had even more rules which they must

⁹Hamilton, The Greek Way, 27.

observe. When God chose the sons of Aaron to be priests, He enumerated their duties and gave them exact instructions about the conduct of their personal lives. The priests were given respect and honored because God had selected them:

"'You shall be holy to me; for I the Lord am holy, and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be mine'" (Leviticus xx.22). The role of the priest was of great importance in the Hebrew culture.

In comparing the relationships between gods and men as evidenced in the literature of the early Greeks and the early Hebrews, several general similarities are apparent. People of both groups believed in one way or another in the existence of many gods, and their relationships to these gods involved obligations as well as privileges. Both Greeks and Hebrews knew that their gods preferred certain standards of behavior on the part of men. The obligations of hospitality were recognized in both cultures as being extremely important. The gods of the Greeks and the God of the Hebrews were thought of in anthropomorphic terms, and many human characteristics were ascribed to them. People in both cultures were interested in learning about divine will through the help of prophets or seers, and omens and oracles were considered to be messages from divine sources. Prayers and sacrifices were forms of ritual worship practiced by Greeks and by Hebrews.

The basic differences apparent in the religious ideas and practices of the two cultures are more numerous and perhaps more significant. Although the Hebrews believed in the existence of many gods, they worshiped only Yahweh, the Lord of Israel and eventually recognized Yahweh as the only god. The Greeks were unequivocally polytheistic, and their Olympian deities felt no real responsibility toward men; the Hebrew God loved men because he had created them. God expected men to follow a strict code of ethics and gave the Hebrews laws which they were to follow. The Greek gods did not expect men to exhibit morality, love, or justice in the Judeo-Christian sense. Although both Greeks and Hebrews offered sacrifices to their divinities, the Greek sacrifices were less formal or ritualized than those of the Israelites, and the Achaeans were free to make sacrifices to their gods at any time without the services of priests. The Hebrews, in contrast, were required to bring their sacrifices to the priests who acted as intermediaries between men and God. The key to understanding the basic differences in these religious ideas may lie in the fact that a relationship of mutual love was established between the Hebrews and their God, while the Greeks recognized no close spiritual ties with their deities. The lives of mortals and immortals were widely

separated, and the immortals were superior to mortals only in their strength, their magical powers, and their knowledge of the future. To the Hebrews, God was perfect, not in a physical sense, but in an ethical sense which made the Hebrews the law-givers to later European civilization.

CHAPTER V

CHARACTERISTICS OF HEROES

The qualities most valued by the people of any culture are exemplified in the lives of their heroes. Thus, a comparison of the Greek hero, Achilles, and the Hebrew hero, David, should lead to a better understanding of the differences or similarities in the hero-concepts of the two civilizations which these exemplary figures represent. Characteristics to be compared include physical appearance and strength, leadership ability, motivation, and weaknesses. Both the Hebrews and the Greeks valued physical strength and beauty and the ability of a hero to gain military victories. The motivations of the heroes of these two cultures show dissimilarity, however. A Hebrew hero felt that he had been chosen by God, and considered himself to be God's tool for achieving His purposes on earth. The motivating forces for a Greek hero were his desire for an immortality of fame and his concern for his arete. Both heroes were shown to have human faults and weaknesses, but Achilles and David were able to overcome these limitations.

Similarities may be seen in the physical descriptions of these heroes. Achilles was said to be " . . . big and

beautiful . . . the very image of a god . . ." (Iliad XXIV. 452). David " . . . was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome" (I Samuel xvi.12).

In addition to being handsome, both Achilles and David were noted for unusual physical strength. Achilles was the greatest warrior among the Achaeans. Stronger than ordinary men, he possessed a "heavy, long, and formidable spear. No Achaean could wield this except Achilles, who knew the way to handle it" (Iliad XVI.296). David was reported to have killed "both lions and bears" (I Samuel xvii.36), and his victory over the giant Goliath became a legend: "So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and with a stone, and struck the Philistine and killed him" (I Samuel xvii.50).

Extraordinary strength and courage enabled these two heroes to become great warriors whose exploits were admired and extolled by their countrymen. Achilles killed the Trojan hero, Hector, and insured a victory for the Achaeans. Achilles' reputation was so great that the mere sight of Patroclus wearing Achilles' armour caused the Trojan lines to waver: "Every man looked anxiously around to find some sanctuary from sudden death" (Iliad XVI.299). David was also a military leader: "And there was war again; and David went out and fought with the Philistines, and made a great slaughter among them so that they fled before him" (I Samuel xix.8). David's victories on the battlefield helped to unify

all the tribes of Israel, and he became the first king to rule over them.

Before David became a king, he was merely the youngest son in a large family. He had the undistinguished task of tending his father's herd of sheep. This fact about his background emphasizes a major difference between the heroes of the Hebrews and those of the Greeks. A Greek hero was always a person of high rank--never an ordinary man. Achilles' father was a mortal, but his mother was a goddess. He was a man who possessed both wealth and a position of importance as leader of the Myrmidons. In contrast to the Greek prince-hero, Hebrew heroes were often ordinary men whom God chose for a special purpose. Before the time of Saul, the Hebrews, a loosely organized group of tribes, had no king.¹

The Achaeans, in contrast, had a ruling hierarchy and referred to Agamemnon as "King of Men." He was described as "one whose authority is absolute among us and whose word is law to all Achaeans" (Iliad I.25). Nevertheless, in the debate over the captive girl Briseis, Achilles showed Agamemnon little respect and insulted him publicly with such phrases as "you shameless schemer" and "you drunken sot" (Iliad I. 27,29). David's actions toward his superior were the

¹Will Sessions, Greater Men and Women of the Bible (St. Louis, 1958), 84.

antitheses of Achilles' actions. He showed respect for Saul's position: "The Lord forbid that I should put forth my hand against the Lord's anointed" (I Samuel xxvi.11). Even when David was pursued by the king, he refused to harm Saul and remained loyal to him. David's loyalty extended to Saul's son, Jonathan, who became his close friend: "The soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul" (I Samuel xviii.1). David's poem, composed after the death of his friend, told of his own feeling: "I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; very pleasant have you been to me; your love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women" (II Samuel i.26).

A parallel to the friendship of David and Jonathan might be seen in the friendship of Achilles and Patroclus. Achilles' grief and anger at his friend's death made him eager to return to battle against the Trojans. Friendship, for the Greeks, involved one's total commitment, as Bowra explains:

The essence of such a relationship was for a friend to share another's fortunes, both good and bad, to support him with complete truth and faithfulness in his loves and his enmities, his pleasures and his sorrows, to be scrupulously candid, and to fail in no call made upon him.²

Achilles obviously believed in this definition of friendship.

²C. M. Bowra, The Greek Experience (Cleveland, 1957), 27.

Once he even warned Phoenix, "Be careful how you give that man your heart, or you may change my love for you to hate. The right thing for you to do is to cross the man who crosses me" (Iliad IX.177). Achilles expected such loyalty from others, but he was not always ready to give it in return.

Divergent ideas concerning a hero's loyalty or highest allegiance provide insight into another major difference between the values of the Greeks and the Hebrews. While Achilles felt that he owed his loyalty to his own concept of honor, David's concern was loyalty to the will of God.

Achilles' behavior after his quarrel with Agamemnon was due to his idea of loyalty to one's own concept of honor. Kitto explains this view of the respect due to an individual: "The Greek was very sensitive to his standing among his fellows; he was zealous and was expected to be zealous in claiming what was due to him."³ Such an attitude might seem childish, but it was based on the Greek concept of arete. Arete could be explained as genuine virtue or outstanding excellence in relation to one's own chosen way of life. The reward of having arete was the praise of one's comrades and lasting fame or glory.⁴ At one time Achilles disclaimed all

³Kitto, The Greeks, 245.

⁴Bowra, The Greek Experience, 21.

interest in the praise of comrades, saying to Phoenix, "I have no use for the Achaean's good opinion. I am content with the approbation of Zeus . . ." (Iliad IX.177). All of his actions, however, revealed that the opinion of others was most important to him. Achilles resented the fact that Agamemnon had insulted him in the presence of all the men: "But my blood boils when I think of what happened and the vile way in which Atreides treated me in public, like some disreputable outcast" (Iliad IX.178). He knew that a hero's arete entitled him to be treated with respect.

Achilles' concern with his arete influenced his decision to remain at Troy. He understood that he had a choice of destinies:

If I stay here and play my part in the siege of Troy,
there is no homecoming for me, though I shall win
undying fame. But if I go home to my own country,
my good name is lost, though I shall have long life
and shall be spared an early death
(Iliad IX.172).

His final decision was, of course, to remain. "And the son of Peleus pressed on in search of glory, bespattering his unconquerable hands with gore" (Iliad XX.379).

A search for glory would never have motivated a Hebrew hero. David considered himself to be a tool to be used by God: "And David did as the Lord commanded him . . ." (I Samuel V.25). The only lasting fame desired by the early Hebrew was that his family should continue to exist in future

generations. A man's children were considered to be an extension of his personality. God's promise to David was:

"When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your son after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. . . . And your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me"

(II Samuel xvii.12,16).

That promise was as valuable to David as the assurance of undying fame was to Achilles.

Both Achilles and David have been shown to have possessed physical beauty, strength, and ability as military leaders. However, the record of their experiences also tells about the development of these heroes as individuals. Their personal qualities as well as their public achievements contributed to their respective heroic images. Some of the personal qualities of each man were not admirable. Achilles revealed his overabundant pride by referring to himself as "the noblest of them all" (Iliad I.34). His father was aware of his excessive pride and gave Achilles some good advice before he left home: "'What you must do is keep a check on that proud spirit of yours; for a kind heart is a better thing than pride'" (Iliad IX.168). After Achilles quarreled with Agamemnon, Phoenix advised him: "'Conquer your pride, Achilles. You have no right to be so stubborn'" (Iliad IX.74). Even his friend Patroclus commented, "'Heaven preserve me from the vindictive feelings you cherish, warping a noble

nature to ignoble ends'" (Iliad XVI.293). The words of Patroclus had no influence on Achilles, but the death of Patroclus caused Achilles to face himself for the first time. He had to realize that Patroclus' death was partially the result of his own behavior. When Achilles' mother told him that Zeus had granted his wish for revenge against the Achaeans, Achilles saw how unimportant his desire had been: "'But what satisfaction can I get from that, now that my dearest friend is dead, Patroclus, who was more to me than any other of my men, whom I loved as much as my own life?'" (Iliad XVIII.339). Achilles had the courage to accept the fact that the responsibility was his:

"Then let me die forthwith," Achilles said with a passion, "since I have proved a broken reed to Patroclus and all my other comrades whom Prince Hector killed, and have sat here by my ships, an idle burden on the earth . . ."

(Iliad XVIII.339).

Not only did Achilles accept the responsibility for his troubles, but he also had the courage to act accordingly. His decision was to "' . . . go now and seek out Hector, the destroyer of my dearest friend'" (Iliad XVIII.339). He made this choice knowing that he was doomed to die soon after the death of Hector.

His mother was grieved that fate had given Achilles "'so short a life; so little time'" (Iliad I.34), but her son learned much about life and about himself in a short time.

Achilles came to Troy as a green undisciplined youth whom Phoenix described as "'a mere lad, with no experience of the hazards of war, nor of debate, where people make their mark'" (Iliad IX.172). The years of the Trojan War hardened this young man into a military leader, but he learned eventually that anger and violence lead to disaster:

Ah how I wish that discord could be banished from the world of gods and men, and with it anger, insidious as trickling honey, anger that makes the wisest man flare up and spreads like smoke through his whole being
(Iliad XVIII.339).

Achilles saw the futility of his anger toward Agamemnon and made a move toward reconciliation: "'But we must let bygones be bygones, for all our resentment, and curb our hearts perforce--far be it from me to persist in my rancour'" (Iliad XIX.355).

Having gained a greater understanding of life, Achilles was able to say to Priam,

" . . . let us leave our sorrows, bitter though they are, locked in our own hearts, for weeping is cold comfort and does little good. We men are wretched things and the gods, who have no cares themselves, have woven sorrow into the very pattern of our lives"
(Iliad XXIV.451).

Achilles was wise enough to show compassion for Priam and to return Hector's body to him. His actions and attitudes as revealed in the scene with Priam seemed to negate the observation made by Apollo: "'Achilles . . . has no decent feelings in him and never listens to the voice of mercy, but goes

through life in his own savage way . . .'" (Iliad XXIV.438). But Zeus seemed to have a better opinion of Achilles' qualities: "'He is no fool; he knows what he is doing, and he is not a godless man'" (Iliad XXIV.441).

David was certainly not a "godless man" either, but he, too, made some poor choices and decisions. Instead of following God's will, David often followed his own desires. One such desire led to his taking Bathsheba, another man's wife. David also disobeyed the will of God in having Uriah killed so that he could marry Bathsheba. Like Achilles, he learned that the innocent sometimes suffer as a result of the mistakes of others. Just as Achilles felt responsible for Patroclus' death, David believed that his own sin caused the death of his first son born to Bathsheba. Part of David's greatness lay in his ability to see himself as he actually was. He accepted the responsibility for his action and admitted to the prophet Nathan: "'I have sinned against the Lord'" (II Samuel xii.43).

In both Greek and Hebrew culture, a hero, after accepting the consequences of his actions, was able to accept life. In neither of the cultures can one discover an element of blind resignation. These men knew life as it really was and were able to appreciate its joys, to endure its inevitable sorrows. Both David and Achilles had to bear the sorrow of the death of the person each loved most. Achilles

grieved for Patroclus, and David's greatest loss was his son, Absalom. Even after Absalom instigated a rebellion against him, David wanted him to be spared and wept when he heard the news of Absalom's death: "'O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I had died instead of you. . . .'" (II Samuel xix.13).

Both Achilles and David possessed human imperfections. At times Achilles was proud and selfish; David, weak and sinful. Perhaps their greatness lay in their ability to overcome these weaknesses and to live a full life within the limiting frame of humanity.

The heroic quality of life had no relationship to the length of a lifetime. Achilles' life was brief, but David lived to be an old man. He reigned over Israel, "and David executed judgment and justice unto all his people" (II Samuel viii.15). Throughout his lifetime David continued to make mistakes, but he never ceased to acknowledge them. During a plague,

David spoke to the Lord when he saw the angel who was smiting the people and said, "Lo, I have sinned and I have done wickedly; but these sheep, what have they done? Let thy hand, I pray thee, be against me and against my father's house"
(II Samuel xxiv.17).

When David wanted to build an altar and make sacrifices to avert the plague, Araunah, one of his subjects, offered to give him everything necessary for the sacrifice. "But the

king said to Araunah, 'No, but I will buy it from you for a price. I will not offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God which cost me nothing'" (II Samuel xxiv.24). Because the sin was David's, the responsibility for the sacrifice was his also.

Even though Achilles and David followed divergent value patterns, their experiences led both toward knowledge of and acceptance of their own limitations. Both had faults, but they also developed qualities which made them heroes who were truly worthy of the admiration of their people.

CHAPTER VI

STATUS OF WOMEN

A comparison of the status of women in the early Greek and early Hebrew cultures may be treated in three categories of consideration: the woman's role in each society, her participation in religious rites, and her influence on affairs of state. Although women in both cultures were considered subordinate to men, Hebrew women actually had more freedom to participate in religious rites and in affairs of state. The evidence would indicate the presence of an element of distrust in women in Greek society, an element which was not noticeable among the Hebrews. Both The Old Testament and the Homeric epics mention examples of romantic love, but the principal function of a woman in each culture was that of wife and mother. Both Greek and Hebrew women, however, had a degree of personal freedom.

Because both of the Homeric epics record periods of disturbance caused by war or separation, the usual role of women is rather difficult to determine. In The Iliad the women in the Greek camp were captives and were usually thought of as property rather than as persons. The only contradiction to this view was provided by the relationship between

Achilles and Briseis. Achilles asked,

"Does not every decent and rightminded man love and cherish his own woman, as I loved that girl, with all my heart, though she was a captive of my spear?"
(Iliad IX.170)

The life of captive women in the Greek society was obviously filled with uncertainty and unhappiness. A description of the captives' behavior after Patroclus' death clearly illustrates their feelings: "Thus Briseis wept, and the other women took up the lament, ostensibly for Patroclus, but each at heart for her own unhappy lot" (Iliad XIX.362).

Although a Greek woman was usually subordinate to her father or husband, she was capable of assuming more responsibility when necessary. During Odysseus' long absence, Penelope managed to put off her final answer to the suitors and to keep at least a portion of Odysseus' wealth intact. As soon as Telemachus came of age, however, he returned his mother to a subordinate role:

"So go to your quarters now and attend to your own work, the loom and the spindle, and see that the servants get on with theirs. The bow is the men's concern, and mine above all; for I am master in this house"

(Odyssey XXI.324).

Although women in Greek society were expected to be obedient to men, they were certainly not subservient. Helen was independent enough to run away with Paris. When Helen and Menelaus were later reunited, she referred to herself as

a "'shameless creature'" (Odyssey IV.68), but she was returned (nevertheless) to her position as his wife. Helen helped to entertain their visitors, Telemachus and Peisistratus, by serving wine and recounting stories. This evidence would indicate that Greek women did not lead secluded lives. In each home which Telemachus visited, the lady of the house was given a place of honor when she appeared. Helen's infidelity and Clytemnestra's treachery illustrated the element of distrust in women and even anti-feminism which was evidently present in Greek society. Agamemnon, of course, had reason to be bitter. During a conversation with Odysseus in the underworld, he declared that Zeus worked his will "'through women's crooked ways'" (Odyssey XI.183). Agamemnon also advised Odysseus to tell his wife only a few of his thoughts: "'Women, I tell you, are no longer to be trusted'" (Odyssey XI.183). Athene even hinted to Telemachus that Penelope might be untrustworthy:

"There is also the danger that she might carry off some of your own things from the house without your permission. You know what a woman's disposition is" (Odyssey XV.230).

Homer's descriptions of Penelope were usually complimentary. She provided a contrast to "' . . . that foul traitress Clytemnestra . . .'" (Odyssey XI.182) by being " . . . so loyal and so true" (Odyssey XXIII.346). Achaean women were expected to be loyal wives, but husbands could take

concubines and sleep with slave girls. Menelaus had a son " . . . the gallant Megapenthes, whom a slave had borne to him when it was clear that he could hope for no other children from Helen . . ." (Odyssey IV.64). Laertes, however, decided against sleeping with the slave Eurycleia in deference to his wife's wishes. Although concubines could bear children to a man, only his legal wife's children could inherit estates, titles, and honors.

The role of women in Hebrew society was similar in many ways to that of Greek women. Hebrew women were definitely subordinate to men. Corswant explains:

From all points of view, a woman occupied an inferior position; there was less rejoicing over the birth of a daughter than a son, her education was less elaborate than that of the boys; generally the woman had to stand aside, men would not take meals with her.¹

Another similarity was the recognition of the existence of romantic love. There are several passages in The Old Testament which clearly indicate the presence of romantic love as a motivating force. When Isaac met Rebekah, " . . . [S] he became his wife; and he loved her" (Genesis xxiv.67). Because Jacob loved Rachel, he promised to serve her father seven years so that he could marry her.

Differences in the role of women in the two cultures are

¹W. A. Corswant, A Dictionary of Life in Bible Times (New York, 1960), 301.

also apparent. Whereas an Achaean man had only one legal wife, polygamy was commonly practiced by the Hebrews, because it was favorable to the development of the family or tribe. The principal function of a Hebrew woman was to become a wife and mother. As a wife she had few privileges, but in becoming a mother she gained respect. Children owed their obedience to their mothers as well as to their fathers: "'Everyone of you shall revere his mother and his father . . .'" (Deuteronomy xix.3). Mothers often selected the names for their children rather than allowing the father to choose one. In the books of Kings and Chronicles, lists of the rulers of Israel usually include the mother's name rather than the father's. Regarding this practice, Deen explains: "In placing the name of a king's mother and the evaluation of his reign side by side the Hebrews showed how powerful they regarded the role of a mother."²

Another difference in the status of women in these two cultures may be illustrated in the ways in which women participated in religious rites. The Greeks worshiped goddesses, but mortal women played no important role in religious ceremony. There is no mention of priestesses in Homeric society although women could offer prayers and even

²Edith Deen, All of the Women of the Bible (New York, 1955), xxi.

make some types of sacrifices. We are told that, in her room, " . . . Penelope . . . filled a basket with sacrificial grains and prayed to Athene" (Odyssey IV.84). Women, however, did not appear to take any part in public sacrifices or religious rites. On one occasion Helen was able to interpret an omen for Telemachus. This inspiration was evidently an unusual occurrence; there were no other interpretations mentioned.

In contrast to the limited participation of Greek women in religious rites, Hebrew women often took part in public ceremonies. Religious festivals were shared by "all the congregation of Israel" (Exodus xii.3). A woman regarded as a prophetess often led other women as they participated in religious rites. After the Lord had saved Israel from the Egyptians, " . . . Miriam, the prophetess, . . . took a timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and dancing" (Exodus xv.20). Hebrew women could not serve as priests, but they were able to take active part in religious rituals.

Women in Greek society probably influenced men's decisions indirectly, but there is no clear indication that women played a major part in directing the affairs of state. In discussing the status of Greek women, Bowra explains, "Their women move freely and easily among men, but take no

part in war or public affairs, and are excluded from rule and government."³ Women in Homer's society obviously were capable of expressing their ideas and of assuming various home responsibilities, but their roles did not include active or open participation in affairs of state.

Hebrew women, in contrast, often played important roles in public life. Deborah, a prophetess, became a judge of Israel. On one occasion she even helped to lead the Israelite army. Barak, the general, insisted that he would go into battle only if Deborah would accompany him. " . . . [A]nd ten thousand men went up at his heels; and Deborah went up with him" (Judges ix.10). Esther was another Hebrew woman who affected the affairs of state. By using her influence on her husband, King Ahasuerus, she was able to save her people from annihilation. Bathsheba reminded King David of his promise that her son should be king, and Solomon was anointed as the new ruler of Israel. Hebrew women were capable of participating both directly and indirectly in affairs of state.

Because the epics depict times of confusion, one may get a distorted view of the usual status of women. Women moved mostly as a background chorus in the epics since Homer

³Bowra, The Greek Experience, 26.

principally related the adventures of men. Such views of women must necessarily be fragmentary. Similarly, although The Old Testament presents vignettes of many women, it is essentially a history of the actions of men. Although Greek and Hebrew women influenced their cultures both directly and indirectly, women did not assume roles of great importance until centuries later when Mary was exalted as the Mother of God.

CHAPTER VII

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary

It was the purpose of this study to explore the differences and similarities in the value patterns of the early Greeks and early Hebrews. The comparison was based on material presented in the Homeric epics and in the first nineteen books of The Old Testament.

The methods used to obtain this data included close textual analysis of primary source material and comparison of conclusions with those of authors of selected secondary sources.

Conclusions

The evidence presented in this study indicates that the following conclusions appear to be in order:

The value patterns revealed in the Homeric epics are, of course, more consistent than those of the early books of The Old Testament because the latter reflect various cultural levels and practices over a longer period of time.

Although many similarities existed between early Greek

culture as revealed by Homer in his epics, and Hebrew culture as revealed in The Old Testament, these similarities generally were those which unite all cultures. Certain basic differences in philosophical outlook were found which sharply divided the early Greek mind from that of the Hebrew.

The early Greek culture contained the seed of humanism which so characterized Golden Age Athenian culture, and which has been the social and political motivating force in European civilization since the onset of the Renaissance. Hebrew culture and concepts, on the other hand, furnished the impetus toward the metaphysical and toward ethical monotheism which has guided European civilization as strongly as has Greek humanism.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

PRIMARY SOURCES

- Homer. The Iliad (translated by E. V. Rieu). Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1966.
- Homer. The Odyssey (translated by E. V. Rieu). Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1966.
- _____. The Old Testament (Revised Standard Version). New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1953.

SECONDARY SOURCES

- Albright, W. F. Archeology and The Religion of Israel. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1941.
- Albright, W. F. The Biblical Period. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1949.
- Albright, W. F. From the Stone Age to Christianity. Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1957.
- Anderson, George K., William E. Buckler (editors). The Literature of England. Glenview, Illinois: Scott Foresman and Company, 1966.
- Bowra, C. M. The Greek Experience. Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1957.
- Corswant, W. A. Dictionary of Life in Bible Times. New York: Oxford University Press, 1960.
- Deen, Edith. All of the Women of the Bible. New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1955.
- Dickenson, G. Lowes. The Greek View of Life. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Doran, and Company, Inc., 1931.

- Dietrich, B. C. Death, Fate, and the Gods. University of London: The Athlone Press, 1965.
- Gulick, Charles. The Life of the Ancient Greeks. New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1902.
- Hamilton, Edith. The Greek Way. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1930.
- Kitto, H. D. F. The Greeks. Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1964.
- Kramer, Samuel Noah (editor). Mythologies of the Ancient World. Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1961.
- Mireaux, Emile. Daily Life in the Time of Homer. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1959.
- Sessions, Will. Greater Men and Women of the Bible. St. Louis: The Bethany Press, 1958.
- Seymour, Thomas Day. Life in the Homeric Age. New York: Biblo and Tannen, 1963.
- Wright, G. Ernest. The Old Testament Against Its Environment. London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1957.
- _____. The Interpreter's Bible. New York: Abingdon Cokesbury Press, 1952.
- _____. The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible. New York: Abingdon Press, 1962.

Vita was removed during scanning