

# The Origins of *The Kabbalah*

By

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The term *Kabbalah* traditionally has been used to represent the esoteric teachings of Judaism and Jewish mysticism. The first time that the teachings were referred to as “kabbalah” was in the 13<sup>th</sup> century of this current era when Eleazer of Worms used the term in his writings about the angelic and Divine Names which were used in magic. Prior to that time the term “kabbalah” was used in the Talmud and post-Talmudic literature to denote the Oral Law.

For the mystical aspects of Judaism, the expression Kabbalah is only one of the many terms used. The Talmud itself speaks of *Sitri ha-Torah* and *Razel ha-Torah* (*Secrets of the Torah*) and a secret tradition called *Ma’aseh ha-Merkabah* (*The Work of the Chariot*).

The writings of the Kabbalah are not restricted to the *Sepher ha-Yetzirah*, the *Sepher ha-Zohar*, and the *Sepher ha-Bahir* either, although these are the best known of the writings. There are some two dozen or so other books which include the *Sepher ha-Razin* (*The Book of the Secrets*), the *Sepher ha-Iyyun* (*The Book of Speculation*), and the *Sepher ha-Ma’ayan Chokmah* (*The Book of the Fountain of Wisdom*). These latter books appear to be later writings coming down through the early part of the medieval period. Actually, it is from some of the medieval writings that the non-Jewish Occult tradition of the Qabalah is drawn. From this tradition comes the Rosicrucians, the Masons, and the Christian systems all of which are the foundation of magickal orders such as the Golden Dawn, the O.T.O., the A.A., and others.

One of the earlier texts which seem to have been all but forgotten is the *Sepher ha-Chenoch* (*The Book of Enoch*). This book was, at one time, included in the Jewish Scriptures but was expurgated in the 1<sup>st</sup> century C.E. when the Masoretic Texts were decided upon as the *correct* scriptures. This book was mentioned in some very early writings. As a matter of fact, the early Christian Gnostics did discuss it at some length and there was also a mention of it in the Dead Sea Scrolls. If you will look at the Book of Enoch you will find that the whole concept of the war between Jahweh and Satan came out of this book. (See *The Other Bible* by Willis Barnstone [Ed.] )

With all of this, it appears that the Kabbalah is taken completely from the Jewish religious system. As much as many would like to believe it, this seems to not be so. The Jewish religion itself is a mixture of Semitic (Babylonian, Phoenician, Canaanite, and so on), as well as some aspects of the Egyptian and Persian religious systems. Consequently, any idea that the Kabbalah is unique to Judaism tends to be also unfounded.

Where, then, did the Kabbalah have its origins?

Before getting into this discussion, we need to trace the main glyph of the system: *The Tree of Life*. (Figure 1)

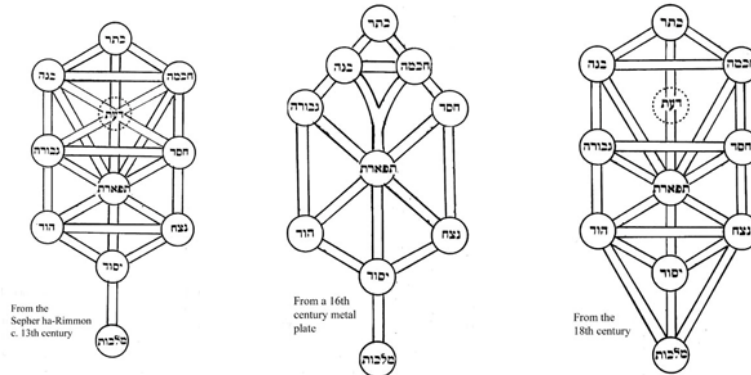


Figure 1

The first mention of the Tree of Life in the Scriptures is in Genesis 3:22 (Masoretic Text). The date of the writing of this text by the Jahwist Priests was sometime around 750-700 BCE. That gives plenty of time to incorporate and include the Tree of Life idea into the religious system and its writings.

If you will look at the Semitic tribes, they *all* had this concept playing quite prominently in their religious beliefs. The Sumerians were the first to depict a Sacred Tree: a Tree of Life. (Figure 2) Babylon took it from the Sumerians when they overthrew their empire. Assyria then took it from the Babylonians when they conquered the Babylonian empire. (Figures 3, 3a, 3b) The question is: Where did the Sumerians get it? It wasn't from the Egyptians because the Sumerian civilization predated the beginnings of the Egyptian civilization by more than 500 years.

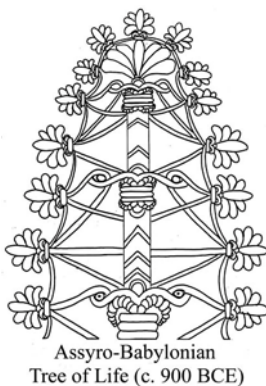
Sumerian Tree of Life (c. 2500 BCE) with a king and queen in worship.



The Tree of (Immortal) Life (the caduceus) with two guardian Cherubim. From a libation cup of King Gudea of Lagash in Mesopotamia (c. 2000 BCE). It is Sumerian in origin.



Figure 2



Assyro-Babylonian Tree of Life (c. 900 BCE)

Figure 3

Assyro-Babylonian Tree of Life (c. 900 BCE) with two winged gods wearing the traditional horned headdresses kneeling on either side. The worship of Enlil was associated with tree worship and the two gods are probably guardian figures.



Figure 3a

Assyro-Babylonian Tree of Life (c. 900 BCE) with two winged goddesses. They are probably fertility goddesses who are the consorts of Enlil.

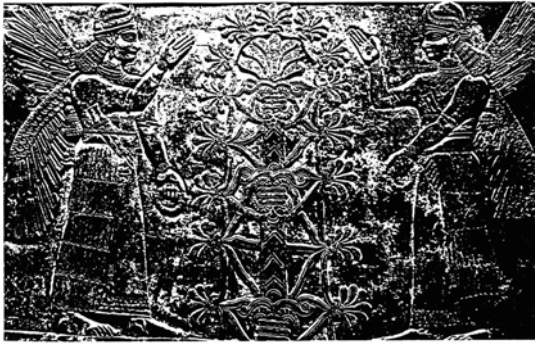


Figure 3b

Lloyd Graham in his book, *Deceptions and Myths of the Bible* states rather cynically; “The western mind is totally incapable of metaphysical thought.” If this is true, then we must look further east in order to get the origins of the Tree of Life idea.

The Tree of Life is the **World Tree**: *the tree from which the world is made*. It is the growth from the seed, to sprout and roots, to trunk and branches, leaves, flowers, and fruit which characterizes the entire universal process of growth that the World Tree, the Tree of Life represents. In Tibet, the Tree of Life is seen as having *3 summits and 6 branches with a bird laying an egg on each branch*. In China it is called “*po*” or **Hollow Mulberry**. It has *9 suns in its lower branches and the 10<sup>th</sup> climbs to the top taking its place in a chariot drawn by dragons*. But from where did these concepts have their roots?

Well, if we go into probably the oldest of the spiritual systems, from India, that is, the Indus valley where many consider the actual cradle of civilization to be, we can begin to see the nativity of this idea. In one of the *Upanishads* it states that the Tree of Life is “...*the ancient Tree, whose roots grow upward, and whose branches grow downward...that is called Brahman...All worlds are contained in it, and no one goes beyond.*” If we go even further back, back into prehistory, we find that the tree itself was regarded as the storehouse of the sun’s fire by the early humans. After all, what do you get when you rub two sticks together? Fire! Also, don’t forget that the sun gives life to everything on the earth.

So, then, it looks like the Tree of Life concept, with which we have most familiarity, came out of India. From there it spread through the Fertile Crescent, through ancient Sumer and the Middle East. From Sumer, the Egyptians took up the idea. We know this because, historically, Sumer was the oldest of the western civilizations. Mythologically, we can also find many counterparts in the Egyptian system to the Sumerian system.

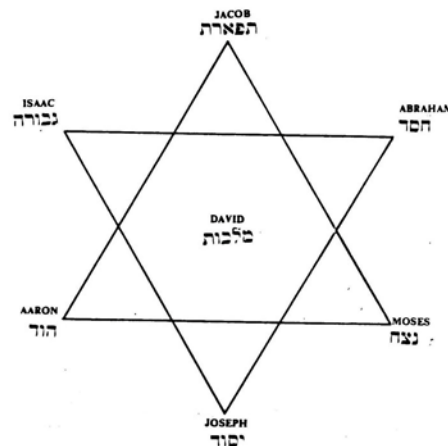
The Egyptians built upon the idea of the Tree of Life. They originally set the Tree up “...*in the midst of Paradise.*” This tree provided *food for the gods* and it was this food which kept them alive. Hence, the admonition in Genesis 3:22: “...*, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever.*”

Now, we can see that the main glyph of the Kabbalah isn’t even Jewish, or even Semitic, in origin. It’s earliest most significant form seems to have come out of India.

Let us look, now, at the possible origins for the Kabbalah itself. As mentioned earlier, many traditionalists would like to believe that it is *strictly* Jewish. This cannot be verified. What can be verified is that the Kabbalah, like the Jewish religion itself, is a conglomeration of different ideas. The Occutists, on the other hand, have attempted to

place the Kabbalah strictly within the realm of Egyptian mysticism. This is due to the apparently easy placement of the ten major Egyptian deities on the sepheroth, or spheres. Of course, this would be so because the Egyptians took the idea of the Tree of Life from the Sumerians. The Egyptian origin of the Kabbalah then is, as we've already seen, likewise incorrect.

There are some clues which we can gather as to the origins of the Kabbalah. The Kabbalistic tradition says that the Kabbalah came into Judaism in pieces and that each of the seven major patriarchs (called *chariots*) brought a part with them. These patriarchs were: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Aaron, and David. (Figure 4) Each of them were carriers of a portion of "The Light" and, as we shall see, brought different traditions with them.



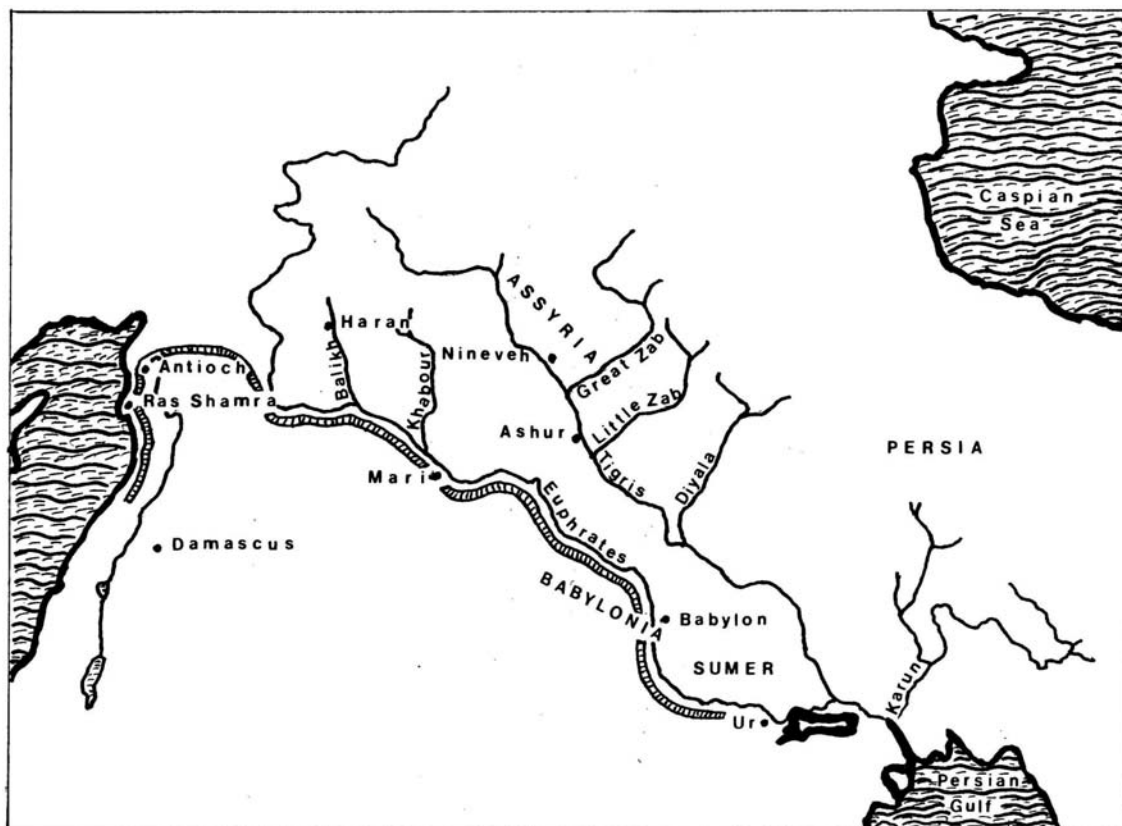
The Shield of David with correspondences to the Sephiroth and Patriarchs. The Patriarchs were referred to as MRCBH for they were carriers of a particular portion of the knowledge which guides man back to the Light or the Source.

Figure 4

If we begin to research backward into history keeping tradition at hand, we can see that Abraham brought with him, out of "Ur of the Chaldees"<sup>1</sup> (Figure 5) the beginnings of the Kabbalah. In fact, tradition states that Abraham brought with him the *Sepher ha-Yetzirah*. This places the Origins of the Kabbalah in the early Babylonian or late Sumerian Empire. Also, we can find the name Abraham mentioned in the Mitanni tablets (c. 1600 BCE). The real problem is that there is no hard evidence for Abraham's existence.

In Genesis 21 we read the story of Abraham finally fathering a son at an old age. This child's name was Isaac. You'll recall that under Yahweh's orders Abraham surreptitiously took his son to a mountain altar to sacrifice him. Let's get a bit serious here. Abraham was supposedly in his 80s and Isaac was 32 years old. If Isaac found out that he was to be sacrificed, don't you think that he would have clobbered his father and walked off? Of course he would have!

This story is mentioned for several reasons. First, the Christians incorrectly call this story *The Sacrifice of Isaac*. Second, traditionally, this story is called *The Raising of Isaac*. There is a big difference here. According to the Kabbalistic tradition, the title of the story indicates that Isaac was *raised up* by his father, Abraham. This was done when Abraham *instructed* Isaac in the secret tradition which he had brought with him from Babylon.



## Abraham's Journey

Figure 5

Isaac then gave the tradition to his favorite son, Joseph, who most likely did the same. You will recall that Joseph went into Egypt ... not of his own accord, by the way. It was this secret knowledge that supposedly protected him in Egypt. Here, then, is where the Babylonian system got mixed in with the Egyptian system.

Now, we must go some centuries and take a look at what's happening in Egypt mystically.

The main mystical system that the Hebrews at the time of the "Exodus" brought out of Egypt was *Merkobah* or *The Chariot*. Remnants of this system were seen in The Bible with the description of Ezekiel who saw *the wheel*. (Figure 6) This was supposedly the chariot.<sup>2</sup>

Moses, you'll recall was *raised* in the palace of the pharaoh. Consequently, he knew the Merkobah system. We also know this because of the story of Moses who *slew* the Egyptian who smote one of the Hebrews. That verse (Exodus 2:12) literally says that Moses *argued* with (literally, *had words with*) the Egyptian who smote one of the Hebrews and hid the Egyptian's body in the sand. What this means is that Moses used a *word* or *words of power* to kill the Egyptian. That is, Moses killed the Egyptian with *Magic*! After this, Moses ran off to Midian where he met Jethro and married Zipporah, Jethro's daughter. Jethro, you'll recall, was a priest and not a mere shepherd. His daughter, Zipporah, was most certainly a priestess.

If Ezekiel was familiar with the Merkabah mystical system from Egypt, this may have been the "vision" that he saw. This is from a bas relief in the Temple of Denderah.

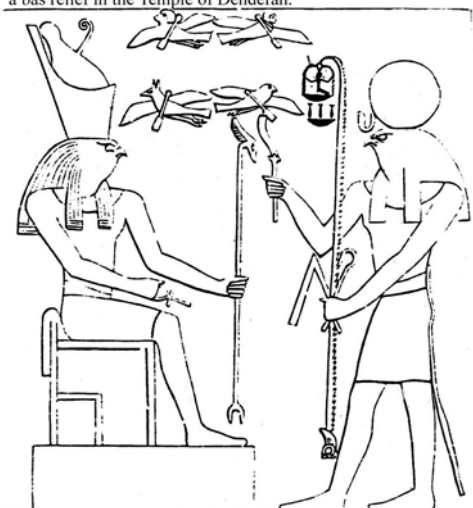


Figure 6

Considering the historical times of Ezekiel, the symbol of Ahura Mazda was on the standards of the advancing Persian armies. This would be the most appropriate candidate for the "vision" that he saw.

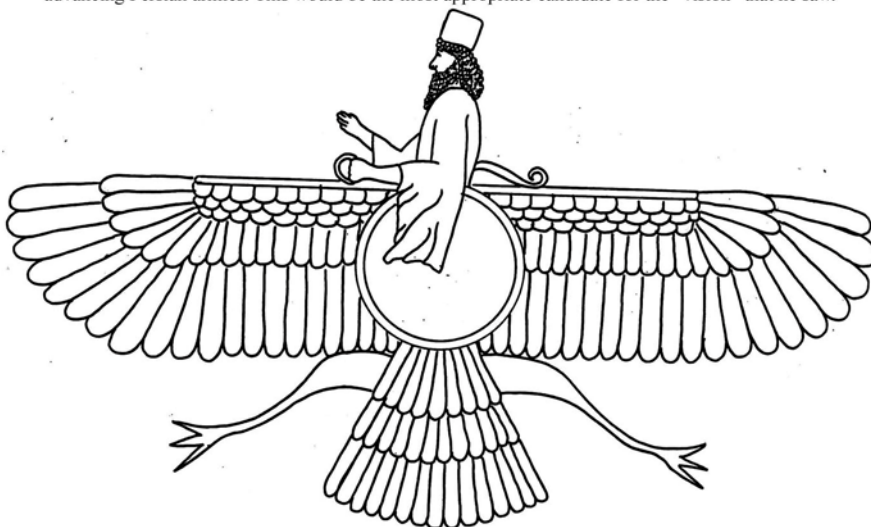


Figure 7

It is quite obvious that Moses received more of the secret tradition from Jethro and Zipporah. He then added this to what he already knew and strengthened it before he returned to Egypt.

Moses had a brother named Aaron. Aaron was a Hebrew priest. When Moses returned to Egypt it was Aaron who was the one who actually did all of the talking to Pharaoh, not Moses. Moses taught what he had received to Aaron and then added it to what he already knew and Aaron most likely taught what he knew to Moses.

So, up until now we have Abraham, a Babylonian (or Sumerian) passing the secret tradition on to his son Isaac, who passed it on to his son Jacob, who passed it on to his son Joseph, who took it to Egypt and mingled it with the Egyptian secrets. Later, Moses, who was taught these secrets in Egypt, took what he knew to Midian where he learned the Midian secrets from Jethro. Moses then returned to Egypt and taught what he

knew to Aaron who brought in what he knew. Consequently, we have Babylonian, Egyptian, and, finally, early Hebrew or Semitic.

Some 500 years later (according to tradition) David, the Bethlehemite, was anointed by Samuel and “...the spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward.” This indicates that Samuel, who was most likely an Elohic priest, gave the secrets that he had to David. David also had some knowledge to impart or he wouldn’t have been anointed (that is, *messiah*). Remember, Bethlehem was part of Canaan at this time. Hence, David could actually be considered a Canaanite. In other words, the *only* Hebrews in this whole scheme of things were Moses and Aaron, and the *only* one trained in the Hebrew secrets was Aaron.

Tradition also states that besides Aaron, Hoses taught Joshua what he knew. Joshua gave his knowledge to Judges. From the Judges it was given to the Sanhedrin. They in turn gave it to the Tonain. The Tonain then gave it to the Essenes. In fact, many researchers since the last century have believed that the Essenes became the Christians and that’s one of the main reasons that they disappeared.<sup>3</sup> The reason this idea is mentioned is because many of the early Gnostic Christian writings had *many* Kabbalistic references, especially the writings of the Valentinian and Ebionite Gnostics.

The Babylonians, the Egyptians, and the Canaanites weren’t the only pagans involved in portions of the Kabbalah. From the Phoenicians (c. 1500 BCE) we have the development of the alphabet. (Figure 8) The Hebrew alphabet was a later development. (c. 900 BCE) The Hebrew alphabet did *not* contain 22 letters until around the 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE. The Phoenician alphabet, on the other hand, in its earliest form contained *all* 22 letters. To the Phoenicians the alphabet was sacred. The gods created the universe by means of the sacred alphabet. In fact, many of the beliefs that are held regarding the sacredness of the alphabet came from the Phoenicians.

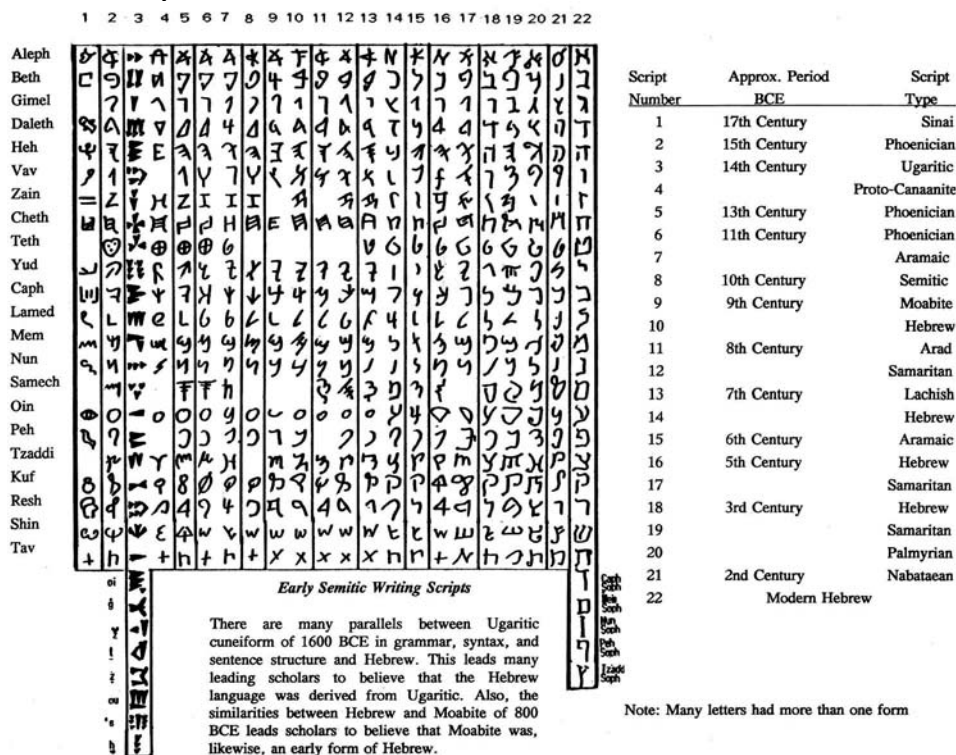


Figure 8

Around 750 BCE the Assyrians invaded Israel/Judea. It was at this time that some of the Assyrian secrets found their way into the Kabbalah. But, remember, when the Assyrians overturned the Babylonian Empire they took all of the Babylonian's religions, myths, and rituals. So, in essence, we have another strengthening of the Babylonian secrets.

Then, around 600 BCE the Babylonians came in and overthrew the Assyrian Empire. It was about this time due to the insurrectionist attitudes of the Israelites/Judeans the Babylonian government split-up these peoples. Many were sent into Babylon, where they could be more closely watched. This was the Diaspora.

In Babylon, the Israelites/Judeans began to wax successful in business and religion. The most profound studies of Torah, Talmud, Mishna, and hence, the Kabbalah were done in Babylon. Consequently, we have more Babylonian influences in the Kabbalah, than anything else.

Then, around 550 BCE the Persians under the powerful king Cyrus II invaded the Babylonian Empire and destroyed it. He then freed the people who were held as captives. Even though the Israelites/Judeans were free to return to Palestine, many chose not to do so.

One of the strongest beliefs of the ancient peoples was that of gods, demigods, and *demons*. The Persian religion (Mazdism or Zoroastrianism) was no different. Only, they had a *cataloged* system of demigods, or angels, and demons. It was at this time when the whole elaborate angelic and demonic systems entered into the Kabbalah.

As with many ancients, the pre-Persian Israelites/Judeans had a strong belief that God brought humans their total experience. Everything good or bad came from God. The Persians had in their religion a good god (Ahura Mazda),<sup>4</sup> who created all good and an evil god (Angra Mainyu), who created all evil. This concept made more sense than one God who did everything. Hence, the concept of *ha-Shatan* entered into Judaism and since the demons needed a commander, Satan<sup>5</sup> (named Samael) was elected.

Finally, the original numbering system for the Hebrews was the Egyptian New Kingdom (1500-1085 BCE) notations. After that, the standard Semitic system of lines and curves was used. (Figure 9) The use of letter notations was first seen in the Scriptures around 300 BCE. This, though, was the *Greek* letters. The Jews didn't begin to use the Hebrew alphabet in numbering until *after* 100 BCE. The use of the Gematria (Figure 10) in Scripture and other rabbinic literature didn't actually occur until around the 2<sup>nd</sup> century of this era. It was, you may recall, the Greeks, Pythagoras specifically, who first began to speculate about the mystical meaning of numbers. The Gematria, then, entered into the Kabbalah later.

Let's take a look at the Divine Names as used in the Kabbalah and in the Scriptures. The Sacret Tetragrammaton **IHVH** or **JAHWEH** doesn't appear to be a Hebrew name at all. Apparently, it is Phoenician in origin dating back to pre-Hebrew occupation times. This name has also been seen in Latin (**Jove**, pronounced *Yoh-way*) and greek (, pronounced *Yah-vay*). Even the euphemism of **Jah** is not Hebrew. This latter name is seen in Pagan texts dating from around 2000 BCE. Another name is that of **Adonai** meaning "lord.." This name is also seen in Phonician (*Adoni*, also meaning "lord") and predating the Hebrew occupation, and in Greek writings (*Adonis*, the god whose name also means "lord"). Also, the name **El**, which means "god" isn't Hebrew. El

The original Hebrew Numbers were Egyptian New Kingdom notations (1580-1085 BCE)

1	𐤀	10	𐤁	100	𐤅	1000	𐤅𐤁
2	𐤁	20	𐤂	200	𐤅𐤁	2000	𐤅𐤁𐤅
3	𐤂	30	𐤃	300	𐤅𐤁𐤂	3000	𐤅𐤁𐤂𐤅
4	𐤃	40	𐤄	400	𐤅𐤁𐤃	4000	𐤅𐤁𐤃𐤅
5	𐤄	50	𐤅	500	𐤅𐤁𐤄	5000	𐤅𐤁𐤄𐤅
6	𐤅	60	𐤆	600	𐤅𐤁𐤆	6000	𐤅𐤁𐤆𐤅
7	𐤆	70	𐤇	700	𐤅𐤁𐤇	7000	𐤅𐤁𐤇𐤅
8	𐤇	80	𐤈	800	𐤅𐤁𐤈	8000	𐤅𐤁𐤈𐤅
9	𐤈	90	𐤉	900	𐤅𐤁𐤉	9000	𐤅𐤁𐤉𐤅

The Original Semitic Numbers

1	𐤀	10	𐤁	100	𐤅	1000	𐤅𐤁
2	𐤁	20	𐤂	200	𐤅𐤁	2000	𐤅𐤁𐤅
3	𐤂	30	𐤃	300	𐤅𐤁𐤂	3000	𐤅𐤁𐤂𐤅
4	𐤃	40	𐤄	400	𐤅𐤁𐤃	4000	𐤅𐤁𐤃𐤅
5	𐤄	50	𐤅	500	𐤅𐤁𐤄	5000	𐤅𐤁𐤄𐤅
6	𐤅	60	𐤆	600	𐤅𐤁𐤆	6000	𐤅𐤁𐤆𐤅
7	𐤆	70	𐤇	700	𐤅𐤁𐤇	7000	𐤅𐤁𐤇𐤅
8	𐤇	80	𐤈	800	𐤅𐤁𐤈	8000	𐤅𐤁𐤈𐤅
9	𐤈	90	𐤉	900	𐤅𐤁𐤉	9000	𐤅𐤁𐤉𐤅

Figure 9

Hebrew	Greek	Arabic	Comparing Numbering Systems		
א	α	1	כ	κ	20
ב	β	2	λ	λ	30
ג	γ	3	μ	μ	40
ד	δ	4	ν	ν	50
ה	ε	5	ξ	ξ	60
ו	ς	6	ο	ο	70
ז	ζ	7	π	π	80
ח	η	8	ρ	ρ	90
ט	θ	9	ρ	ρ	100
י	ι	10	σ	σ	200
ק			ש	τ	300
ר			ת	υ	400
ש			ת	φ	500
ז			ת	χ	600
ח			ת	ψ	700
ט			ת	ω	800
י			ת	Ϟ	900

A comparison of the Hebrew and Greek numbering systems with the standard Arabic numbrals. The original numbering in the Septuagent was in Greek. The Hebrew was not introduced until around the 2nd century of this era. The original Hebrew numbers placed the same numerical values on the final letters as the standard letters. Later numerical values were incorporated in the final letter forms.

Figure 10

is the name of the major Canaanite deity. In fact, this is the name for God used most often in the Scriptures. The *Tzabaoth* is another name borrowed from the Greeks. It means “host” or “army.” The name *El Shaddai* is a Semitic name which also pre-dates the Hebrew occupation. It means “god almighty.” El Shaddai was called “the great thunderer and was the name of the first god worshipped by the Hebrews. This god was most likely a storm god who lived on the top of Mt. Sinai, an extinct volcano. Finally, the name *Elohim* (literally, gods) appears to be a borrowed name. Possibly it came from the Babylonians for the beginning of the Babylonia myth of creation begins with: “*In the beginning, the gods in their assembly created...*”

So, it is rather obvious that the vast majority of the Kabbalah is *not* Jewish in origin at all, but quite Pagan and quite universal! It apparently went through many centuries of change and refinement before it finally appeared in the form with which we’re most familiar. The traditional Kabbalists state quite unequivocally that the patriarchs never existed and that the events described never occurred. What then do the patriarchs represent? They represent the groups, the peoples, the religious systems which contributed to the formation of the Kabbalah all of which were Pagan. Judaism wasn’t actually written about as a solidified religious system until sometime around 350 BCE. Prior to that time there were many factions. This can be seen in the groups writing in the Scriptures: the Jahwahists, the Elohist, the Priests (Aaronic most likely), and the

Deuteronomists and their redactors. Each was trying to say something and to prove a point for the time which they existed. Each also had their message. This message wasn't finally collected until just prior to the beginning of this era. Hence, we have a collection of ancient Pagan sources contributing to the system which has come down to modern humanity and which is referred to as *The Kabbalah*.

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<sup>1</sup> Most likely this was from Sumer because the first Babylonian Empire didn't conquer Sumer until around 2100 BCE and Chaldea didn't exist until the second Babylonian Empire which was around 600 BCE. It may also mean that this tradition came into the Kabbalah around 600 BCE.

<sup>2</sup> Another very possible explanation of "the wheel" could be the Persian image of Ahura Mazda. (Figure 7) Remember, Ezekiel was living near the time of the rescue of the Israelites from the Babylonian captivity and this image seems to fit in rather well with this period.

<sup>3</sup> The Essenes may have been the group who actually were the *original* Christians. Many of the early Christian beliefs, the early church and so on parallel quite closely the presently published Qumran document (*The Dead Sea Scrolls*).

<sup>4</sup> Almost every epithet that has been applied to Jahweh was taken from the Persians concerning Ahura Mazda: God is an all-consuming fire; Universal, All-Knowing; Omniscient; Omnipresent; All-Good, etc.

<sup>5</sup> The original job of ha-Shatan was not as the Christians of today see it. It was very similar to that of the Egyptian god Set in that he was to attempt to *mislead* in this life and to be the *accuser* of the soul of the righteous in the afterlife. See the *Book of Job* in the Scriptures.