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Beyond Controversy in the Hebrew Bible: Standing Stones as Messengers of Common Humanity

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Abstract: The Hebrew Bible is not only an ancient religious text, but also imbues information about the lives of people. Beyond controversial matters in the text, links can be found to common humanity with ancient roots. This renders the text not only relevant for adherents to the religions based on this text, but to all people. The exemplar followed in this article is standing stones. Biblical authors frequently refer to standing stones. These references are sharply contrasting, with some condoning and others condemning, causing contention. Archaeologically, standing stones are a ubiquitous phenomenon all over the world throughout time. They abound in the southern Levant, the region for which the Hebrew Bible is a sacred text. The meaning of standing stones is multifarious, but ultimately relates to the numinous. Among other meanings, like other vertical elements, such as mountains and trees, they play a role in shamanism, an ancient and extensive worldview. Exploration of common human traits, ascribed to inborn neurophysiological and psychological factors, divulges explanations for universal phenomena such as shamanic worldviews and the physical manifestations of such worldviews, of which the standing stone is one. Multidisciplinary evidence from archaeological, ethnographic, and textual analysis reveals that both standing stones of the southern Levant and those in the Hebrew Bible exhibit meanings related to this cosmology which flows from unconscious properties common to all people. Going beyond controversial topics allows access to common human traits linking all people, in this case adding relevance to the biblical text. This approach could elucidate the human commonality hidden behind other dissonant subjects in the Hebrew Bible.



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1. Introduction

The Hebrew Bible is a major sacred text for two religions, Judaism and Christianity, and matters to Islam. Apart from religious principles, it imparts knowledge of people living before the Current Era in the southern Levant, the backdrop to the Hebrew Bible. The biblical text ‘unfolds the multiplicity of human existence inductively, aspectively, and in narrative fashion’ (Schroer and Staubli 2013, p. 5), and this can thus be teased from the content. This article considers one such teased detail occurring in several biblical narratives, namely, standing stones, to glean better understanding of the lives of the people in the Hebrew Bible.¹

Natural, unhewn, blank stones raised for a specific purpose, called standing stones, are prevalent in all eras and on all continents of the world. Well-known examples exist at Stonehenge in the United Kingdom (Parker Pearson and Ramilisonina 1998, p. 308) and at Nabta Playa in Egypt (Malville 2015, p. 1079). Confusingly, frequent references to them in the Hebrew Bible are contradictory, with some accepting (e.g., in Genesis 28:18) and others reviling them (e.g., 2 Kings 23:13–14). No matter how the dichotomy is explained, the fact that these stones, part of a universal tradition, occur in the Hebrew Bible at all does not comment only on religious practices acceptable at certain times or among certain

adherents of the faith. They form part of the lived human experience of people described in the Hebrew Bible.

Scholars have alluded to the ability of the Hebrew Bible to showcase the complexity of human nature, including disjunction (Schroer and Staubli 2013, p. 6). Following this line of thought, this article widens the focus from contention to consider human universals in general and the scientific explanations for them. Next, the article explores universal worldviews which emerge from common human experiences. Finally, the article investigates standing stones as one manifestation of universal worldviews and follows it back to the Hebrew Bible and its background region.

This multidisciplinary study seeks to enrich comprehension of the people in the Hebrew Bible. The aim is to underline the common elements in humanity across time as they are evidenced by worldview and illustrated by one archaeological element, namely, standing stones.

2. Human Universality

2.1. Common Human Experiences and the Need to Explain Them

Worldview is variously defined by scholars (Van der Kooij et al. 2013, p. 211). For the purposes of this article, worldview is defined as a collection of ‘beliefs and values, religious or otherwise, that propel thoughts and actions’ (Valk 2009, p. 11) which answers experiential questions, such as what happens after death (Van der Kooij et al. 2013, p. 214). It is a view on life broader than religion and does not necessarily include religion (Vroom 2006, p. 1; cf. Van der Kooij et al. 2013, p. 212). We can think of worldview as a ‘structure’, filled out by religion and mythology. Religion and mythology are therefore microcosms fitting into a macrocosm of a more general worldview.

All people experience birth and death, day and night, and different weather conditions. All societies have worldviews to explain them (Leeming 2010, p. 1). The structure and content of worldview becomes ‘what everybody knows’ (Berger and Luckmann 1967, p. 83), a background that is taken for granted and hardly noticed.

Recurring themes among all worldviews, such as the cycle of life, the struggle between good and bad, or incomprehensible disaster, rooted in universal, real-life experience, represent archetypes. Archetypes, with differences in content, appear in various myths and pantheons from different places (Stevens 1998, pp. 36–37). For example, the idea that the journey after death includes many dangers is widespread across most continents and seems to have individually originated without contact between societies (Kelley and Milone 2005, pp. 473–74).

Worldview with its accompanying mythologies and pantheons not only expounds, but orders society (Berger and Luckmann 1967, p. 117). Evidence suggests that humans make use of the physical information they have of the world to create order (Adamski 2011, p. 567). For example, lived experience shows both that the dead are transformed physically, and, at the time of death, the soul which animated the living person leaves the body. From this, it is easy to assume that a transformation of the soul of the deceased also occurs and that this happens under the earth. Therefore, the existence of an underground realm where the dead continue to live and have influence (Peoples et al. 2016, p. 274), widely found in mythology and worldview, seems logical (Hasanov 2016, p. 221). If the dead live on in an afterlife, the ancestors can watch us, and either praise or punish us, leading to norms which order society (Peoples et al. 2016, p. 274).

The rising of similar ideas from diverse locations at the same time is so prevalent that there is an anthropological term for the phenomenon, namely, ‘psychic unity of mankind’ (Kelley and Milone 2005, p. 474). Leeming (1990, p. 6) states that ‘when we study the world’s mythologies and discover the archetypal patterns (also common to our individual dreams) that essentially unite those mythologies, we study what we might reasonably call the dreams of humankind, in which we find information about the nature of humanity itself. In a real sense, the world reveals its inner self through its common mythology’.

2.2. Basic Worldview: Shamanism

2.2.1. Persistence

Although some scholars consider shamanism a religion (Díaz-Andreu 2001, p. 123), others see shamanism as a worldview (Miller 2011, p. 315; cf. Peoples et al. 2016, p. 274). According to Pratt (2007, p. vi), shamanism is not a ‘formalized system of beliefs’. Instead, it is a collection of practices showcasing a particular ‘understanding of the mechanics of our world’. As noted in Section 2.1, shamanism is, in my opinion, therefore, a structure which is filled in by religion or mythology, and, for the purposes of this article, the definition of shamanism as a worldview, not a religion, is accepted.

Despite not being a religion, shamanism as worldview is so pervasive that it is either placed at the root of (Winkelman 2002, p. 1876; cf. Aldhouse-Green and Aldhouse-Green 2005, p. 10; Mowinckel 2012, p. 3), or has at least left traces in (Edson 2009, p. 9), most religions.

Shamanism is the most basic and widespread of worldviews (Yamada 1999, p. 147). Evidence of shamanism is found in most ancient hunter–gatherer communities across the world (Hutton 2006, p. 211; cf. Grosman et al. 2008, p. 17668), from the dawn of human consciousness during the Middle Palaeolithic Era (Flor-Henry et al. 2017, p. 6; cf. Sidky 2017, p. 208). Its universal persistence across millennia (Yamada 1999, p. 147) is proven by its presence throughout the ages (Vitebsky 2001, p. 51) up to the modern day (Kehoe 2000, p. 44), where it is even found in modern industrialised societies, such as Korea (Rowan and Ilan 2007, p. 251) and Japan (Tomar 2010, p. 338). In modern Western society, ‘spontaneous religious experiences, illness characterized as “spiritual emergencies”, and the dynamics of addictions have shamanic roots and illustrate the continued relevance of the shamanic paradigm’ (Winkelman 2002, p. 1876).

Debate surrounds shamanism, amongst others, about the differences in manifestation thereof in different traditions across the world. However, Craffert (2019, p. 208) opines that the observed differences are ‘different versions of the same pattern rather than different things altogether’, and Romain (2009, p. 23) notes that shamanism is adapted culturally to fit each society in which it occurs. What ethnographers do agree upon is that shamans are practitioners who, while in altered states of consciousness, mediate between their community and different realms populated by numinous entities (Benz and Bauer 2015, p. 2), and, in Hutton’s (2006, p. 211) opinion, this has to take place publicly.

The influence of shamanism is such that shamanic fundamentals, such as the concept of a central device, an *axis mundi* (centre of the world), *omphalos* (navel of the world), or cosmic mountain, rooted in the earth and reaching to the sky and which holds the different worlds together, are common in many worldviews, even when those worldviews are not ‘exclusively shamanic’ (VanPool and VanPool 2023, p. 79).

2.2.2. Elements

This article focuses only on the main elements of shamanism which pertain to both the southern Levant and the Hebrew Bible.

2.2.2.1. The Three-Tiered World and the Axis Mundi

Very briefly, shamanism sees the world, or, the cosmos, as consisting of three horizontal levels, stacked on top of each other. The three realms are the underworld, where the dead and chthonic deities exist, the ordinary realm of living, and an upper realm, where celestial deities reside (Ballmer 2010, p. 194).

The realms are held together by vertical features such as mountains (Clifford 1972, p. 190), trees, ladders (Rappenglück 2009, p. 110), and standing stones (Varner 2004, p. 85). Everything comes into existence and is organised from this central point (Green 1977, p. 327), and all life rotates around it (Varner 2004, p. 85). This is where rulers and spiritual leaders are to be found and legal matters settled. The further one moves away from this point, the greater the danger one may encounter (Rappenglück 2009, p. 110).

The *axis mundi* has foundations under the earth, where chthonic deities are found, and reaches through the ordinary realm towards the sky, where the gods live, providing access to all the realms. This idea occurs in mythologies and is attested in the archaeological record all over the world (Rappenglück 2017, p. 253).

2.2.2.2. Journeying, Altered States of Consciousness, and Liminality

Through the *axis mundi*, travel, or journeying, to other realms takes place to obtain help from sources beyond the mundane realm (Miller 2011, p. 316). The non-physical forces, energies, and beings experienced in the upper and lower realms of a shamanic worldview are typically experienced as internal in the modern world, versus external in the shamanic world, where it becomes possible to journey to these perceived external realities (Naydler 1996, pp. 12–13).

Altered states of consciousness facilitate journeying, which usually takes place as a public display (Craffert 2019, p. 85). Altered states can occur naturally, for example, in dream states, or be achieved on purpose by various means, for example, hallucinogenic substances, sensory overload or deprivation, divination, music, dance, or donning of special clothing (Miller 2011, p. 316). Sound phenomena, as described in Section 2.3.1, can also induce altered states (Tarabella and Debertolis 2017, p. 60).

Masks are a hallmark of such sessions. They are especially powerful in allowing the shaman to become absent while the entity identified by the mask becomes present, creating ambiguity and the illusion of moving between worlds (Filitz 2018, pp. 17, 19). The wearer of the mask becomes the physical representation of the entity represented by the mask and speaks as that persona (Berlejung 2018, p. 151). In this way, the ancestor, or spirit or deity, from another realm becomes visible and acts in all its power in the realm of the living, substantiating the shamanic worldview (Filitz 2018, pp. 18–19).

Liminal indicates ‘being-on-a-threshold’ (Turner 1979, p. 465). Liminal areas are defined as the dangerous space between the visible physical and the unseen spiritual worlds: a place where humans are in limbo and in need of ritual to facilitate their entry into one or the other sphere (Derks 1998, pp. 14, 200, 212). Journeying is a liminal experience itself since one travels between realms or states (Ballmer 2010, pp. 193, 199). The experience is so intense that it is likened to dying and being rebirthed afterwards, symbolic of the transformation which takes place during journeying (Peters 1989, pp. 120, 124).

Liminal areas are often secured by sacred areas in response to the perilous character of the area (Derks 1998, p. 14). Appropriately, it is often in these cultic areas, such as city gate shrines, or at entrances, or along ancient roads, that *standing stones* are found. Places where the realms can be accessed, i.e., the *axis mundi*, are themselves seen as liminal and thus dangerous because of the transition between one realm and another (Aldhouse-Green and Aldhouse-Green 2005, p. 12).

2.3. Explanations for the Universality of Worldviews

Shamanism has been called the study of self (Narby and Huxley 2001, p. 7), and yet its principles transcend the self to encompass traits innate to all of humanity and underlying universal worldviews. Scientific proof of these connatural qualities is provided by both psychology and neurophysiology.

2.3.1. Neurophysiological Explanations

Earlier humanistic views held that all supernatural human experiences are due to cultural learning. However, it is now known that certain physiological processes occur automatically, without being taught (Kehoe 2000, p. 51). Sidky (2017, p. 209) asserts that all ‘pan-human, pan-cultural phenomena’ have a physiological basis shared by all humans. This newer trend implies that humans do not consciously choose so-called shamanic principles for their worldview, but that those principles represent the most natural way for the human mind to make sense of its surroundings. Anthropology now generally accepts

neurophysiological concepts as underlying all universal cultural phenomena (Bruner et al. 2023, pp. 145, 162).

Mirror neurons, a discovery of the late twentieth century, have been found to cause the same emotion present in someone performing an action in an observer of the action (Roessler 2012, p. 242). This discovery has led to a theory explaining how significant patterns can be transmitted pre-verbally by means of mirror neurons, forming a 'memory of mankind' (Bauer 2005, pp. 166–67). This provides a possible physiological explanation for Jung's collective unconscious and the occurrence of universal phenomena (Roessler 2012, p. 242) such as tool-making and standing stones.

In terms of shamanism, the potential for altered states of consciousness is 'found within all individuals, representing psychobiological factors that structure human experience' (Winkelman 2000, p. 128). Dreaming, day-dreaming, states of intense immersion in an activity, and the period between sleep and wakefulness are altered states of consciousness experienced by all people. Other incidents not experienced by everybody, yet common enough to be considered pan-human, are near-death experiences, meditative states, the fire-walker's trance, and pre-migraine auras (Ludwig 1972, pp. 13–15). Non-ordinary states can also be induced as described in Section 2.2.2.2 (Walsh 1989, p. 35). These states are similar cross-culturally (McClenon 1997, p. 350), although explanations for them contain cultural content dependent on the specific worldview and mythology of the society (Ludwig 1972, pp. 15, 17).

Apart from the innate human potential for non-ordinary states of consciousness, the physical experience of these states is also universal (Craffert 2019, pp. 203, 208). This includes physiological reactions such as alterations in brain wave patterns, heart rate, blood pressure, and muscle tension (Tart 1972, p. 499). There are also similarities in the visual patterns, called entoptic phenomena, experienced during some forms of altered consciousness. Their development during an episode follows a set design, and Lewis-Williams (2002, p. 207) posits that the tunnel-like experience recounted by those who have had near-death experiences is an attempt to describe one of the stages of entoptic phenomena. Entoptic phenomena have been shown to be the result of neurophysiological processes in the brain (Lewis-Williams 2002, pp. 127–28).

The characteristic shamanic three-dimensional vision of the world, involving horizontal spheres vertically anchored, bears some resemblance to recent discoveries in human physiology. A type of specialised neuron in the entorhinal cortex, named 'grid cells', creates a grid-like metric in which places are plotted in the mind, apparently for mental navigational purposes (Løvschal and Skewes 2022, p. 256).

Low-frequency sounds, produced naturally in some landscapes, are common at sacred sites (Tarabella and Debertolis 2017, p. 241). When low-frequency sounds are not 'consciously perceived, it may make people feel that strange or supernatural events are taking place', and a feeling of awe or fear is common (Tarabella and Debertolis 2017, p. 241). Research has shown that all humans experience unusual sensations, such as strong emotion or visual hallucinations, when exposed to non-local, low-frequency sound (Tarabella and Debertolis 2017, p. 241). Physical effects include headaches, pressure on the ears, drowsiness, speaking difficulties, balance problems, and alteration in heart rate and normal breathing (Evans 1976, p. 107). These outcomes can cause altered states of consciousness (Tarabella and Debertolis 2017, p. 60).

Resonance phenomena can also have a powerful physiological effect, in some cases creating the perception that voices are disembodied or that sounds come from unexpected directions or from all around the listener (Tarabella and Debertolis 2017, p. 240). These common human physiological experiences may be interpreted as supernatural in the absence of scientific explanations (Watson and Keating 1999, p. 335).

Research suggests that ancient people probably had some understanding of unusual ramifications on people visiting such sites, and it has been suggested that sites were picked for those very reasons (Tarabella and Debertolis 2017, p. 240). Possibly, such signs were thought to mark sites chosen by the gods (Debertolis and Gullà 2016, p. 146). Professional

detectors of such sites, known as augurs, existed in Roman culture (Tarabella and Debertolis 2017, p. 240). Ancient Greeks had a word, '*chora*', to refer to such sites (Debertolis and Gullà 2016, p. 137).

There is, therefore, a 'neurological bridge' between us and all people, including the earliest people, who were the first in a long line of societies with shamanic worldviews (Lewis-Williams 2002, p. 160).

2.3.2. Psychological Explanations

Animism, the 'philosophy that nonhumans have their own agency, spirituality, knowledge, and intelligence' (Whyte 2018, p. 129), is intrinsically part of shamanism (Winkelman 2002, p. 1881). Animism is thought to result from 'theory of mind', the supposition, formulated in psychology, that, following commonsense, one attributes to others, or to other things, the mental states and intentionality which one knows in oneself (Zufferey 2010, p. 6).

In psychology, the term 'collective consciousness' explains the collective, encultured thought and action of a particular group (Mathieson 2005, p. 241). Collective consciousness does not, however, explain how an idea can be shared by groups worldwide and over aeons, without contact. For that, we are dependent upon the principle of the 'collective unconscious' described by Jung (1960, p. 4). According to this concept, common concepts are not created by the individual; they arise from a universal pool of archetypes to which all humans have access (Evans 1980, p. 323).

According to Jung (1936, p. 43; 1972, p. 13), we physically inherit the collective unconscious, populated by archetypes, as a universal memory bank shared by all mankind as opposed to the collective consciousness, the content of which is absorbed after birth in a particular society.² Archetypes result from an innate disposition to organise life experience common to all people, such as birth and death (Jung 1972, p. 9).

Universal archetypes explain why similar mythological deity groups, e.g., mother and child, occur in different societies who have no contact with each other, albeit with different content to the myth (Scott 2014, pp. 94, 99). The collective unconscious explains the archetype (Evans 1980, p. 324), whereas collective consciousness explains the variety in the myths (Adamski 2011, p. 567).

Archetypes also explain how illogical, and sometimes frightening, myths can be described as 'mysterious' yet be 'comprehensible' to us on some level (Doty 2000, p. 7). Myths are neither 'factual' nor 'untrue' because they consist of fictional details conforming to a framework of archetypes that are familiar and 'true' to all people (Eliot 1990, p. 1). Archetypes do not arise from personal experience but allow personal experience to be fitted into a worldview or a mythology in a way that makes sense of the personal experience (Jung 1980, p. 42).

Shamanic concepts such as the centre of the world in the form of a world tree, or cosmic mountain, can be seen as archetypes (Ries 1993, p. 130). According to Scott (2014, p. 94), a shamanic worldview is an involuntary and unconscious human response; 'Jung's analytical psychology interprets the spirit world of the shaman as an expression of the collective unconscious and the archetypes that transcend humanity'.

Universal mythical storylines are also archetypal. The well-known plot, called the 'hero's journey', underlies all myths, according to Campbell (2007, p. 15). It comprises a psychological 'death' as one sets out on the journey, then various challenges and perilous passages, and finally a 'rebirth' with new insight and knowledge (Campbell 2007, p. 15). These are not only the elements of all myths, but they are also the elements of a shamanic journey (Peters 1989, p. 123) and the stages of passing from one state to another, such as during birth, maturation, or marriage (Van Gennep 1909, p. 20).

We can thus conclude that there is also a 'psychological bridge' between us and all other people.

2.4. Macrocosm and Microcosm

Ancient thought systems such as Chinese geomancy, or *feng shui*, teach that there is a correlation between our local life and the functioning of the entire cosmos (Gallay 2022, p. 57). Using the terms microcosm and macrocosm, Lethaby (1892, p. 2) formulated this concept for architecture, namely, that our created living environment reveals what we believe to be incontrovertibly true: our worldview. For example, in a hierarchical society, there will be affluent buildings which form a contrast to all other buildings, revealing hierarchy (Lethaby 1892, p. 2). The orientation, focus, and structuring of space in habitation layout thus exhibit the culture of a society (Miller 2010, p. 173). It thus seems reasonable to expect that wherever standing stones are raised, they will form part of and reveal the cosmology of that society (Oliver 2022, p. 191).

Re-enacted mythologies, such as the ancient Near Eastern *Enuma Elish* myth of origin recreated annually at Emar, likewise reveal the worldview of a society. So strong are the ties between belief and concrete behaviour that the local re-enactment on a small scale was believed to have the same power as the original large-scale mythical event (Naydler 1996, pp. 10–12). Microcosm not only reveals macrocosm but carries the same power.

3. Standing Stones as Universal Shamanic Element

3.1. Universality of Standing Stones

3.1.1. Appearance

Standing stones are here defined as natural stones with little or no tooled shaping, without inscription or engraving, set upright for a specific purpose (Graesser 1972, pp. 34–35). Stones conforming to this definition are similar all over the world due to their natural state (Avetisyan et al. 2023, p. 15) and shared interpretations.

3.1.2. Occurrence

Arguably the earliest standing stone, dated to 11,000 BCE, stands at Rosh Zin in the Negev (Avner and Horwitz 2017, p. 36). This date puts it in the Natufian era, a period immediately predating the Neolithic era in the southern Levant (Nadel et al. 2013, p. 23). The Natufian period is seen by some as the start of changes, known elsewhere no earlier than the Neolithic period, such as the advent of agriculture and a sedentary lifestyle and proliferation of cultic behaviour (Belfer-Cohen 1991, p. 179). Standing stones thus predate these developments in human civilisation.

Following this early evidence, standing stones have been raised on all inhabited continents throughout the ages (Avner 2002, p. 87). The phenomenon was still so prevalent after the advent of Christianity that the admonition against standing stones was reiterated by successive councils of the Catholic church up to the 11th century CE (Fergusson 1872, pp. 24–26). The Ka'abah in Mecca, holy to Muslims, still contains fragments of a standing stone said to date from before the lifetime of Mohammed (Mettinger 1995, pp. 57, 71, 74). Today, standing stones are still being erected for symbolic purposes, for example, in Madagascar (Parker Pearson and Ramilisonina 1998, pp. 311–12).

According to Steimer-Herbet (2021, p. 65), standing stone monuments appear, despite any differences, like an answer to a common need which transcends cultures.

3.1.3. Interpretation

Although, by definition, standing stones are without inscription which could aid interpretation, several meanings are suggested for them (Graesser 1972, p. 35). Graesser (1972, p. 37) lists four: memorial, legal, commemorative, and cultic. The first three appear at first glance to be non-cultic. However, in antiquity, societies possessed no separate categories for spiritual and non-spiritual activities or thoughts (Darvill 2013, p. 141). Shamanic societies simultaneously experience 'ordinary reality and nonordinary reality' (Craffert 2019, p. 195). Ethnographic research suggests that the interwoven sacred and quotidian nature of life is still true for some modern societies (Kehoe 2000, p. 26). If cult suffused all aspects of life, all interpretations for standing stones can be said to have a cultic

aspect (Avner 2002, pp. 89–91). According to Avner (1984, p. 119), ‘the stones fulfilled [all] other functions by virtue of the divine spirit that dwelt in them’.

Despite a lack of absolute certainty and although regional differences exist, some factors of interpretation are common across the world and across time (Crossland 2014, p. 233). The ancestral cult is prolific in most traditional societies, and the most prevalent interpretation for standing stones across the world is that of deified ancestral figures who live on after death and hold power over the living from the underworld (Avner 2002, pp. 87, 90; cf. Steiner 2015, pp. 11, 22). Standing stones also represent deities, or act as reminders of people, events, vows, and boundaries (Bechar 2018, p. 28). Calado (2005, p. 19) adds the importance of standing stones as markers of sacred places. A detour to ethnography reminds us that they can also represent the vertical element holding the whole cosmos together (Varner 2004, p. 85), an interpretation discussed separately below.

3.2. Shamanic Interpretation of Standing Stones

According to Laporte (2022, p. 44), societies who erected standing stones in the past subscribed to animism, believing that the stones were ensouled and animated by deities. The universal interpretations of standing stones, chief of which are associated with chthonic and supernal deities, relate standing stones to lower and higher realms. Darvill (2013, p. 147) asserts that ‘throughout the standing-stone tradition there is a sense that the pillar somehow links the earth with the sky as a representation of the axis mundi’. Cepitis and Jakubenoka (2011, p. 34) call standing stones ‘the world axis, as well as a symbol of its centre’. Ilan and Rowan (2023, p. 201) suggest that it is the partly submerged character of standing stones planted in the earth that implies connection between this world and the underworld. Many standing stones are associated with burials, where the stones may appear to be grave markers (O’Kelly 1989, p. 228), but graves were also seen as liminal access points to the underworld (Romain 2009, p. 20). Emphasising the upper reach of standing stones as *axis mundi*, Stockton (1971, p. 68) views them as the development of the concept of the cosmic mountain. Microcosmically, each standing stone is seen as the local *axis mundi* (Cowan 1989, p. 17).

The intention of this section is not to allege that all standing stones are the product of shamanic society, but to show that in the context of the view argued for here there are corresponding aspects which could play a role in a continuum of possibilities, ranging from complete adherence to shamanism to complete lack of consideration for shamanism, or unconscious accordance with shamanism.

4. Standing Stones as Feature in the Southern Levant and Hebrew Bible

4.1. Standing Stones in the Southern Levant

4.1.1. Appearance

With some exceptions, in the southern Levant, most standing stones are unhewn, or very little tooled, especially in the desert (Mettinger 1995, pp. 122–23). More settled areas generally display better-dressed standing stones (Tebes 2020, pp. 506–7), especially during the 2nd and 1st millennia (Avner 1984, p. 118), when they were shaped in varying degrees (Mettinger 1995, p. 153; cf. Zevit 2001, p. 256).

Even when shaped, the crude nature of standing stones usually contrasts with the architectural skill of nearby buildings (Avner 1984, p. 119). The largely unhewn form of standing stones is not due to lack of skill since evidence of contemporary well-tooled artefacts abounds. It therefore seems chosen and significant (Avner 2002, p. 80). In the southern Levant, some scholars relate the untouched status of most standing stones to the biblical injunction to use nothing but unhewn stones for cultic purposes, as stated in Deuteronomy 27:6, Joshua 8:31, and 1 Kings 6:7 (Mettinger 1995, p. 33). According to these texts, tools defile sacred stones. Extra shaping of stones which naturally conform to cultic expectations would be sacrilege (Avner 2002, pp. 84, 92). Elsewhere, scholars have interpreted keeping the natural roughness of standing stones as part of an intentional dialogue with the landscape (Scarre 2002, pp. 11–12).

4.1.2. Occurrence

Standing stones are ‘one of the most common recurring cultic features in the southern Levant’ (Susnow 2022b, p. 166) over an extended period. Their prolific presence at archaeological excavations (Garfinkel 2018, p. 55) attests to the fact that they were a familiar part of life for people of the southern Levant (Ilan and Rowan 2023, p. 201).

The southern Levant consists of both rural, nomadic desert regions and more urban, settled areas. Standing stones occur in both (Garfinkel 2018, p. 55), although there is a difference in time span. The desert tradition starts with Rosh Zin in the 10th millennium BCE (Avner and Horwitz 2017, p. 36) and has carried on throughout the millennia, up to the present day, with some Islamic desert open-air mosques containing standing stones in their *mihrab* niches (Avner 2002, p. 83). The most prolific time for desert standing stones was from the 6th to the 3rd millennia BCE (Avner 2002, p. 65). Standing stones in settled areas of the southern Levant mostly date from the 2nd to the 1st millennia BCE (Avner 2002, pp. 83–84, 91, 151). Another marked difference between the two areas is that standing stones in desert areas far outnumber those in settled areas (Avner 2002, p. 83).

4.1.3. Interpretation

In accordance with interpretations elsewhere, Avner (2002, pp. 84–87) suggests meanings related to commemoration of events or people; boundaries; witnessing; vows; ancestors; and deities for southern Levantine standing stones. As elsewhere in the world, the last two are most prevalent. Ilan and Rowan (2023, p. 202) infer that standing stones ‘may have been the focus of communal, commemorative rituals, communicating with the ancestors and/or with the chthonic deity’. At Hazor, several standing stones are thought to relate to the worship of the moon god on the grounds of symbols on accompanying artefacts (Zuckerman 2012, p. 103).

A consistent mythology is apparent in the desert, with persistent groups of three, five, seven, or nine standing stones thought to represent specific pantheons (Avner 2002, p. 90). Although the pantheons are unknown, their correspondence with the numbers of deities in pantheons from other mythological traditions worldwide is striking (Avner 2002, pp. 87–89). This similarity with universal myth elevates southern Levantine standing stones to the level of archetypal interpretation. Such groups are rare in settled areas (Avner 2002, p. 82).

Apart from the pantheon groups, groups of multiple standing stones facing in random directions also occur frequently in the desert. Avner (2002, pp. 90–91) interprets these standing stones as ancestral deities. Avner calls these groups ‘detached’ and the pantheon groups ‘attached’ (Avner 2002, p. 67).

Some attached groups have been found within the enclosure of tombs, indicating that these places are the domain of both the deities and the dead (Avner 2018, pp. 41–43), reminiscent of the shamanic idea of burials being a type of *axis mundi* (Romain 2009, p. 20). In apparent confirmation, there is not always a correlation between the number of interred individuals and number of standing stones at a burial site (Ilan and Rowan 2023, p. 198), and it seems reasonable to suggest that in those cases the attached standing stones indeed reference deities (Avner 2002, p. 89).

Standing stones are found in sacred places such as temples and sanctuaries, for example, those in the fortress temple of Arad (Herzog 2002, p. 63) or those in the *stelae* temple at Hazor (Greener 2019, p. 268). In the desert, open-air sanctuaries, such as the ones at Jebel Hashem al-Taref (Avner 2002, p. 101), are the most common findspots (Zevit 2001, p. 256).

The prolific number of standing stones at city gates—Blomquist (1999) has devoted an entire volume on the subject—and along ancient roads in the desert illustrates the need for divine help and protection in liminal spaces (Avner 2002, p. 66).

Standing stones are sometimes witnesses and reminders of territorial boundaries and an ancestral past, for example, at the Iron Age ruin cult at Hazor (Zuckerman 2011, p. 391).

Southern Levantine standing stones thus conform to all interpretations worldwide, including that of a meeting place between the ordinary world, the realm above, and the realm below.

4.2. Standing Stones in the Hebrew Bible

In the Hebrew Bible, standing stones are on occasion not only accepted as normal practice, the absence of which is cause for alarm (Hosea 3:4–5), but commanded by YHWH (Deuteronomy 27:2). In complete contrast, in other texts, for example, 2 Kings 23:14, standing stones are prohibited, vilified, and destroyed (Avner 2021, par. 17).

4.2.1. Appearance

The appearance of biblical standing stones is largely unknown, but Jacob's stone (Genesis 28:10–22) resembles the description of standing stones known from the material record (upright, unhewn, chosen from everyday stones).

4.2.2. Occurrence

Biblical standing stones occur wherever people found themselves: on a journey (Genesis 28:10); in a town (Joshua 24:26); where someone died (Genesis 35:10); worshipped (Deuteronomy 12:2); at war (1 Samuel 7:12); or wanting to remember something important (Deuteronomy 27:2).

4.2.3. Interpretation

As noted generally in Section 3.1.3, no clear distinction between sacred and profane exists in the Hebrew Bible (Schroer and Staubli 2013, p. 6). For example, priests dealt with skin diseases (Leviticus 13:9). Consequently, it is no surprise that standing stones in the Hebrew Bible not only cover all the known meanings for standing stones but are all related to the numinous.

Jacob meets YHWH at the location of his standing stone and calls it the house of YHWH. He asks for YHWH's protection during a liminal journey and makes a covenant (Genesis 28:10–22). Both Josiah (2 Kings 23:13–14) and Jehu (2 Kings 10:26–28) tear down standing stones of specific deities. The stone at Shechem is said to 'have heard' (Joshua 24:10), confirming its animated nature (DeGear 2015, p. 80).

A standing stone is set up at the grave of Rachel (Genesis 35:20), a location still known generations later (1 Samuel 10:2) and up to the time of the Babylonian exile (Jeremiah 31:15). The alleged location is still revered today by Christians, Muslims, and Jews (Strickert 2007, pp. 48, 72), confirming her status as ancestor.

Biblical standing stones are found in sacred places. On YHWH's instruction, Jacob builds an altar (Genesis 35:1, 7) at the sacred place recognised and created in Genesis 28. Moses builds an altar and erects twelve standing stones before meeting YHWH on Mount Sinai, possibly to indicate the liminal zone beyond which it would be dangerous for people to proceed, according to YHWH's injunction (Exodus 24:2, 4). Standing stones condemned in the Hebrew Bible often stood on sacred high places (Deuteronomy 12:2–3; 1 Kings 14:23; 2 Kings 17:10).

Witnessing and reminding are also functions of biblical standing stones. Absalom erects a commemoration stone (2 Samuel 18:18). Jacob sets up a standing stone marking the border with Laban, as reminder of the covenant between them and invoking YHWH's presence to oversee both (Genesis 31:44–53). An envisioned standing stone would mark the border between Egypt and Israel (Isaiah 19:19–20). Joshua sets up a standing stone in Shechem as a witness to the covenant with YHWH (Joshua 24:16). YHWH commands Joshua to take twelve stones from the river Jordan and set them up as a reminder of what He has done for them (Joshua 4:7–8).

There is only a tenuous biblical suggestion of standing stones as *axis mundi*. In shamanic worldview, all functions associated with kingship, judgement, and the numinous take place close the centre, where the ruler and any religious functionaries are found

(Rappenglück 2009, p. 110). In the Hebrew Bible, we read of several kings who are crowned or who make covenants at ‘pillars’ (Judges 9:6; 2 Kings 11:14–20; 2 Kings 23:3), as does Joshua in 2 Kings 23:3 (Avner 2021, par. 17).³

All functions of standing stones found elsewhere thus possibly apply to biblical standing stones too, although a shamanic interpretation is not spelled out. The general living environment of the region and of the Hebrew Bible may reveal whether such an interpretation is viable.

5. Shamanism in the Southern Levant and Hebrew Bible

Scholars agree that shamanism must be envisioned for the wider region (Mowinckel 2012, p. 3). For example, Neolithic structures at Catalhöyük, Turkey, exhibit a three-tier microcosm, where the dead lived under the floors of the houses of the living, and an entirely separate realm was created by the rooftops reached via ladders (Lewis-Williams 2004, p. 32). At Göbekli Tepe, Turkey, a shamanic background is suspected for the structures and ceremonies there (Schmidt 2012, p. 205).

It seems reasonable to expect that shamanism also influenced the thought, religion, and mythology of the sub-region (Kapelrud 1967, p. 90; Rowan and Ilan 2007, p. 251). Let us explore this supposition.

5.1. Shamanism in the Southern Levant

5.1.1. Three-Tiered World and the Axis Mundi

The *axis mundi* is closely related to the origin of life, the central principle whence springs all life and, thus, fertility (Green 1977, p. 327). In the southern Levantine desert, a minority of standing stones are broader than they are high. These standing stones are interpreted as female deities on the grounds of their position in pairs, which corresponds to typical male–female positions in art and mythology (Avner 2018, pp. 31–32, 34). In addition, broad standing stones are related to fertility on the grounds of grindstones, associated with grain fertility, being ritually buried in front of some of them in the desert (Avner 2002, p. 77). Broad standing stones all face west, the archetypal direction of death, effectively uniting concepts of life, death, fertility, and thus possibly rebirth (Avner 2002, p. 79).

Substantiating the association of these concepts in the region, Chalcolithic burials of the 5th and 4th millennia BCE sometimes occurred in caves, for example, at Shoham (Rowan 2005, pp. 116–17) and at Giv’atayim (Rowan and Ilan 2012, p. 99) in Israel. Rowan and Ilan (2012, p. 103) assert that if ‘we are to speculate, the cave—whether natural or artificial—was also conceived of as the womb’.

Symbolic activity frequently took place not only in caves such as Hilazon Tachtit, where a female shaman was buried 12,000 years ago (Grosman et al. 2008, p. 17665), and Raqefet (Nadel et al. 2013, p. 11776), but also on high places (such as the ‘heights’ of the Hebrew Bible), as well as mountain tops (Peša 2013, p. 159). These extreme high and low points are suggestive of a worldview subscribing to a three-tiered world (Peša 2013, pp. 161–62).

5.1.2. Journeying, Altered States of Consciousness, and Liminality

Activities at the thresholds of southern Levantine temples, for example, at Lachish and Hazor, indicate that temple thresholds were treated as liminal spaces (Susnow 2022a, pp. 16–17).

The mushroom *Amanita muscaria* has psychedelic properties which are known to induce shamanic altered states of consciousness (Balzer 1998, p. xviii). A recent theory posits that *A. muscaria* was not only known and used to induce altered states of consciousness by southern Levantine populations but also revered and remembered in rock art (Orrelle 2022, p. 1). Another entheogen for shamanic journeying known from ancient use is that of cannabis smoke (Balzer 1998, pp. xviii–xxix). The recent discovery of traces of cannabis on one of the incense altars in front of the standing stones in the Iron Age fortress temple of

Arad has raised the possibility that altered states of consciousness were chemically induced even in official temples (Arie et al. 2020, pp. 22–23).

Caches of *astragali*, animal bones widely used for divination (Gilmour 1997, p. 173), are abundant in archaeological cultic contexts in the southern Levant (Susnow et al. 2021, p. 93). Senet game boards are used, apart from for recreation, in making ritual contact with the realm of the dead by means of divination-type use of dice (Susnow et al. 2021, p. 95) and in recreating the journey of the deceased to the realm of the dead in a microcosmic manner (De Voogt et al. 2020, p. 126). Several examples are found in southern Levantine archaeological sites, such as at Arad (Sebbane 2001, p. 213) and Lachish (Sebbane 2004, p. 690).

Masks are commonly found in cultic context in Israel (Carter 1987, p. 370). Many were undoubtedly meant for wearing as they display convenient holes on either side (Verhoeven 2013, p. 248; cf. Kuijt and Goring-Morris 2002, p. 398).

5.2. Shamanism in the Hebrew Bible

It has been noted that shamanism is the root of many religions. It has been alleged that traces of shamanism can be found in Iranian magi religion, as well as in Islamic Sufism (Kapelrud 1967, p. 90). Some aspects of surrounding worldviews are ‘demythologized’ in the Hebrew Bible by attributing sole power to YHWH (Cornelius 1994, p. 202), yet, controversially, some scholars still notice vestiges of a worldview aligned with the principles of shamanism in biblical texts (Craffert 2019, pp. 173, 203; cf. Wilhelmi 2004, p. 40). Miller (2014, p. 36) opines that the ‘religion of the earliest Israelite community, according to the archaeology, corresponds closely to the praxes integral to shamanism all over the world’.

It should be noted that much of what is included in shamanic practices, such as communing with spirits of the dead, is prohibited in the Hebrew Bible, for example, in Deuteronomy 28:10–11. However, the prohibition underlines that the practices existed at the time.

5.2.1. Three-Tiered World and Axis Mundi

The essence of Elisha’s power remains in his bones after his death, raising someone from the dead (2 Kings 13:21), reminiscent of the shamanic idea of the power residing in the deceased who have gone to the underworld (Miller 2011, p. 336). An unusual translation of 2 Samuel 22:16 postulates that David refers to travelling to the realm of the dead while mourning for his son. In the usual English translation, David lies down on the ‘floor’ for seven days, but Lewis (1989, pp. 43–44) points out that the word translated as ‘floor’ also means ‘netherworld’.

Archetypal trees, called the ‘tree of life’ and the ‘tree of knowledge of good and evil’, are found in the middle of the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:9). This central position suggests a possible meaning as *axis mundi*. True to shamanic principles, the trees embody danger (Genesis 2:17; cf. Genesis 3:22). Eventually, humans are disbarred from reaching the trees, the limen being guarded by cherubim (Genesis 3:24).

Mountains are central concepts in the *Hebrew Bible* (Aveni and Mizrachi 1998, pp. 491–92). Ashdown (2019, p. 30) opines that it ‘is undisputed in pre-exilic Israel that sacredness was thought to reside in the heavens; and whatever was closer to the heavens, especially mountains, was regarded as more sacred’. Altars are built on mountain tops and hills (Hosea 4:13). At Mount Sinai, YHWH presents Moses with the Ten Commandments (Exodus 19 & 20) which will become the basis of his people’s faith for millennia to come. At Mount Carmel, YHWH reveals Himself as more powerful than other gods. Mount Zion fulfills the concept of a cosmic mountain in the *Hebrew Bible* (Clifford 1972, p. 3) where YHWH sits and establishes order with his council (Stager 1999, p. 183).

Liminality is suggested in passages such as 1 Samuel 6:19 and 2 Samuel 6:7, which imply that the central object for reaching YHWH at the time, the Ark of the Covenant, was both holy and dangerous (Hendel 1997, pp. 221–22). The idea of liminality and danger away from the *omphalos* of one’s known world is illustrated in the Hebrew Bible when Cain

is sent away from the protection of his people to live a liminal existence, where he needs YHWH's protection (Genesis 4:12–14).

Considering that the concept of axis mundi is crucial to the argument in the article (standing stones being seen as axes mundi), and as the article traces the persistence of the worldview which has underlain the phenomenon of standing stones since its early prehistoric origin, it seems reasonable to point to ongoing influences. In modern-day Judaism, based on the Hebrew Bible, the term *zadiq* is equal to *axis mundi*. The *zadiq* can be 'Zion, Temple, Jacob's ladder, or Holy of Holies', or even a holy person (Green 1977, p. 327). Such a person is seen to be 'the great tree who in an entirely new way unites the three-tiered cosmos in his own person' (Green 1977, p. 342). A *zadiq* 'becomes a channel through which others may ascend to God and by means of which blessing comes down into the world' (Green 1977, p. 338). Moses is seen as the first *zadiq* (Green 1977, p. 338).

According to Stager (1999, p. 183), in biblical terms, Jerusalem is a microcosm, filled with archetypes, including the *axis mundi*. Palmer (2012, p. 59) quotes from the Jewish *Midrash Tanhuma* (Responsa 691):

Just as the navel is found at the center of a human being, so the land of Israel is found at the center of the world. Jerusalem is at the center of the land of Israel, and the temple is at the center of Jerusalem, the Holy of Holies is at the center of the temple, the Ark is at the center of the Holy of Holies, and the Foundation Stone is in front of the Ark, which spot is the foundation of the world.

5.2.2. Journeying, Altered States of Consciousness, and Liminality

Occasions of non-ordinary states of consciousness abound in the Hebrew Bible (Nissinen 2017, pp. 183–88). Deprivation in the desert wilderness, culminating in a theophany, occurs for Moses (Exodus 34) and Elijah (1 Kings 19). After being anointed as king, the prophet Samuel tells Saul that he will meet a procession of prophets coming from the high place, playing music and prophesying. If Saul joins them, he will become 'a different person' and will have unusual powers afterwards (1 Samuel 10:5–7). On another occasion, the men sent to Samuel by Saul, as well as Saul himself, involuntarily change their planned and normal behaviour and join Samuel in pronouncing oracles and prophesying (1 Samuel 19:20–24). For the king, this state lasts overnight and has him divested of his clothes in public (1 Samuel 19:24), suggesting an ecstatic state. Ezekiel has an extended vision or dream which finds him sitting stunned for seven days afterwards (Ezekiel 3:15).

The Hebrew Bible contains accounts of music and dancing inducing altered states of consciousness. Miriam dances ecstatically to the rhythm of a drum (Exodus 15:20). According to 2 Chronicles 5, at the dedication of Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem, more than a hundred musicians from among the officiating Levite priests play trumpets, cymbals, harps, and lyres. They lead proceedings in which the crowd participates by singing and making multiple burnt offerings. The ceremony ends with a cloud filling the temple, with the result that the rest of the meeting cannot continue. Given the arguments in the above, I suggest that one possible reconstruction of this narrative is that of altered states of consciousness.

In shamanic tradition, percussion instruments, such as bells, may be shaken to indicate that a different kind of time and space, i.e., an altered state, is being entered (Turner 1979, p. 468). This could be the motivation for the bells sewn to shaman's clothing (Hejzlarová 2010, pp. 14–16). In the Hebrew Bible, golden bells are said to adorn the bottom of the priest's robe worn with the *ephod*, which contained the priest's stones of divination, the Urim and Thummim (Exodus 28:15–30).

Divination was commonplace in the Hebrew Bible. Priests (Exodus 28:30), as well as Saul (1 Samuel 28:6), used the Urim and Thummim (Meyers 2020, pp. 12–13). Saul tried all the divination ways he knew, but eventually had to resort to a 'specialist' to help him access the world of the dead (Hamori 2013, pp. 833–34, 837). Joseph had a cup with which he divined (Genesis 44:5). The Levite priest in Micah's house divined for five travellers (Judges 18:4–6).

According to [Winkelman \(2021, p. 64\)](#), the Torah and the books of Leviticus and Exodus, as well as traditional Jewish Masoretic texts, raise the topic of shamanic practices, such as necromancy. Mystic Jewish Hekhalot visionary literature refers to altered consciousness practices which lead to ascent and descent between worlds ([Winkelman 2021, p. 62](#)).

YHWH proclaims that he communicates through dreams and visions (Numbers 12: 6). Abram has a significant and prophetic dream (Genesis 15:10–21), as do Samuel (1 Samuel 3:10–18), Joseph (Genesis 31:5–8), and Solomon (1 Kings 3:5–15). Joseph (Genesis 41:1–36) and Daniel (Daniel 2:27–45) convey messages from the divine realm by means of dreams. ‘Dreamers of dreams’ who could give ‘a sign or a wonder’ or a prediction were known to the authors of the Hebrew Bible (Deuteronomy 13:1).

[Kapelrud \(1967, p. 91\)](#) opines that Balaam is a shaman-type figure in the Hebrew Bible as he uses divination and sees visions with his eyes open, according to Numbers 24:1, 4, 16–17. Kapelrud also points out that the dancing and cutting which the Baal prophets perform on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18:28–29) may indicate attempts to reach an altered state.

Judged by his extraordinary mantle, able to part waters (2 Kings 2:8, 13–14), Elijah may also represent a shamanic-type figure ([Kapelrud 1967, p. 92](#)) since special garments are traditionally worn by shamans ([Eliade 1964, p. 451](#)). These garments are usually passed on to apprentices by a shaman, recalling the casting of Elijah’s mantle upon Elisha, which, according to 2 Kings 2:15, indicated to people that he was Elijah’s successor ([Miller 2011, p. 335](#)).

A striking example of thresholds as liminal zones is that of blood-smeared thresholds in Egypt during Passover, signalling where YHWH should protect against death (Exodus 12:13).

6. Human Universality in the Hebrew Bible

It seems reasonable to conclude, based on the evidence in this study, that the postulation of some scholars ([Kapelrud 1967, p. 90](#); cf. [Rowan and Ilan 2007, p. 251](#); [Miller 2011, pp. 326–28](#)) that remnants of shamanic worldview are noticeable in the southern Levant and in the Hebrew Bible is feasible. It is also reasonable to accept that standing stones may, in addition to their other meanings, carry a shamanic meaning in the southern Levant and in the Hebrew Bible, as they do elsewhere.

If vestiges of earlier shamanic worldviews are thus correctly identified in the Hebrew Bible, in the manner of all worldviews, they would have been seen as so natural that they would not have been questioned and would hardly have been noticed. The implication here is therefore not that figures in the Hebrew Bible were shamans, but rather that people in the Hebrew Bible were overly familiar with traditions and customs related to shamanism and that these traces are remembered in and represent the background to narratives of the time. For example, the power which Elijah wields over the weather (1 Kings 17:1; 1 Kings 18:41–46) is typical of shamanism ([Rowan and Ilan 2007, pp. 250–51](#)), yet he executes this power in YHWH’s name. This suggests that the narrative was included for the purpose of showcasing YHWH’s might and that any shamanic elements were unconsciously woven into the story due to their pervasive presence in the background of people’s lives.

Unconsciously, then, standing stones and other shamanic traces in the Hebrew Bible provide a bridge between people in the Hebrew Bible and all other people.

7. Conclusions

This article has argued that some religious convictions and practices in the Hebrew Bible contain trances of basic human origin and that standing stones are an example of this. It has traced the compelling human need to form a worldview to explain universally shared human experience. This need is fulfilled by means of innate human physiological and psychological characteristics, which naturally result in a worldview commonly termed shamanic. The principles of macrocosm and microcosm, which describe the tendency to recreate living conditions in the image of our worldview, determine that architectural, anthropological, and other elements, discernible in the material record and ethnographic

data, reveal our worldview. Standing stones, as microcosmic elements, serve to illustrate that traces of shamanism, the most pervasive known worldview, are found in the world of the Hebrew Bible.

The article deduces that the same human universality which leads to universal worldviews such as shamanism is innate both in us and in those societies. This realisation underlines common humanity and potentially increases the relevance of the biblical text for all people.

When we look beyond controversy in the Hebrew Bible, we find we have touchpoints with people there. According to Kent (2015, p. 45), standing stone sites ‘do not exist just as stone. They are part of ritual landscapes with connections to other places and other times, but overwhelmingly they have connections to people’. Even today, people ‘are moved by these sites: they feel through them an attachment to the deep past and find in them an enduring truth about human existence’ (Kent 2015, p. 45). The article posits that this truth is our commonality.

Beyond other biblical controversies, there is scope for future multidisciplinary research to find more evidence of common humanity in the Hebrew Bible, highlighting unusual dimensions of the text and broadening the application of the text.

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Notes

- ¹ The article is approached in an archaeological and anthropological manner, centred on ancient texts relevant to the time and region under discussion. The approach is not a theological one.
- ² It is noted that some scholars deny the innate nature of archetypes (Knox 2004, p. 4; Hogenson 2003, p. 109).
- ³ Pillar is a word for standing stone sometimes used in biblical translation (Avner 2021, par. 17).

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