THE CELESTIAL COUNCILS IN
UGARITIC AND BIBLICAL
CORPORA

by

Johnson Lim Teng Kok

Th.B., Malaysia – Singapore Baptist Theological Seminary, 1973
M.M., Trinity Theological College, 1983

A THESIS

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ABSTRACT

The *raison d'être* of this thesis is due to the apparent lack of any systematic and exegetical treatment of celestial councils in the Canaanite and Biblical corpora. While the former has generated a sea of literature, the latter has been neglected especially in the Old Testament theological books.

The question of Israelites' dependence on the Canaanites for their theological framework is still hotly debated with the scholarly pendulum swinging in both directions.

This thesis has been written to explore the *Weltanschauung* of both corpora and also the concept of the celestial councils with special attention to their roles and relationships, their composition and characterization.

Textual data and complex nuances will be analyzed and their underlying theological concepts will be carefully brought out.

My research started with a panoramic survey of the ancient Canaanite civilization with reference to the Ugaritic city, and its culture, language and literature.

Then I proceeded to line up and characterize that pantheon of major and minor deities which comprised each of

the councils and undertook to elaborate their various

functions.

Using semantic field study for words like sôd, ʿēdâ,

qāhāl and môʿēd, I have substantiated the occurrence of

Israelites' celestial councils in the Old Testament itself,

and proceeded to analyze those selected texts that are germane

to the council. This required a careful exegetical treatment

in setting up an appropriate grid dealing with these councils

and defining their significance.

A case will be made for careful analysis of the

contexts (textual, intratextual and intertextual), by means of

cross references, concordant study and cognate terms as a *sine*

qua non for accurate exegesis.

The formation and function of the celestial council of

YHWH and His celestial beings will also be elaborated.

Several proposals suggested by scholars to solve the

grammatical and syntactical conundrums of YHWH *SB'WT*, will be

critically scrutinized. In the end, the traditional rendition

and explanation have been retained because they seem to have

solved more problems than the newer interpretations evoke, and

do so without creating new ones.

The issue of dependence upon pagan sources will be

dealt with by a comparative and contrastive study of the

Weltanschauung and councils of the traditions involved so as

to demonstrate a strong case of non dependence, upon any

extra-Biblical influences, even though a certain measure of

cultural solidarity and literary affinity will be taken into account.

Finally, a paradigm will be set up to enable better categorization of scholarly opinions.

Affectionately Dedicated to my lovely wife

Rose Lee Lay Mei:

Your affection envelops me like a garment;
Your charming smile is as refreshing as a
cooling stream.
I was fluttering like a wandering bird, till
I found a resting place and nestled in your
heart

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ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible Series
AfO	*Archiv für Orientforschung*
ANET	*Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*
ARTU	*An Anthology of Religious Texts from Ugarit*
BA	*The Biblical Archaeologist*
BAR	*Biblical Archaeology Review*
BASOR	*Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*
BDB	F. Brown, S. R. Driver and C. A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*
BHS	*Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*
Bib	*Biblica*
BibOr	*Biblica et Orientalia*
CAD	*The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago*
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
CML	G. R. Driver, *Canaanite Myths and Legends Encyclopedia Judaica*
ES	Abraham Even-Shoshan, *A New Concordance of the Old Testament*
Fuerst	*A Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament*
Gaster, (I)	T. H. Gaster, *Myth, Legend, and Custom in the Old Testament*

Gaster, (II)	T. H. Gaster, *Thespis*
Gibson	J. C. L. Gibson, *Canaanite Myths and Legends*
Ginsberg	H. L. Ginsberg, "Ugaritic Myths and Legends" in *ANET*
GKC	*Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, rev. by E. Kautzsch and ed. and tr. by A. E. Cowley
HAR	*Hebrew Annual Review*
HS	*Hebrew Studies*
HTR	*Harvard Theological Review*
HUCA	*Hebrew Union College Annual*
ICC	International Critical Commentaries Series
IDB	*The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*
IEJ	*Israel Exploration Journal*
ISBE	*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*
JAOS	*Journal of the American Oriental Society*
Jastrow	M. Jastrow, A *Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature*
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JCS	*Journal of Cuneiform Studies*
JJS	*Journal of Jewish Studies*
JNES	*Journal of Near Eastern Studies*
JQR	*The Jewish Quarterly Review*
JSS	*Journal of Semitic Studies*
JTS	*Journal of Theological Studies*
KB	Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros*
NASB	*New American Standard Bible*
NEB	*The New English Bible*

NIV	*New International Version*
NJB	*New Jerusalem Bible*
OTS	*Oudtestamentische Studiën*
PEQ	Palestine Exploration Quarterly
RSP I	Ras Shamra parallels, vol. I
RSP II	Ras Shamra parallels, vol. II
RSP III	Ras Shamra parallels, vol. III
RSV	*Revised Standard Version*
Seow	A *Grammar for Biblical Hebrew*
ST	*Studia Theologica*
TB	*Tyndale Bulletin*
TDOT	*Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*
TG	*Targum*
TJ	*Trinity Journal*
TK	*Tanakh*
TWAT	*Theologisches Worterbuch zum Alten Testament*
TWOT	*Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*
UL	C. H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Literature*
UF	*Ugarit Forschungen*
UT	C. H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Textbook*
VT	*Vetus Testamentum*
VTSup	*Vetus Testamentum* Supplements
Waltke	Bruce K. Waltke and M. O. Connor, *Biblical Hebrew Syntax*
ZA	*Zeitschrift für Assyriologie*
ZAW	*Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*

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CHAPTER ONE

THE CONSTRUCT OF THIS THESIS

Concerns

Problem

With the discovery of the city of Ugarit and its

abundant literature, modern scholarship acquired a new base

for the interpretation of Scripture against the Canaanite

backdrop.[1] Thus the stark distinction earlier assumed between

the cultures of Canaanites and the Israelites has been

significantly modified due to the massive amount of textual

(liturgical and mythological) materials discovered.[2]

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[1]A few years ago, the Bible was seen in light of Pan-Babylonianism. I suspect with some easing of international political tensions in the world, numerous excavations may reveal even more significant texts from the Middle East generally. What, then is an intelligent response to these recent discoveries and the discussion these have engendered? Are we to keep changing our minds and positions with every new finding, or can we stand firm on the bedrock of the trustworthiness of Scripture?

A classic example in point is the destruction of Jericho. As a result of Dame Kathleen Kenyon's excavation, modern scholars have more or less concluded that the biblical data of the tumbling walls of Jericho did not happen. However Bryant Wood's latest article "Did the Israelites Conquer Jericho" may prove a turning point. See *Biblical Archaelogy Review* 16/2 (March-April 1990): 44-57. See also John Bimson's provocative article on "Redating the Exodus," in *BAR* XIII: 5 (September/October 1987): 40-53.

[2]I am not denying the significance of the Ugaritic materials elucidating the Biblical texts. What I am arguing against is "Pan-Ugaritism." This has been confirmed by G.

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But after extensive reading of the resultant scholarly discussions, I seemed to have found a flaw in most of the literature of comparative studies concerning the Pantheon.[3] Scholars like Theodore Mullen, Frank Cross and Marvin Pope perhaps did not take into account sufficiently the contrasting cosmic view between the Canaanites and the Israelites.

I submit that no accurate theological assessment can be made between the Canaanites and the Israelites unless one incorporates the cosmic view[4] of a particular culture.

In the scientific world, physicists are seeking desperately to find that elusive force which will explain all the phenomena surrounding us. Einstein spent the last thirty years of his life in an unsuccessful attempt to do so. In scientific jargon, it is called "the grand unified theory." In the words of the brilliant physicist Stephen Hawking who is the Lucian Professor of Mathematics at Cambridge: "To unify the four forces in a single mathematical explanation is the

Herbert Livingston who commented that Biblical scholarship went through Babylonian, Egyptian and Canaanite shifts in *The Pentateuch in its Cultural Environment* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1974), 181-182.

[3]To cite just a few examples: E. Theodore Mullen, Jr., *The Assembly of Gods*, (California: Scholars Press, 1980). Frank Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973). Marvin H. Pope, "El in the Ugarit Texts." *Vetus Testamentum* Supplements (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1955).

[4]See James W. Sire's book, *The Universe Next Door* (Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1988), 14-20 for his reasons.

greatest quest in all sciences."[5]

Similarly, in the biblical world, theologians and scholars have been seeking the *mitte* of the Bible. Several proposals have been made like Covenant,[6] Promise,[7] Commanding Lord,[8] Divine Presence,[9] Testimony,[10] Yahweh's Incomparability,[11] God's transcendence,[12] just to name a few.

In studying the Scriptures, I must admit that all the above have something to commend them, for each of these furnishes a *leitmotif* in the Scripture.

However, another *leitmotif* that has been neglected but has begun to gain some momentum and ascendancy is the

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[5]John Boslough, *Stephen Hawking's Universe* (New York: Avon Books, 1989), 77.

[6]Thomas McComiskey, *The Covenants of Promise* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985). Also Walter Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. J. A. Baker (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1961).

[7]Walter Kaiser, *Toward Rediscovering the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987).

[8]Ludwig Köhler, *Old Testament Theology*, Trans. A. S. Todd (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1957).

[9]Thomas W. Mann, *Divine Presence and Guidance in Israelite Traditions* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1977).

[10]G. Ernest Wright, *The Old Testament and Theology* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969).

[11]C. J. Labuschagne, *The Incomparability of Yahweh* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1966).

[12]Theodore C. Vriezen, *An Outline of Old Testament Theology* (Boston: Ch. T. Brandford Co., 1958).

Celestial Council[13] as Ancient Near Eastern materials (textual and iconographical) become available.[14] The concept of the celestial council is a very common religious motif in the cultures of Egypt, Mesopotamia, Canaan, Phoenicia, and Israel.[15]

However, it was the article of H. Wheeler Robinson on the *Council of Yahweh*[16] in 1944 that brought that concept in the Old Testament to the foreground. Since then, articles, monographs, dissertations have been written.[17]

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[13]Older books on theology either neglect it altogether or make a passing reference concerning the Council. E.g., Ludwig Köhler, *Old Testament Theology*. Otto J. Baab, *The Theology of the Old Testament* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1949). Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*. A. B. Davidson, *The Theology of the Old Testament*, ed. S. D. F. Salmond (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1904).

[14]See Othmar Keel, *Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient near East Iconography and the Book of Psalms* (New York: Seabury Press, 1978). L. Löwenstamm, *Comparative Studies in Biblical and Ancient Oriental Literatures* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirche Verlag, 1975). Hans Peter L'Orange, *Studies on the Iconography of the Cosmic Kingship in the Ancient World* (Oslo: H. Aschenboug and Co., 1953). Henri Frankfort, *Cylinder Seals. A Documentary Essay on the art and Religion of the Ancient near East* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1939).

[15]E. Theodore Mullen, *The Divine Council*, 113. See E. A. Speiser, trans. "Akkadian Myths and Epics," *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, ed. James B. Pritchard (NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969): 65-66. S. N. Kramer, trans., "Sumerian Myths and Epic Tales," *ANET* 42-44. Albrecht Goetze, trans., "Hittite Myths, Epics and Legends," *ANET* 121-125.

[16]H. Wheeler Robinson, "The Council of Yahweh," *Journal of Theological Studies* 45 (1944): 151-157.

[17]John D. Watts, "The Heavenlies of Isaiah." (Ph.D. diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1948.) G. Ernest Wright, "The Old Testament Against its Environment,"

Concerning the question of dependence there is no consensus in the scholarly world. Did the Israelites borrow and adapt much of their ideas and theology[18] of the council from the Canaanites? Who are the members of the council? What is the role and relationship between the courtiers, couriers and Yahweh who is the head of the council?

Modern scholars have argued for the inclusive and exclusive positions. However, the categories for both positions are too broad and general.

Thus, this thesis has been written to address those issues. The significance of this thesis lies in that it will define and describe the pantheon categorically in order to determine its influence in the Hebrew corpus and to develop a paradigm for differentiation.

Studies in Biblical Theology, No. 2 (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1950): 30-41. Frank M. Cross, Jr., "The Council of Yahweh in Second Isaiah.," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* XII (October 1953): 274-77. Gerald Cooke, "The Sons of (the) (God)s," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* LXXVI (February 1964): 22-47. Edwin Kingsbury, "The Prophets and the Council of Yahweh," *Journal of Biblical Literature* LXXXIII (September 1964): 279-86. Helmer Ringgren, *Israelite Religion*, trans. David E. Green (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 95-103, 307-16. Patrick D. Miller, Jr., "The Divine Council and the Prophetic Call to War," *Vetus Testamentum* XVIII (January 1968): 100-107. George Brown Davis, "The Concept of the Council of Yahweh in the Teaching of the Prophets." (Th.D. diss., New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1968).

[18]Some examples are: God of Israel riding on storm clouds (Deut. 33:26; Ps. 18:10; Ps. 103:4); God defeating the sea-monster Leviathan (Isa. 27:1; Ps. 74:13-14; Hab. 3:13-14); His mastery over chaotic forces (Ps. 29:3, 93:3-4; Hab. 3:8, 15). Similar vocabularies (Ps. 74:13-14; Hab. 3:13-14) All Scripture quotes are from the New English Bible unless otherwise stated.

Purpose

The major thrust of this thesis is to *identify* clearly the cosmic view of the Israelites and the Canaanites in the study of the celestial council in the Ugaritic corpus and the Old Testament. This will be followed by an *investigation* on whether the Israelites did indeed borrow their theology and concepts of the council from the Canaanites. Finally, to *issue* definitive statements as a result of my investigation and to *illustrate* the various scholarly positions in the Israelite-Canaanite controversy by using a paradigm that is broad enough in scope, but narrow enough to be useful.

Proposed Methodology

Methodologically, I shall *collect* only relevant data pertaining to the subject. Principal texts used will be Johannes C. De Moor, *An Anthology of Religious Texts from Ugarit* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1987); James B. Pritchard, ed. *The Ancient Near East in Pictures*. 3d ed. with supplement (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968). The data will then be *critiqued* in light of the Old Testament concept of celestial council. Finally, to *corroborate* evidences methodologies like semantic field study (for words like *sôd, ʿēdâ, qāhāl,* and *môʿēd*), comparative philology (in the case of *hapax legomena* or ambiguous meanings), concordance analysis, deductive and inductive reasoning will be used to in marshall evidences. It is to be noted that my *composition* will be descriptive, interpretive, suggestive but not exhaustive.

Contours

Positive Contribution

The contribution of this thesis will be primarily to *delineate* the cosmic views of the Israelites and Canaanites and to *determine* the validity of the positions held that the Israelites borrowed, adapted and assimilated the Canaanites' culture and religion. Finally, the last contribution will be to *decide* whether the biblical concept of the celestial council is an imitation of the Canaanite celestial council.

Present Limitation

The primary works consulted will be English. Ugaritic texts will be used with English translation. The primary emphasis will be on the Canaanite literature rather than parallel literatures of the Ancient Near East. Liturgical texts in the Canaanite corpus are not examined. Materials are selected on the basis of their relevance and significance to the stated focus of this thesis.

Biblical texts are chosen based on their relevance to the topic. Exegesis will be limited to selected phrases within the passages germane to the concept of the council. However, they are not exegeted to the limits. Owing to the abundance and richness of the Biblical materials, this thesis cannot claim to be exhaustive. Matters concerning the Israelite's entry into Canaan or their origin are not the main concern of our study. The origin of the angels and its development in the intertestamental period are beyond the

scope of this thesis.

Biblical texts will be restricted to Hebrew, Greek and English. Ancient versions will only be utilized whenever necessary.

Proposed Outline Description

Chapters I and II introduce the subject and present an overview of the discovery of the lost city of Ugarit with special attention paid to its culture, language and religion.

Chapter III portrays the major deities and minor deities like El, Baal, Mot, Yam, Asherah, Anath and Astarte in the Canaanite literature. It also probes into their roles, relationships and how they function within the council. The Canaanite cosmic view is taken into account.

Chapter IV will put together Biblical texts that deal with the celestial council and how they function. Its basic focus will be similar to that of Chapter II. Here the usage of the words like *sôd, qāhāl, ʿēdâ* and *môʿēd* are studied lexically and semantically.

Chapter V will postulate a conclusion based on comparative and contrastive study of the cosmic views and councils.

CHAPTER TWO

THE CLUES TO THE PAST

The City of Ugarit

An accidental plow by a farmer named Mahmood Mella As-zir, into an ancient tomb near the coastal regions of Northern Syria in 1928, led later to the discovery of the ancient city called Ugarit.[1] Its modern Arabic name is Ras Shamra which means "fennel head." The site[2] is located only a few miles north of Latakia, Syria's main seaport on the Mediterranean coast.

The French authorities began sponsoring the expedition under Claude Schaeffer who surveyed the area that led to the site of Ugarit. From 1929 to 1939, extensive finds enabled archaeologists to reconstruct the ancient city. Artifacts

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[1]For more details on excavations see Charles F. Pfeiffer, *Ras Shamra and the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1962), 9-18. Adrian Curtis, *Ugarit* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1985), 18-48 . Peter C. Cragie, *Ugarit and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1983), 3-25.

[2]Charles F. Pfeiffer remarked that the excavation at Ras Shamra indicated that the site had a history extending back to Neolithic age that is the fifth or sixth millennium B.C., in *Ras Shamra and the Bible*, 10. Excavation showed that Ugarit flourished in the late Bronze Age (1500-2000 B.C.). It was destroyed in 1200 B.C. due to natural disasters like earthquake, drought, famine, etc. The resumption of settlement took place in the Iron Age but on a smaller scale.

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like jewelry, royal seals, and potsherds convinced them that they belonged to the period of the Patriarchs.

The excavation showed that the city of Ugarit existed as early as 7000 B.C. (Neolithic Age). In the Late Bronze Age about 15-13th century B.C. it was the capital of a small Syrian kingdom that was politically weak but economically wealthy. Its prosperity was due to its strategic location and fine harbor. Thus it became a major trading center for economic and commercial transactions.

Archaeologists were able to uncover pottery, ivory carvings, sculptures, jewelry and metal works. The palaces of the kings were luxurious with impressive structures that had internal gardens and courtyards. The palace is believed to have been two stories high.

The remains of the temples dedicated to Baal and Dagon, stelae with carved reliefs representing El and Baal and installation for the cult of the dead were also uncovered.

Thousands of clay tablets were uncovered from the archives and libraries containing records of economic, legal and administrative materials. Most of them were written in Akkadian because it was the lingua franca of those days. Others were written in Sumerian ideographic signs, Hurrian, Hittite and Egyptian hieroglyphics. The most significant finds were the cuneiform tablets numbering about one thousand four hundred, written in the Ugaritic language which was

unknown until then.[3]

Three scholars[4] independently and about the same time
succeeded in deciphering the new script in 1930 as Ugaritic.
The discovery of the liturgical and mythological texts changed
the course of Biblical studies.[5] Firstly, they enable
scholars to understand the Canaanite culture and pantheons
because up till then, our knowledge of the Canaanites has come
from the Bible[6] and the Greek writers like Philo of Byblos,
Lucian of Samosata and later on the Church Fathers.

Secondly, they throw new light on obscure words in the
Bible. Thirdly, the literary texts are in poetic forms that
display parallelism like the Hebrew poetry. Thus Peter
Craigie affirmed that it is clear that these two languages
have a great deal in common. They share many common words and

[3]For a summary of the categorization of the various
texts, see the M. A. thesis of Carl Rasmussen, *An Annotated
Bibliography of English Language Works Pertaining to Ugaritic
and its Relationship to Hebraic-Old Testament Studies*
(Deerfield: Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1971), 8-10.

[4]Hans Bauer, Edward Dhorme and Charles Virolleaud.
See C.H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Textbook* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical
Institute, 1965), 1.

[5]Note that Ugaritic is basically alphabetic while
other Mesopotamian cuneiforms are ideographic or syllabic
which originated from the Canaanite family of languages. To
understand the nature of the Ugaritic writing, see U. Cassuto,
The Goddess Anath (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1971), 5-7.

[6]It is understandable why many scholars believe the
portrayal of the Canaanites to be biased in the Scripture.

grammatical structures that have a degree of commonality.[7]

Indeed, the discovery of Ugarit was an epochal event because our understanding of the second millennium Near Eastern social, political, economic and religious history has been greatly increased.

The Canaanite Culture

The word "Canaan" generally refers to the region of Palestine and Phoenicia. The Canaanites were culturally homogenous and were the predecessors and neighbors of the Israelites. As Philip K. Hitti has said:

> In the early documents of the Old Testament, the term Canaanite was applied in a broad sense to all inhabitants of the land without any racial connotation and the "language of Canaan" was used as the general designation of the Semitic tongue of Palestine.[8]

From the Bible it is clear that they never became a unified state in spite of their strategic positions which they occupied between the mighty powers of the Egyptians and the Mesopotamians. Instead, they were more of a conclave of small

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[7]See Loren R. Fisher, ed., "Ras Shamra Parallels", 3 vols. Analecta Orientalia, nos. 49-51 (Rome: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 1971). See also Carl Rasmussen, "The Influence of Ugaritic Literature upon Biblical and Hebraic Studies: selected illustrations," 3-38 in his unpublished thesis.

[8]Philip K. Hitti, *History of Syria* (New York: Macmillian Co., 1951), 81.
John D. Watts concurred that "they did not denote a fixed racial or ethnic unity but rather defined a civilization built on remnants of a succession of people who conquered this area to be in time conquered by a new wave of migrants." *Basic Patterns in Old Testament Religion* (New York: Vantage Press, 1971), 223. The phrase "language of Canaan" appears in Isa. 19:18.

communities, each having its own king who rose to power from their previous positions of nobility.[9]

Canaan[10] in the first half of the second millennium was a highly developed civilization as a major complex of cities and crossroads which was in contact with her neighbors such as the Egyptians and the Mesopotamians as well as the Syrians to the north. They were heirs of the great culture that had gone before them from Sumer to Egypt.[11]

Politically, it was a combination of small city states divided into various provinces, some of which were loyal vassals of Egypt. Economically it was an agricultural society which depended on yearly rainfall without irrigation. It is not surprising then to see them taking a special interest in nature, seasons and fertility. All these are reflected in their cultural practices.

Their complex pantheonic structure, architecture and literature of myths and rituals show them to be a highly

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[9]Philip K. Hitti, *Syria*, 81-82.

[10]The word Canaan seems to be related to the Akkadian word *kinnahhu* which means purple in the Armana letters and Nuzi texts. See Jack Finegan, *Myth and Mystery* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1989), 119.
From the Bible we are told that the sons of Ham, including Sidon, Heth, Jebusites, Amorites, Girgashites, Hivites, Arkites, Sinites, Arvadites, Zemarites, Hamathites are descendants of Canaan. See Gen. 10:15-18; I Chron. 1:13-16.

[11]Cyrus H. Gordon, *Ugarit and Minoan Crete* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1966), 12.

cultured society.[12]

The literary texts from Ugarit are most important for Biblical studies. They are written in poetic form. Some of the tablets are damaged. Therefore total accuracy of sequential events cannot be ascertained.

The longest texts are the Baal cycle[13] consisting of eight large fragments and other smaller fragments. It is a series of episodes of the contests of Baal, god of fertility and storm, against the god Yam (sea) and Mot (death, also known as god of sterility) and an account of how Baal finally emerged victorious. Another episode involves the building of a palace for Baal.[14]

Lawrence E. Tombs correctly sums up its importance:

Thus we can say that the Baal epic was a literary creation, formed of the raw material of many myths. It was valuable to the priests and political leaders since they served as a guide to ritual activity, and a work of theological reference provided legitimation of the customs and rituals of the Ugaritic community. It became an assurance to the community that what was done by the temple and royal court was in accordance with the

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[12]See A. R. Johnson, *Sacral Kinship in Ancient Israel* (Cardiff, 1967).

[13]For a textual study see H. L. Ginsberg, "Ugaritic Myths, Epics, and Legends" in *ANET* ed., James B. Pritchard (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1955): 129-142. A more recent book is Johannes C. De Moor, *Anthology of Religious Texts from Ugarit* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1987), 1-116.

[14]Helmer Ringgren, *Religions of the Ancient East* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 144ff.

structures of reality.[15]

The legend of Keret[16] is contained in three tablets. It is a tragic story of the elimination of his entire family. In his dream, El the chief god of the Pantheon, appeared to him and as a result of his counsel, Keret led a military expedition and captured a wife who bore him many sons.

Another text is about the legend of Aqhat[17] which is contained in three tablets. It is a mythical legend about how a childless king Daniel[18] is blessed with a son named Aqhat through the prayer of Baal. He was later slain by the goddess Anat because of his refusal to surrender to her a bow and some arrows given him by Kothar Wakhasis, the skillful craftsman, for her use. Included is a compositional lyric of the birth of Shahar, the god of dawn, and Shalim, the god of evening by the two wives of El. The marriage of the goddess Nikkal to Yarikh, the moon god is celebrated in another hymn.

Other texts found in the priestly, kingly and private archives deal with sacrifices for various deities, rituals, including omen literature, divination texts, treaties, official letters of correspondence, administrative and legal

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[15]Lawrence E. Tombs, "Baal, Land of the Earth: The Ugaritic Baal Epic" in *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 621.

[16]*ANET*, 142-149; *An Anthropology of Religious Texts from Ugarit* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1987), 191-211.

[17]*ANET*, 149-155; *ARTU*, 224-269. The dates of all these tablets are estimated to be between 1400-1350 B.C.

[18]This is not the Daniel of the Bible.

records.[19]

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[19]See *ARTU*, 117–146; 157–171; 175–187.

CHAPTER THREE

THE CONCEPT OF PANTHEON IN UGARIT

Cosmic View

The central feature of the Canaanite religion is the worship of forces of reproduction and growth, stemming from the fact that they were an agricultural and stock-raising community located in a region of limited and uncertain rainfall.[1] They were realists who understood the nature of things in pluralistic terms.[2] The focus of attention was on the yearly cycle which was recreated each spring and thus the order of blessing was established. George Ernest Wright described them as being "bound in the bundle of life" with nature.[3]

In the area of cosmogony, the cosmos was understood as a theogonic conflict in the divine realm.[4]

In their theogony, the gods were limited because they

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[1]Philip K. Hitti, *Syria*, 116.

[2]Lawrence E. Toombs, *Baal*, 662.

[3]George Ernest Wright, "God Who Acts: Biblical Theology as Recital," *Studies in Biblical Theology*, vol. 8 (London: SCM, 1952), 24.

[4]John H. Walton, *Ancient Israelite Literature in its Cultural Context* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1989), 232.

were subject to the decrees of the divine council. Each god
had to consult another who had his own idea of ruling the
world. J. J. Finkelstein remarked that "the existence of
plurality of wills precluded the absolute omnipotence of one
of these wills.[5] Furthermore their fixed places in the divine
pantheon and fixed roots in the natural forces prevented them
from transcending their limitations.[6]

The Canaanites supposed that their gods could be
manipulated through the offering of sacrifices. Sexual orgies
in the temple precincts could indeed induce agricultural
fertility. Since the gods were dependent on men for
sacrifices, they were profoundly influenced by the offering of
their altars, whether niggardly or generously.

The Canaanites had a cyclic worldview which arose from
the natural cycle of the year and cultic festivals. This
cyclic worldview was manifested in the activities in the cult
of the dying and rising godcult such as Tammuz or Baal.[7]

Life was perceived by them in terms of nature and thus
it was subject to the decrees and destiny of the gods. Thus,
no moral options were available.[8] Since they were trapped in

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[5]J. J. Finkelstein, *The Ox that Gored, Transaction of
the American Philosophical Society* (Philadelphia, 1981), 10.

[6]Wilfrid Lambert, "History and the Gods: A Review
Article," *Orientalia* 39 (1970): 170-177.

[7]Bertil Albrektson, *History and the Gods: An Essay on
the Idea of Historical Events as Divine Manifestations in the
Ancient Near East and in Israel* (Lund: Gleerup, 1967), 93-95.

[8]George Ernest Wright, *The God Who Acts*, 20.

a cosmic whirlpool of natural forces, they deified and personified them.[9]

Cultic offerings were very important because of the cosmic flux. They enabled them to get in touch with the gods who would respond to their gifts and prayers. Festivals became an occasion where the people assumed the identities of the deities they were worshipping, and so they acted out some kind of a divine-human drama to secure blessings and security in the natural realm. Furthermore, fertility rites were thought to be a means of obtaining harmony in the divine realm as they carried on their sexual activities with temple prostitutes.[10]

Thus it is fair to say that the Canaanite worldview was focused upon its pantheon of deities acting in the forces of nature and the recurring cycle of seasons. Their perspective of life was cyclical and nature was thought to be governed by a predetermined fate. Cultic rituals were much used to influence the cosmic rhythm.

Cabinet

Formation

The concept of pantheon is universal in the Near Eastern world. The strategic position of Ugarit meant that

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[9]See Irving Zeitlin, *Ancient Judaism*, 28-33; George Ernest Wright, *God Who Acts*, 30.

[10]Irving Zeitlin, *Ancient Judaism*, 30-33; George Ernest Wright, *God Who Acts*, 28.

the influence of the religious ideas of her neighbors were widely shared. However, the pantheon at Ugarit is unique in that it reflected its locale of Syrian context out of which it emerged.[11]

The structure of the pantheon was fluid and complex, with each god having different ranks. Over seventy gods[12] made up the assembly. Even within the assembly there were subgroups of gods[13] and goddesses whose relationship to El and Baal was somewhat tangential. In all probability they functioned as a literary or military coterie. The principal gods and goddesses in the Ugaritic pantheon were El, Baal, Yam, Mot, Asherah, Astarte and Anat.

At the head of the pantheon was El himself.[14] He presided over the assembly of gods.[15] Some of his major

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[11]Patrick D. Miller, "Aspects of the Religion of Ugarit" in *Ancient Israelite Religion*, ed. Patrick D. Miller et al (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987): 53.

[12]See W. C. Kaiser, Jr., "The Ugaritic Pantheon" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Brandeis University, 1973), 15-223 for a full discussion of the various deities. Also J. J. M. Roberts, *The Earliest Semitic Pantheon* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1972).

[13]Circle of El (*dr il*), the circle of El and the assembly of Baal (*dr il wpḥr b'l*), the helper of gods of Baal (*il't ḏr b'l*), the children of Anat (*bn atrt*).

[14]El is a generic name for deity. The plural for El is Elîm or Elohim which is found in Scripture. Lexically *'l* and *'ilu* in the Ugaritic is similar but semantically different. See Exodus 3:14. Cassuto said that this generic name later became a proper name. *The Goddess Anath*, 53.

[15]*pḥr ilm*. Philo of Byblos identified him as Kronos of the Greeks.

epithets are father,[16] father of mankind,[17] creator of creatures,[18] merciful,[19] and father of years.[20] His consort appears to have been Athirat.[21]

He was looked upon as father of seventy gods. A stele discovered at Ras Shamra shows him seated on a throne, receiving offerings from the king of Ugarit.[22]

He was a patriarchal figure, who guided human destiny; at times compassionate, and at times a fearful, drunken carouser, either highly virile or sadly impotent.[23] El ruled the divine world in the mythological texts, guided and blessed the kings and received offerings and sacrifices from the cult of Ugarit.[24]

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[16]*'ab*

[17]*'ab 'adm*

[18]*bny bnwt*

[19]*ltn 'il dp'id*

[20]This title alludes to his longevity. Other attributes ascribed to him are strength, merciful, etc.

[21]*qnyt 'ilm*. The two other goddesses are Attart (Ashtart) and Anat. It appears that their functions overlap with Athirat (Asherah) and there is some ambiguity in their relationships to the other gods. For an extensive treatment see the Ph.D. dissertation of Alice Lenore Perlman, "Asherah and Astarte in the Old Testament and Ugaritic Languages" (Graduate Theological Union, 1978), 167-170, 183-189.

[22]Charles Pfeiffer, *Ras Shamra in Ugarit* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House), 29.

[23]Patrick D. Miller, Jr., "Aspects of the Religion of Ugarit," *Ancient Israelite Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987): 55.

[24]Ibid., 55.

His dwelling place was remote at the "mouth of the rivers," in the "midst of the channels of the two deeps." His three sons were given dominion of the world. Baal ruled the heavens; Mot ruled Sheol and Yam ruled the sea with the designation of "Prince of the Sea." Only when there were important issues like governing the world, they journeyed to El's dwelling place to seek his permission.[25]

A central figure in the Ugaritic pantheon was Baal, an appellative meaning Lord.[26] His other designations were the storm god,[27] the son of Dagan,[28] Aliyu or Aliya-na ʿam,[29] Baal of Sapan,[30] and rider of the clouds, and occasionally identified with Hadad. [31]

He is related to agriculture; the crops were

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[25]Cassuto, 55.

[26]*bʿl* is a generic term. In Akkadian it is *bĕlu* which means Lord. Note that he is mentioned over 200 times.

[27]Haddu (*hd*). There must have been a fusion between Baal and Haddu before the recording of the epic myths. It was a common appellative in the Semitic world.

[28]*bn dgn*. Dagan was a Near Eastern grain and fertility god. No passage appears to suggest that Baal was the son of El but of Dagan. Dagan played no part in the mythological texts though he had a temple in Ugarit. It might be assumed that Baal had overtaken the function and place of Dagan.

[29]ʿ*aliyu bʿl* UM, 304-305.

[30]*bʿl spn*. Sapan is the seat of his dominion.

[31]*rkb ʿrpt*. Others are *zbl* (prince), *mlk* (king), *ṯpt* (judge). For identification with Hadad cf. G. R. Driver's "Canaanite Myths & Legends," 70-72. For Aliy-naʿm cf. Gordon *UM*, 304.

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altogether dependent on him for fertility.[32] As the god who
controlled the storm, lightning and rain, he had a higher
status than other gods of fertility.[33]

There is a stele picturing him as a warrior holding a
club in one hand and lightning bolt in the other hand.
Beneath his feet is the sign for water signifying that he trod
on high places of the sea. On his head are horns signifying
fertility.[34]

Baal's consort and wife (sister) was Anat or Baalat
(revered at Serabit el-Khadim). Their union was what produced
fertility of crops.[35] She appears to have been
syncretistically identified with the Egyptian goddess Hathor.

Baal was a young and active god and a hero in several
epic texts. As a god of fertility, he died and rose according
to the rhythm of the seasons. When Mot (the personification

[32]A. S. Kapelrud, *Baal in the Ras Shamra texts*
(Copenhagen, 1952), 43.

[33]Peter C. Craigie, *Ugarit*, 61.

[34]Cassuto, *Anath*, 60. Temples especially dedicated to
him have been found. See also A. S. Kapelrud, *Baal*, 332.

[35]In the Ugaritic literature El and Athirat are husband
and wife but the Bible presents Baal and Athirat (Asherah) as
counterparts. He is never associated with Anat. In Hebrew
there is no word for goddess. How do we explain their absence
in light of their importance in the Near Eastern Religion?
Patrick Miller proposed that "either the feminine deity was
implicitly absorbed in Yahweh from the beginning along with
all other divine powers, and so had no independent existence
or characters, or the radical integration of divine powers in
the male deity Yahweh effectively excluded the goddess(es) as
seems to be the case in CT 24 #50," in "The Absence of the
Goddess in Israelite Religion," in *Harvard Annual Review*,
(1986): 245.

of death) killed him, Baal descended to the nether world.
Thus summer came and drought was at hand.   When Baal
reappeared rivers would flow with honey.[36]

The place where devotees worshipped him was called a
bamah, marked by trees and symbols of fertility.   The figurine
of Asherah is often found there with an altar and water
reservoir.   The open country shrines were frequent on the
hills or ridges and sometimes they were on burial places.

Mot was another figure who was associated with
bringing death by killing life.   He represented the anti-life
force in nature by opposing fertility.   He was the king of the
underworld.   He was given the name "hero beloved of El."[37]   He
was engaged in battle twice with Baal whom he later put to
death.

Yam who was called Prince Sea,[38] and Judge River,[39]
contended with Baal for kingship.   He was a warrior god but
one who was bent on destruction.   Baal on the other hand was a
life-giving force.   It is commonly accepted that the sea
symbolized the forces of chaos that threatened the existence
of the Ugaritians.[40]   Ugarit was a city dependent on sea

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[36]Helene Sadder, "Ras Shamra--Ugarit and the Bible" in
Theological Review 9/2 (November 1988): 42.

[37]*ydd il ǵzr*

[38]*zbl ym*

[39]*ṯpṯ nhr*

[40]Frank M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*
(Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 40, 58-59.

trade. They needed Baal to constrain the forces of Yam.[41]

The three principal goddesses were Asherah, Astarte and Anath.[42] It is understandable to have female deities because some functions were judged by the Ugaritians to be more appropriately done by the female.

Asherah was the consort of El who was called "the progenitress of the gods," while the gods were termed "the sons of Asherah." She was regarded as the goddess of fertility. She supported Baal in his fight against Mot, the god of the underworld. She was the embodiment of matriarchal qualities.

Anath is considered the goddess of sensuality and fertility. She was called in the Ugaritic texts "virgin Anath" and also several times as maiden.[43] As a mighty fighter, she was characterized by heroism and courage.

Astarte is depicted in the Ugaritic texts as competing

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[41]See Elisha Linder's article in "Ugarit: A Canaanite Thalassocracy" in *Ugarit in Retrospect* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1981): 31-42.

[42]'*atrt ym*, which means one who marches upon the sea. She is the only one mentioned in the Bible. See 1 Kings 15:15, 2 Chron. 15:16, 2 Kings 21:7. In the Bible the common noun asherah meant a wooden cult object that can be burnt or cut down.
For further details see two of the latest monographs: Walter A. Maier, III., *Asherah: Extra Biblical Evidence* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986); Saul M. Olyan, *Asherah and the Cult of Yahweh in Israel* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988).

[43]In the Middle Bronze period she was pictured more as vigorous, quarrelsome and vicious rather than voluptuous or reproductive. See *ANET*, 136-137. She acted as a wet nurse to the offspring of Baal.

unsuccessfully with Yam and Baal for the possession of the earth.

In the study of the Ugarit pantheon, there are two key questions. Was El ever superseded by Baal? Those who argue affirmatively are Marvin Pope,[44] A. S. Kapelrud,[45] U. Cassuto,[46] and Oldenburg.[47] Arguments that have been put forward are that no temples of El have been found in Ugarit, the popularity of Baal with the worshippers by the time of the judges and several Baal temples and statuettes have been found; his leadership over the rest of the gods, El's conflict with Baal in his siding with Yam and El's remoteness as a high God.[48] Thus El is seen as a titular head of the pantheon with full regalia but characterized by senility and otiosity.

Walter Kaiser[49] has argued cogently that El was never

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[44]See Marvin H. Pope, "El in the Ugarit Texts," *VT Sup* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1955): 103-104.

[45]A. S. Kapelrud, *Baal in the Ras Shamra Texts*, 64-93. El lived at a great distance and devotees had to travel far but not Baal who was accessible in the temple, 117.

[46]U. Cassuto, *Anath*, especially 55-59 and 67.

[47]U. Oldenburg, *The Conflict between El and Baal in Canaanite Religion* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1969), 101-163.

[48]E. Theodore Mullen, Jr., *The Divine Council in Canaanite and Early Hebrew Literature* (Chico: Scholars Press, 1980), 93-109. See also Conrad E. L. Heureux who contends that El retains his supremacy in the pantheon. *Rank Among the Canaanite gods* (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1979), 3-110.

[49]Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Ugaritic Pantheon*, 246-247. It is interesting to note that Theodore Mullen of different theological persuasion came to the same conclusion even after seven years later! Was he aware of Kaiser's dissertation? If he was, there was no acknowledgement! If he was not, it does

replaced because his permission was still sought in any building project or in the extradition of its members. Baal's centrality and popularity stemmed from his fertility, which was the major concern of the Ugaritians.

Theodore Mullen[50] has also convincingly pointed out that there was no enmity between El and Baal because their spheres of power were different. Though Baal's cultus replaced El in the popular religion, El was still worshipped as father and creator of the gods. His position and power are seen clearly through his decree which determined the action of the gods.[51]

The second crucial question is, what was the relationship between El and Yahweh? In the Bible, we find El epithets like El Olam (Gen. 21:33), El Shaddai (Gen. 17:1, 28:3), El Elyon (Gen. 14:18-24). Interestingly, the divine name El does not appear in the Scripture as a Canaanite deity (except possibly in references to the pagan 'ēlîm. cf. Exod. 34:14, 21, Ps. 4:4, Deut. 32:12, Judg. 9:46).

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say something of Evangelical Scholarship!

[50]Theodore Mullen, Jr., *Divine Council*, 110. There is no Ugaritic textual evidence for conflict between El and Baal.

[51]Note that El was responsible for monitoring order and justice in the society. He did not have to fight for leadership. However, his role in the mythical epic is paradoxical. He wailed and mutilated himself when he heard Baal was dead, yet he was also treated with disrespect by Anat. On the other hand, he was called possessor of everlasting wisdom and bestower of good fortune. See Lawrence E. Toombs, "Baal, Lord of the Earth: The Ugaritic Baal Epic" in *The Word of the Lord shall go forth*, ed. Carol L. Meyers and M. O. Connor (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1983): 614.

One way of explaining their relationship is that El's characteristics have been assimilated into the Yahweh cultus. El was a manifestation of the god of the past and manifested himself later by his real name. This view is best expressed by Lokkegaard who said that "El is the special contribution of Canaan to the world. He is fused with the stern god Yahweh and thus he has become the expression of all fatherliness, being mild and stern at the same time.[52]

On the other hand, Frank Cross suggested that Yahweh was originally a hypocoristicon of a liturgical title of El.[53] Yahweh was originally an El figure who developed a separate identity as the cult of Israel separated and diverged from its polytheistic context.[54]

The most logical and best explanation of the relationship between El and Yahweh is that they are one and the same God. The difference in name has nothing to do with personality but expressions of relationship and emphasis.

Function

The concept of the council of gods is a very important motif in the Canaanite pantheon. The Ugaritic texts mentioned the gathering of the gods and goddesses in the activities of

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[52]See O. Eissfeldt, "El and Yahweh," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 1 (1956): 37 and note 4.

[53]F. M. Cross, "'el," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* Vol. 1, 242-261.

[54]*Ibid.*, 260.

the council.[55]

At the head of the assembly[56] was El, surrounded by his sons and other deities. The council normally gathered in the divine mountains[57] where they would eat, drink, deliberate or hear disputes.[58]

The Ugaritic texts also revealed that there was a special group of deities called Rephaim.[59] Some saw them as spirits of the nether world.[60] Others saw them also as

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[55]For a detailed treatment of the subject see Theodore E. Mullen, Jr., *The Divine Council*. J. C. de Moor, "The Semitic Pantheon" in *Ugarit Forschungen* (1970), Julian Oberman, *Ugaritic Mythology: A Study of its Leading Motifs* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), Patrick D. Miller, *The Divine Warrior in Early Israel* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973).

[56]The assembly is known by different names, e.g., *phr 'ilm* (assembly of the gods), *phr bn 'ilm* (assembly of the sons of El or sons of the gods), *phr m'd* (the gathered assembly), *mphrt bn 'ilm* (the assembly of the sons of El).

[57]Lawrence E. Toombs argued that the divine mountain should not be identified exclusively with the geographical top of any mountain such as Mt. Cassius, Mt. Tabor or Mt. Zion. They exist in the timeless time and spaceless space of mythology, in *Baal*, 617.

[58]On one occasion the council dealt with the kingship of Yam and on another was the permission sought by Baal to have a palace built for him.

[59]Because the reference to the Rephaim are rare, there is diverse opinion as to who they were. For a survey, see Conrad E. L. Heureux, *Rank among the Canaanite Gods El, Ba'al and the Rephaim* (Ann Arbor: Edwards Brothers, 1979), 111-127. He sees the Rephaim as belonging to two different ranks. There is a lower level of deities who formed the charioteering escort of Baal and another that followed Shapshu, the sun goddess, 229.

[60]Marvin Pope, "Notes on the Rephaim Texts from Ugarit," in *Memoirs of the Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences* 19 (1977), 163.

charioteers of Baal.[61] One thing is certain, that whenever
they are mentioned, they appeared within the context of the
divine realm. It seems likely that they are spiritual beings.

The gods gathered in the assembly only when there was
a crisis that concerned security. There were times when they
gathered for reunion. When a meeting was needed, a principal
deity would summon the divine members through a messenger god.
The messengers were heralds of the final decision of the
council. The council was, of course, polytheistic in nature.
Irving Zeitlin summarized accurately the Canaanite pantheon:

> The Canaanite pantheon was a family of males and females
> who suckled at the breasts of their mothers, who fought
> and vanquished one another, who built dwellings, and who
> made great banquets and relied for nourishment on
> sacrificial offerings.[62]

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[61]Dermont J. Ryan, "Rpum and Rephaim: A Study in the
Relationship between the *Rpum* of Ugarit and the Rephaim in the
Old Testament" (M.A. thesis, National University of Ireland,
1954), 84.

[62]Irving M. Zeitlin, *Ancient Judaism* (Cambridge: Polity
Press, 1984), 10.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE CONCEPT OF PANTHEON IN OLD TESTAMENT

Cosmic View

The existence of Yahweh[1] was assumed *a priori* in the Scripture.[2] They saw God as the director, producer and principal actor in the Biblical drama.[3]

God was the sovereign Lord who created all things. By his fiat command, the world was created and He alone

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[1]See Gen. 1:1; Pss. 14:1, 53:2; etc.

[2]It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the origin of the Israelite religion. A few comments are in order. One popular theory is the Kenite hypothesis. It assumes that Kenites were a tribe of Midianites who were descendants of Cain (Judg. 4:11) and Cain's descendants had special protection based upon the mark God had placed on him. Moses' father-in-law, a Midianite priest (Exod. 3:1), was a worshipper of Yahweh and since he officiated sacrifices (Exod. 18:12), he introduced Yahwism. See H. H. Rowley, *The Rediscovery of the Old Testament* (Westminster Press, 1946), 108ff. W. F. Albright supports the idea that Moses was a monotheist, *From Stone Age to Christianity* (Baltimore, John Hopkins, 1957), 271-272. See also Jack Finegan, *Let My People Go* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1903), 10-16. T. J. Meek on the other hand argued that Yahweh of Israel was originally a storm god. During some early period, for some reasons unknown, He was adopted by Judah as its tribal god, and then as Judah absorbed other tribes through conquest and alliance, the rest embraced the religion of Yahweh. *Hebrew Origin* (New York: Harper Torch Books, 1966), 99-105; 116.

[3]Frank E. Gakin, Jr., *The Religion and Culture of Israel* (Washington: University Press of America, 1977), 99.

sovereignly ruled over all things.[4] All the phenomena of

forces were not to be feared because they were subject to

Yahweh. God was therefore seen not as someone who was

immanent in nature but the Creator of nature.[5]

Yahweh was portrayed as one who was above the forces

of nature. He acted directly and personally through an

ethical mode rather than through the phenomena of nature.[6]

This explains why images of Yahweh were prohibited.

They had a linear perspective of history. They

understood time as proceeding in a straight line with a

beginning and an end rather than an endless recurrence of

cycles that lead to nowhere.[7] Herbert Butterfield sums it

well when he remarks that to the Israelites, history was not

cyclic, but predominantly linear-irreversible and

unrepeatable.[8]

They perceived Yahweh to be the God of history who

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[4]See Isa. 41:4; 44:6.

[5]George Ernest Wright, *The Old Testament Against Its Environment* (London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1969), 24.

[6]George Fohrer, *History of Israelite Religion*, trans. David Green (Nashville: Abingdon, 1972), 79

[7]Millar Burrows, "Ancient Israel," *The Idea of History in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Robert Denton, American Oriental Series, Vol. 38 (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1955), 127. Sigmund Mowinckel also said that the Old Testament conceives of history as a straight line, pointing to a goal. *He that Cometh*, trans. George Anderson (Oxford, England: Blackwell, 1956), 151.

[8]Herbert Butterfield, *The Origins of History* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 88.

intervened in human affairs to work out his plan and purpose. Through his prophets, He called for religious and social change.[9]

In summary we can say that the basic worldview of the Israelites was monotheistic with a linear perspective of history and Yahweh was perceived as the God of history who intervened in human affairs. Their knowledge of God came not from nature but the acts of God in the history of His people.[10]

Council

Connotations

The terms used in the Old Testament for celestial council are *sôd*,[11] *`ēdâ*,[12] *qāhāl*,[13] and *mô`ēd*.[14]

The term *sôd* is defined by BDB as "council or counsel,

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[9]Wilfrid Lambert, *History and the Gods*, 173-175.

[10]Theodore Vriezen, *An Outline of Old Testament Theology* (Oxford, England: Blackwell, 1958), 187.

[11]Even-Shoshan, *A New Concordance of the Old Testament*, 2d ed. (Jerusalem, 1989) lists 21 occurrences out of which only 7 have bearing on our topic: Job 15:8, Pss. 25:14, 89:8; Prov. 3:32, Jer. 23:18,22.

[12]ES has 149 citations but only one is related to the divine council: Ps. 82:1.

[13]Out of 122 references in ES, only Psalm 89:6 bears on our topic.

[14]ES has *mô`ēd* listed 223 times. Only one has direct reference to the celestial council: Isa. 14:13.

circle of familiar friends, assembly, company."[15] Fuerst adds,[16] "properly it means a sitting, for conversation or consultation, hence a circle, an assembly . . . metaphorically it means mutual consultation."

R. D. Patterson[17] concluded that the primary meaning of the word *sôd* is confidential speech. The emphasis on confidentiality marks a distinction between this word and the more general `*ēsâ* 'advice,' 'counsel.'

As for `*ēdâ*, Fuerst defines "an assembly, association, congregation . . ."[18] Accordingly, Jack Lewis maintained that `*ēdâ* is derived from *ya'ad* 'to appoint,' hence it means an assembly by appointment and in the Qumranic materials it frequently refers to a "self designation of the community."[19] One main difference between `*ēdâ* and *qāhāl* is that the former is used for people and animals, while the latter is not used of animals.[20]

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[15]F. Brown, S. R. Driver and C. A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford, 1907), 891b.

[16]Julius Fuerst, *A Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament* (Leipzig: Bernhard Tauchnitz, 1967), 970b.

[17]*Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris, et al. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 2: 1471a. Note that D. Winton Thomas argued that the word *sôd* is derived etymologically from the sense of 'penning' in (of sheep), and of 'care' (or orchards, grains, etc.) in "The Interpretation of *b'sôd* in Job 29:4." JBL 65 (1946): 63-66.

[18]Fuerst, 1015b.

[19]*TWOT* 1:878.

[20]Ibid., 1:878.

Qāhāl has the meaning of "assembly, congregation (of a god) perhaps related to *kôl*, assembly, convocation of people.[21] Thus Jack Lewis remarked that any assembly of any sort and purpose may be designated by *qāhāl*. It may be for evil counsel or deeds (Gen. 49:6, Ps. 26:5), civil affairs (I Kgs. 2:3; Prov. 5:4; 26:26; Job 30:28) or war (Num. 22:4; Jud. 20:2, etc.) . . . But the *qāhāl* is especially an assembly for religious purposes.[22]

In the case of *mô`ēd* Fuerst lists several meanings: "a fixed appointed time, a coming together, an assembly of enemies, of gods, of the people, a festive gathering."[23] Thus *mô`ēd* can designate an assembly as in the phrase "picked men of the assembly" (Num. 16:2).[24]

On the basis of *sôd*, *`ēdâ*, *qāhāl*, and *mô`ēd*, a council connotes a religious, festive or military gathering of people or gods at an appointed time and place for a specific purpose of consultation, pronouncing judgment, deliberation, administration, cooperation, etc. Although these four words are used sparingly in the Old Testament, the imagery of the

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[21]Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *Lexicon in Veteris Testament Libros* (Leiden, 1958), 829.

[22]*TWOT* 2:1991.

[23]Fuerst, 785b.

[24]*TWOT*, 1:878. Jack P. Lewis also remarked that this usage has been paralleled by Wilson in the Wen Amun Story (JNES 4:45) for the city council for Zaker Ba'al of Gebal. The reference *har mô`ēd* in Isa. 14:13, finds its counterpart in Ugaritic expression for the council of the gods. Ibid., 1:878.

council is abundant.[25]

Contexts

In the Old Testament we have explicit references to
God as the head of the celestial council and that celestial
beings are members of it.

Translations

The day came when the members of the court of heaven took
their places in the presence of the Lord . . .   Job 1:6

. . . I saw the Lord seated on his throne, with all the host
of heaven in attendance on his right hand and on his left.
                                                   1 Kgs.22:19

. . . I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted and
the skirt of his robe filled the temple. About him were
attendant seraphim, and each had six wings, one pair covered
his face and one pair his feet, and one pair was spread in
flight. They were calling ceaselessly to one another. Holy,
holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts. The whole earth is full of
his glory . . . Then I heard the Lord saying, Whom shall I
send? Who will go for me?   Isa. 6:1-8

The heavens praise thy wonders, O Lord, and the council of the
holy ones exalts thy faithfulness. In the skies who is there
like the Lord in the court of heaven, like God who is dread
among the assembled holy ones, great and terrible above all
who stand about him? O Lord God of Hosts, who is like thee?
Thy strength and faithfulness, O Lord surround thee.
                                                    Ps. 89:5-8

God takes his stand in the court of heaven to deliver judgment

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[25]Jay N. Boo Heflin identified 34 pericopes in the
Pentateuch, 202 pericopes in the Prophetic Literature, 93
pericopes in the Hagiographa containing the council imagery.
See "An Exegetical and Theological Study of the Concept of
Heavenly Council in Ancient Israel," (Ph.D. diss.,
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1971), 90-138; 139-
202; 203-256.

among the gods themselves . . . This is my sentence: Gods you
may be, sons all of you of a high God, yet you shall die as
men die; princes fall, every one of them, and so shall you.

<div align="right">Ps.82:1,6-7</div>

Text Critical Notes

*wyhy hym wyb'w bny h'lhym lhtyssb `l YHWH wyb' gm hśśtn
btkm.*

<div align="right">Job 1:6</div>

wyhy hywm literally means "and it was the day." Is

this phrase to be construed as "a fixed time" or an "ordinary

day"? The Targum supports a special day. Hence they

translated "And it came to pass on the day of Judgment, the

New Year."[26] The Jewish exegetes, Ibn Ezra and Rashi

suggested that that day was Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New

Year, when children of the world pass before the Divine

Presence like rebels after surrender is brought before a

tribunal.[27] A. C. M. Blommerde argued that the construction

wyhy hywm w with *ywm* plus the article followed by *waw*

explicativum, the meaning is "*The* day *when* this or that

happens, *the* day which is characterized by this or that

event."[28] However, GKC remarks ". . . the phrase *wyhy hywm*

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[26]Solomon B. Freehof, *Book of Job*. (New York: Union of
American Hebrew Congregations, 1958), 44. E. Dhorme, A
Commentary on the Book of Job. (New York: Thomas Nelson
Publishers, 1984), 5 sees it as appointed time, too.

[27]Victor E. Reichert, *Job*. (London: The Socino Press,
1967), 2.

[28]A. C. M. Reichert, *Northwest Semitic Grammar and Job*.
BibOr 22. (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1969), 37.
For more details see D. W. Baker, "Further Examples of the *WAW
EXPLICATIVUM*," VT 30 (1980): 129-136.

which does not refer back to the previous narrative in the sense of *the same day* but is used exactly like our one day . . . i.e., on a certain day."[29]

bny h'lhym literally means "the sons of God." LXX and Targum translate as the angels of God. This is a widely held scholarly view.[30] The collocation of *bny (h) 'lhym* occurs five times in the Scripture (Gen. 6:2,4; Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7). The word *bn* means not so much descendant or family but type or class of beings.[31] Waltke also commented that similar expressions indicate the relationship of an individual to a class of beings, i.e., divine beings.[32] They are generally messengers of God in His divine presence singing praises (Psalm 29:9) and executing His will. Psalm 103:20-21, "Bless the Lord, all his angels, creatures of might who do his bidding. Bless the Lord all his hosts, his ministers who serve his will." As celestial beings, they are the nearest created glory, with which He has surrounded Himself in His eternal glory, and that He uses them as the immediate instruments of His cosmic rule.[33] Adam Clarke noted, "As

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[29]GKC, 408, no. 1263.

[30]*Contra* Lamsa who said the sons of God refers to the "good men," believers of God, in *Old Testament Light* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1964), 511.

[31]Solomon B. Freehof, *Job*, 44.

[32]Waltke, 150.

[33]Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d.), 53

kings, therefore transact their most important affairs in a
solemn council or *assembly*, so God is pleased to represent
himself as having *his council* likewise; and as passing the
decrees of his providence in an assembly of His holy
angels."[34] Thus *bny h'lhym* does not connote physical
descendence from God.[35] Yahweh is not merely one of the
elohim, but that one who is in absolute control of all other
elohim, as well as all creatures of the earth. All his angels
are subordinate to Him, who acts only on His initiative or
authority. They do not have authority of their own.[36] The
rendering of NEB "members of the court of heaven" is to be
preferred because it encompasses all the angelic hosts. NJB
has "the divine beings."

lhtysb`l literally means to station themselves before.
BDB records that *lhtysb* occurs only in the hithpael and it
means to set or station oneself, to take one's stand.[37] The

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[34]*Italics* his. Adam Clarke, *The Old Testament* Vol. 3
(Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press), 34.

[35]Driver and Gray note "The sons of the gods (*bny
h'lhym*) are individuals of the class god, as 'the sons of man'
(*bny h'dm*, Isa. 26:19) are individuals of the class of man.
Samuel Rolles Driver and George Buchanan Gray, *The Book of
Job. The International Critical Commentary* (Edinburgh: T. &
T. Clark, 1950), 10.

[36]*Ibid.*, 10.

[37]BDB, 426b. The collocation of *lhtysb 'l* occur also
in two other places, Job 2:1 (twice). In Ugaritic, Aramaic
and Hebrew the preposition `l means "before" in the presence
of. See also RSPI, 293 no. 420. See also Zech. 6:5; Prov.
22:29 and cf. Lk. 1:19. It is used of courtiers presenting
themselves before the kings in humble servitude. See also
Paul R. Gilchrist, *TWOT*, 1:894.

expression *lhtysb'l*, "to stand before, in the presence of"
aptly expresses the standing at attention of the officers and
servants of Yahweh in order to report to him and then to
receive instructions for their duties.[38] H. H. Rowley
correctly remarked that to present themselves literally means
"to stand over," in the manner of servants standing before a
seated master. Yahweh is not merely one of the assembled
company. He is the monarch in the court.[39] Thomas Aquinas
added that this collocation suggested that the angels were
submitting everything to divine judgment on their own motion
and intention.[40] Note the translation of NEB "took their
places in the presence of . . . ."

Summary of Exegesis

   We have a picture of the celestial council assembling
in the heavenly court gathering round the Lord. Each of the
members of the court presenting himself before[41] Yahweh to
give an account and at the same time expecting to receive

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[38]Walter L. Michel, *Job in the Light of Northwest
Semitic* Vol. 1 (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1987), 16.

[39]H. H. Rowley, *Job* in New Century Bible. (Greenwood:
Attic Press, Inc., 1976), 31.

[40]Thomas Aquinas, *The Literal Exposition on Job*.
trans. S. Anthony Damico. (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press,
1989), 77-78.

[41]The preposition *'l* implies God seating on the throne
(cf. 1 Kgs. 22:19). Yahweh was holding sessions at stated
intervals for the dismission of his messengers to earth, and
for the reception of reports from them on their return. See
Driver and Gray, *Job*, 9.

commands.[42]

> *wy'mr lkn šm' dbr YHWH r'yty 't YHWh yšb 'l ks'w wkl sb'*
> *hššmym 'md 'lyw mymynw umśśm'lw.*
>
> I Kings 22:19; II Chron 18:18

Edward J. Kissane contended that the vision of Micaiah is purely imaginary.[43] So does Maimonides, who said that the word *saw* should not be taken literally but that it should be understood figuratively in the sense of intellectual perception.[44] However, I concur with H. Wheeler Robinson who argued cogently that one danger in exegesis is that we take the meaning figuratively when it should be taken literally. When that happens we rob ourselves of the deeper historical meaning and we become arbitrary in the word usage. Therefore what Micaiah saw actually took place in heaven.[45]

The Targum translates this phrase as "I saw the glory of the Lord residing." The reason being to avoid

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[42]The motif of a divine council is very common in the Near East. In the Ugaritic Texts we have several words describing the council. It is termed *mphrt bn il* (council of the sons of god) *UT* 2:17, 34; 107:3; *phr bn ilm* (council of the sons of gods) *UT* 17:7, 51 III:14; *'dt ilm* (assembly of gods) UT 128 II; 7, 11; *dr il* (circle of el) *UT* 128 II:19; *phr m'd* (the whole assembly) *UT* 137:14, 31.

[43]Edward J. Kissane, *The Book of Job.* (New York: Sheed and Want, 1946), 8.

[44]Quoted by Leo L. Honor, *Book of Kings 1* (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregation, 1955), 318.

[45]H. Wheeler Robinson, *Council*, 151-157. Cf. Keil and Delitzsch statement: "The vision described by Micah was not merely a subjective drapery introduced by the prophet, but a simple communication of the real inward vision by which the fact had been revealed to him . . ." *Old Testament Commentary*, Vol. 111, 276.

anthropomorphism of God.

YHWH yšb`l ks'w depicts a graphic imagery of His divine sovereignty and supremacy over all created order. There is grandeur and splendor. It is His throne by virtue of His right and might and not someone else's throne.

The host of heaven (*ṣb' hsmym*) in this context[46] refers to the angels who are an organized force of army under Yahweh.[47] Perhaps the host of heaven is used to describe its variety, multiplicity, orderliness and obedience.

The idea of God surrounded by his heavenly host can be found also in Dan. 7:10. ". . . Thousands upon thousands served him and myriads upon myriads attended his presence . . ." Similarly, Neh. 9:6: "Thou alone art the Lord; thou hast made heaven the highest heaven with all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. Thou preservest all of them, and the host of heaven worships thee."

A picture of the attitude of the subordinates standing while his superior sits or reclines on his divan is expressed

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[46]The meaning of this word is dependent on the context. It can refer to the heavenly bodies deified in the astral cults introduced by Ahaz and Mannaseh (2 Kgs. 21:5; 23:4, 5, 12) or to the angels. Other usages can be found in Gen. 2:1, Ps. 33:6; Isa. 34:4; 45:12, Jer. 33:22. I concur wholeheartedly with Dr. McComiskey who made a cogent remark: "The *court* of final appeal in Exegesis is the *context* in its *cultural* setting," Class Lecture in OT 845 Advanced Exegesis: Hosea, 1990.

[47]John Gray, *I and II Kings* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1963), 402. Note he also believes that the heavenly court imagery and host of heaven are borrowed from Canaanite mythology, *ibid.*, 402.

by the word `md `lyw.[48]

Summary of Exegesis

A dialogue in the celestial council between Yahweh and
members of his court waiting for his bidding to execute his
commands.

> bšnt mwt hmmlk `zzyhw w'r'h 't 'dny yšb `l kss' rm wnśś'
> wšlyw ml'ym 't hhykl. śrpym `mdym mmm`l lw šš knpym šš
> knpym l'ḥd bštym yksh pnyw ubštym yksh rglyw ubštym y`wpp.
> Isa. 6:1-2

The prophet visualizes[49] the Lord enthroned in
sublime majesty and power. He is absorbed in the kingliness
of Yahweh, who is enthroned on a conspicuously lofty throne.[50]
Surrounding Him are the seraphim in motion. God's power is
clearly emphasized by the mention of the loftiness of the
throne and the dais, and his greatness and dignity by His

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[48]*Ibid.*, 403.

[49]Is the prophet's vision imaginary or real? Is the
prophet simply saying that he became aware of God's presence?
There is no reason not to take it literally that he indeed saw
the Lord. It was certainly an intense experience where the
presence of God took the form of a vivid mental image. See J.
Yeoman Mucke, *Isaiah 1-39* (London: The Epworth Press, 1960),
24. Cf. the remarks of Keil and Delitzsch; "Isaiah saw, and
that not when asleep and dreaming; but God gave him, when
awake, an insight into the invisible world . . ." *Commentary
on the Old Testament* Vol. VII (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d.),
189. "If these are poetical fictions, then it is impossible
to discriminate between the naive truthfulness of primitive
tradition and the scenic illusions of the contemporary
novelist," added T.K. Cheyne in *The Prophecies of Isaiah*
(London: Kegan Paul, Trench, & Co., 1884), 36.

[50]George Buchanan Gray, *The Book of Isaiah*, ICC
(Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1928), 102.

cloak that flows the temple's halls[51] The *tipha* accent with

kissē' does seem to suggest that the Masoretes construe *rm*

wnśś' with *'dny*.[52] Oswalt argued that the two words modify

persons rather than things (Isa. 52:13; 57:15).[53]

The emphasis on the exaltedness and loftiness of God

is a theme that can be found in the book of Isaiah. He is the

transcendent Lord exalted in power and glory above the earth,

not subject to man's finiteness or mortality.[54] Thus we are

reminded of our separateness from God.

The word *šwlyw* is commonly translated skirt or train,

designed as a representation of long flowing skirt, which is

believed to be an allusion to an oriental monarch surrounded

by his ministers.[55] However, G. R. Driver[56] has argued

persuasively that we have no evidence that robes had trains in

the Near East especially when we look at Accadian sculptures

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[51]Otto Kaiser, *Isaiah 1-12* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1972), 74.

[52]*Contra* E. J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, Vol. I (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1972), 238.

[53]John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah 1-39* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 178.

[54]John Mauchline, *Isaiah 1-39* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1962), 89.

[55]See Albert Barnes, *Notes on the Old Testament*, Vol. I (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1955), 130. Also E. Henderson, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah* (London: Hamilton, 1840), 47.

[56]G. R. Driver, "Isaiah 6:1 his train filled the temple," in *Near Eastern Studies in Honor of W. F. Albright*, ed. H. Goedicke (Baltimore: John Hopkins, 1971), 87-90.

and Egyptian paintings. He prefers the rendering "lower limb" or "extremities" i.e., all the limbs below the trunk are meant. He goes on to add that the pictures suggest that he will have regarded him as clothed in a long robe reaching to the ankles and leaving only feet uncovered.

Lexically *śrpym* are thought to be related to *śrp*[57] (fiery serpent[58] that is venomous and from burning effect of poison). They are also thought by others to be beings originally mythically conceived with serpents' bodies, or personification of lightning.[59] They could possibly be related to the *serref*[60] which is an Egyptian guardian-griffin who guarded the graves, or Assyrian *sarrapu*, an epithet of solar fire god Nergal.[61] Some trace this word to *saraph*, a snake (in Sanskrit it is *sarpa*, Latin *serpens*) or Arabic *šarafa* (*sarufa*), to tower high, to be exalted.[62] The word *śprm* is retained by the LXX, Peshitta, Vulgate but the Targum paraphrased it as "holy ministers."

This is the first mention of the seraphim who are part

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[57]BDB, 977a.

[58]See Barnes, *Old Testament*, 138 where some fanciful interpretation is given that a *śrp* was originally a sea serpent that lives in lakes and when those places dried up it becomes a land serpent, and then its bite is very fierce!

[59]T. K. Cheyne, *Isaiah*, 38.

[60]See Owen C. Witehouse, *Isaiah 1-39*, the Century Bible, Vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T. C. & E. C. Jack, n.d.), 122.

[61]Whitehouse, *Isaiah 1-39*, 123.

[62]See Keil & Delitzsch, *Old Testament*, Vol. VII, 195.

of Yahweh's retinue. They are never mentioned again in the
Scripture.[63] The *śrp* (burning) is used in Num. 21:6, 8; Deut.
8:15 as a epithet of destructive fiery serpents of the
wilderness. It is also used in Isa. 14:29, 30:6 as of a
flying dragon. We can conclude that they are burning and
winged creatures.[64] As John F. A. Sawyer pointed out, there
does not seem to be any need to suppose a connection with the
fiery serpents in Num. 21 and Isa. 14:29 which are instruments
of destruction; since they have no human characteristics, they
have nothing to do with the seraphim here.[65] Thus the

[63]It is the general opinion, however, that they are the
four living creatures, each of them with six wings who sang
"Holy, Holy, Holy" is God the sovereign Lord of all, who was,
and is and is to come, Rev. 4:8.

[64]This is also the view of Joseph Addison Alexander,
Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah, (Grand Rapids:
Zondervan, 1953), 146, Joseph Jensen, *Isaiah 1-39* (Wilmington,
Del., Michael Glazier, Inc., 1984), 86, E. J. Young, *Isaiah*,
240. See also Lacheman, "The Seraphim of Isaiah 6," *The
Jewish Quarterly Review* (1968): 7-8. Thus the views of K.
Joines, "Winged Serpents in Isaiah's Inaugural Vision," *JBL* 86
(1967): 410-415, and also T. K. Cheyne, *Isaiah*, 38 who
conjectures them to be the mythic serpent--like lightning, are
to be rejected. Knobel's emendation of seraphim to *sharathim*
(worshippers of God) though ingenious is nevertheless
groundless, as quoted in Keil and Delitzsch, *Old Testament*,
Vol III, 195. Their comments are worth noting: "To pronounce
the word seraphim a copyist's error, would be a rash
concession to the heaven-storming omnipotence which is
supposed to reside in the ink of a German scholar," 195.

[65]John F. A. Sawyer, *Isaiah*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: The
Westminster Press, 1984), 68. Cf. the remarks of Oswalt who
pointed out that the title seraph may denote fiery one. Fire
is an appropriate image of God's holiness. Fire can cleanse
and destroy; is fascinating yet terrifying. It can translate
mass into energy. We are reminded that "our God is a
consuming fire" (Deut. 4:24; Isa. 33:14; Heb. 12:29) in
Isaiah, 184.

seraphim are not mere symbols but celestial beings[66] perhaps
of the higher order who are living, intelligent creatures who
perform acts of unceasing worship.[67] They are part of God's
retinue.[68] They are also vehicles and media of divine
love.[69] As holy ministers and messengers of God they are ever
ready to do God's bidding. They are also to be considered by
some as guardians protecting the way to the throne of
Yahweh.[70]

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[66]*Contra* T. K. Cheyne, *Isaiah*, 39, "The popular notion
of seraphim as angels is of course to be rejected . . . They
are indeed more like Titans than placid Gabriels or Raphaels."

[67]Henderson, *Isaiah*, 48.

[68]Are the seraphim to be identified with the cherubim?
According to E. J. Young, yes essentially, but not
functionally. The cherubim are over the mercy seat and are
represented as having four wings. The seraphim are attendants
of God in *Isaiah*, 240. According to Harry Bultema, they are
different by virtue of their different names. Cherub means
seizer while seraphim means *burners*. The former are bearers
of God's throne (Ez. 1:5), while the latter stand above the
throne. The cherubim are executors of God's justice and
judgment (Gen. 3; Ps. 18; Ez. 10) while the seraphim are
singers of praises to the holiness and glory of God,
Commentary on Isaiah (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications,
1981), 94. F. C. Jennings added that the wings of the cherub
are for protecting care, the wings of the seraphim are for
flight. The cherubim protect and they speak of inflexible
righteousness, while the seraphim (active) search and they
speak of burning holiness *Studies in Isaiah*. (New York:
Loizeaux Brothers, Bible Truth Depot, n.d.), 62. Keil and
Delitzsch see the seraphim as vehicles and media of divine
love while the cherubim (Ezekiel) are vehicles and media of
divine wrath, 197. (There is, however, no lexical basis for
"seizer" as the meaning of *krb*. Akkadian *Krb* = "pray" or
"intercede" KB 454b. There is no   in Arabic)

[69]*Ibid.*, 197.

[70]This is advocated by R. E. Clements on the basis of
the Egyptian royal symbolism, where the winged cobra (Uraeus)
was a widely used symbol for divine protective spirit guarding

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mm'l lw literally means at above to him.   Most
commentaries have argued that it need not be because of their
reverence for God.   Thus Henderson argued that it be rendered
as beside and not above, or before in comparison to 1 Kgs.
22:19, where *'lyw* is explained with the words "at his right
and at his left."[71]   Oswalt pointed out that while the
seraphim may be above him, but still they are on the same
plane as he (attending to him, Gen. 45:1; Judg. 3:19; 2 Sam.
13:9).[72]

The seraphim conceal their faces and private parts
with their wings as a sign of reverence for the holiness of
God.[73]   Wings also suggest their readiness and cheerful
performance of the commandment of God.[74]   Their attitude of
covering indicates the infinite gulf between God and every

the king, in *Isaiah 1-39* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 74.
This connection can hardly be proven.   Note also that older
Christian commentaries see the two seraphim as representing
the Son and Holy Spirit while Jewish exegetes see them as
representing the two covenants.

[71]Henderson, *Isaiah*, 48.

[72]Oswalt, *Isaiah*, 178.   Cf.   E. J. Young, *Isaiah*, 240,
who said that "the seraphim stand above and are not to be
thought as superior to Him, but simply in the position of
waiting upon him."

[73]Otto Kaiser, *Isaiah 1-12*, 76.

[74]John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of the Prophet
Isaiah*, trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948),
203.

creature.[75]

> *wgr' zh 'l zh w'mr qdš qdš qdš YHWH sḇ'wṯ ml' ḵl h'rṣ*
> *kḇdw.*

<div align="right">Isa. 6:3</div>

The thrice repeated *qdš* expresses intensity,

superlativeness of degree[76] (see Jer. 7:4, 22:29, Ez. 21:27).

The Targum explained the use of the trisagion as meaning holy

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[75]Otto Kaiser, *Isaiah 1-12*, 76. Calvin's insights are
to be noted: "And if angels are overwhelmed by the majesty of
God, how great will be the rashness of men if they venture to
intrude so far! Let us therefore learn that our enquiry
concerning God ought never to go beyond what is proper and
lawful, that our knowledge may soberly and modestly taste what
is far above our capacity," 203.

[76]Henderson, *Isaiah*, 49; Whitehouse, *Isaiah 1-39*, 124.
Older commentators see here an allusion to Trinity. See
Joseph Addison Alexander who remarked that the allusion to the
Trinity in this *trisagion* is more probable because different
parts of the chapter are referred to in the New Testament in
relation to the three persons of the Godhead, in *Isaiah*, 147.
Keil and Delitzsch asserted that "three is the number of
developed and yet self-contained unity, has its ultimate
ground in the circumstance that it is the number of the
trinitarian process; and consequently the trilogy (*trisagion*)
of the seraphim (like that of the cherubim in Rev. 4:8),
whether Isaiah was aware of it or not, really pointed in the
distinct consciousness of the spirits themselves to the triune
God," *Old Testament*, Vol VII, 193. However, it is unlikely
that the Jews understood it this way. While admitting that
the doctrine of the Trinity is in the Scripture, it may be
unwarranted to see the *trisagion* as the Holy Trinity. H. C.
Leupold's word of caution is to be stressed: "To see here a
revelation of the Holy Trinity is more than the words can
bear," in *Exposition of Isaiah*, Vol. I (Grand Rapids: Baker
Book House, 1968), 131. He then later on contradicted himself
saying, "In the light of the New Testament we may see this
aspect of the truth thus reflected without calling this a
proof for the Holy Trinity," 130. Evangelicals are commonly
guilty of reading the Old Testament through the lens of the
New Testament. And yet it is to be recognized that the New
Testament is in actuality the commentary of the Holy Spirit on
the Old Testament.

in heaven, holy on earth, holy to eternity.[77] What does the
word actually mean?[78] From the Biblical viewpoint it refers
not only to the mystery of his power, but also that his
character is totally good without evil.[79] This word does have
the connotation of moral purity.[80] As a predicate of the
deity it expresses the gulf between the divine and human.[81]
Oswalt[82] pointed out correctly that in the book of Isaiah,
"the Holy one of Israel/Jacob seems to be a favorite
expression of the prophet. This phrase occurs 26 times in
Isaiah, while only 6 times elsewhere in the old Testament (2
Kgs. 19:22, Jer. 50:29, 51:5, Pss. 71:22; 78:41; 98:18).[83] It
is also used as an idea of separateness or a personal God in
contrast to the pantheon.

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[77]Targum reads "Holy in the heavens of the height, his
sanctuary, holy upon the earth, the work of his might, holy
on eternity is the Lord of hosts."

[78]See *TWOT* 2:1990 on *qdš* by Thomas McComiskey for an
excellent discussion.

[79]*TWOT* 2:1990. I concur that the root is related to
"separate" rather than cut (qd bilateral).

[80]Joseph Addison Alexander, *Isaiah*, 147. *Contra*
Oswalt, 180 who sees no moral connotation at the outset.

[81]J. Skinner, *Isaiah 1-39* (Cambridge: University Press,
1905), 45.

[82]Oswalt, *Isaiah*, 180.

[83]For more details on the concept of holiness see E. J.
Young, 242-243; Nathan H. Snaith, *Distinctive Ideas of the Old
Testament* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1956), 24-98;
Norman Walker, "The Origin of the Thrice Holy,"*New Testament
Studies* 5 (1958-59): 132-133.

The Lord of Hosts[84] occurs at least eleven times in
the first six chapters of Isaiah. It is his favorite
designation other than "Holy One of Israel." It occurs about
288 times in the Old Testament.[85] It does not appear in the
Pentateuch, Joshua, Judges, Job, Proverbs or Ecclesiastes. In
the prophetic literature, Isaiah (61 times), Jeremiah (84
times), Zechariah (51 times), Malachi (25 times). The word
host can mean[86] armies of Israel (1 Sam. 17:45), or else it
points to mightiness, heavenly stars, celestial beings, or
gods of the ancient Canaanite pantheon.[87] It is best to take
it as celestial beings in light of other contexts. It can
encompass the heavenly stars since we find the ancient people
having thoughts that stars were animate beings (Judg. 5:20;
Isa. 40:26). Otto Kaiser also pointed out that the divine
title seems to have come into use when Israel consciously
recognized Yahweh's cosmic power and opposed it to the claim

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[84]It will be studied in greater detail in the next
chapter.

[85]ES, 973c.

[86]NIV translates Lord Almighty which is unwarranted
while other major translations NJB, RSV, TK, NASB retain the
traditional translation. Otto Kaiser suggested that it be
translated by "surrounded by hosts," in Isaiah, 77 and Joseph
Jensen's suggestion that originally it means "he who brings
the (heavenly?) hosts into being in Isaiah 1-39 (Wilmington,
Del.: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1984), 86-87 is not particularly
convincing.

[87]Otto Kaiser advocated this view in light of the fact
that this title becomes less prominent during exilic and post-
exilic periods. These gods of ancient Canaanite pantheon are
reduced to the status of Yahweh's servants in Isaiah, 78.

of the old gods, that is, during the period of the Judges.[88]

w'šmʿ 't qwl 'dny 'mr 'ṯmy 'šlḥ umy ylḵ lnw w'mr hnny šlḥny.

<div align="right">Isa. 6:8</div>

The NEB translation of *us* to *me* is unwarranted.[89] The change of pronouns from the singular *'šlḥ* to *lnw* ("to us") has caused perplexities. The LXX has *pros ton laon touton*, while the Syriac omits it altogether. The Targum has *whom shall I send* which is without any manuscript warrant.[90] The older interpretation of the plural pronoun suggested by Gesenius as self deliberation[91] and some older grammarians as *pluralis excellentie* is rejected by modern commentators because no passage can be adduced from the Hebrew Scriptures, from which it might be proved that this was the practice of a king.[92] If "us" refers to plural of majesty, the singular "whom shall I send" seems strange![93] Another interpretation is to see it as a reference to the Trinity.[94] The best explanation is that it

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[88]Otto Kaiser, *Isaiah 1-12*, 78. The LXX interprets 2 Sam. 6:2 as "the Lord, of the powers" and Amos 9:5 "the Lord, the ruler of all."

[89]The Revised English Bible has "us."

[90]Perhaps the ancient versions try to avoid polytheism.

[91]*Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, rev. by E. Kautzsch and tr. by A. E. Cowley (Oxford, 1910), 124g, footnote 2.

[92]Barnes, in *Isaiah*, 143: T. K. Cheyne, in *Isaiah*, 40; Henderson, in *Isaiah*, 50.

[93]Oswalt, in *Isaiah*, 185.

[94]Calvin, in *Prophet Isaiah*, 213, "I am rather favorable to the opinion that this passage points to three persons in the Godhead. . . God talks with himself, and in the

refers to his celestial council in light of the fact that the seraphim have just been mentioned. It fits the context very well and it follows *Occam's Razor*.[95] Keil and Delitzsch asserted that "the plural is no doubt used here with reference to the seraphim, who formed together with the Lord, one deliberative council (*sôd kedošhim*, Ps. 89:9) . . ."[96]

Summary of Exegesis

Yahweh is sitting on his throne as the Heavenly king whose glorious presence fills the room surrounded by the seraphim. After the cleansing, Isaiah asks the heavenly council that he should be sent as a messenger.

wywdw šmym pl'k yhwh 'p 'mwntk bqhl qdšym.

Ps. 89:6

The phrase *bqhl qdšym* literally means in an assembly of holy ones who are the *qdšym*. Frank Cross and Noel Freedman[97] argued that the term is used for members of the

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plural number; and unquestionably he now holds a consultation with his eternal Wisdom and his eternal Power, that is with the Son and the Holy Spirit."

[95] J. Skinner, *Isaiah*, 47; Joseph Jensen, *Isaiah*, 88; A. S. Herbert, *Isaiah*, 58; Oswalt, *Isaiah*, 185; R. Clements, *Isaiah*, 76; Whitehouse, *Isaiah*, 125.

[96] Keil and Delitzsch, *Isaiah*, 198. Note that E. J. Young after giving two cogent reasons why the plural refers to the seraphim as members of the heavenly court, concluded it is best to adopt the *time honored interpretation of the church* to indicate plurality of persons, in *Isaiah*, 254. *Italics mine.* Another case of evangelical prejudice.

[97] Frank Moore Cross, Jr., and David Noel Freedman, *Studies in Ancient Yahwistic Poetry* (Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1975), 106.

divine assembly in both biblical and extra-biblical literature. Similarly C. H. W. Brekelmans[98] conceded that in most of the instances *qdšm* are the heavenly council of God. This is agreed upon by the majority of commentators.[99]

Who are the *bny 'lym*? Literally it means sons of the mighty. A. C. Gaebelein argued that the mighty ones are the kings, the rich, and others dwelling on the earth.[100] The reason is that *Bnei Elim* is not *Bnei Elohim*.[101] The more common interpretation is to see them as angels. Franz Delitzsch[102] suggested that the angels elsewhere are called *bny 'lhym* (e.g., Job 2:1) but are here called *bny 'lym*. That *bny 'lym* is to be taken as double plural of *bn 'l* or like the

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[98]C. H. W. Brekelmans, *The Saints of the Most High and their Kingdom*, Oudtestamentische Studiën (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1965), 308.

[99]Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms 11: 51-100*, AB (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1968), 313. Joseph Addison Alexander, *The Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, m.d.), 370. George Phillips, *The Psalms in Hebrew* (London: John W. Parker, Weststrand, 1856), 268. A. F. Kirkpatrick, *The Book of Psalms* (Cambridge: University Press, 1906), 533.

[100]A. C. Gaebelein, *The Book of Psalms* (Wheaton, Illinois: Van Kampen Press, 1939), 134. From the commentaries I have read, he is alone in this position.

[101]*Ibid.*, 134. Many commentators especially Dahood, Peter Craigie see this phrase analogous to Ugaritic *bn 'ilm* sons of El. See Peter Craigie, *Psalms 1-50* in Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 19 (Texas: Word books, Publishers, 1983), 242.

[102]Franz Delitzsch, A *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, trans. David Eaton (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, n.d.), 47. J. W. Rogerson and J. W. McKay *Psalms 1-50* (Cambridge: University Press, 1977), 130.

angels[107] are but *alicubitas* (localization to one place at a time) and not *omnipraesentia* and are altogether subordinate to him.[108] Even the stars are relegated to the mere retinue of God and rank as celestial attendants of Yahweh (Isa. 40:26).[109] While God admits the holy angels into his council, there is always an unapproachable superiority of God above them, owing to which He never ceases to be the object of their adoring reverence (Job 4:18; 15:15).[110] As Vriezen[111] pointed out so clearly, the idea of God being surrounded by the celestial beings does not detract from His uniqueness but rather they emphasize only His uniqueness. He is the God of gods, their God, too.

'*l n'rs bswd qdšym rbh wnwr' 'l kl sbybyw.*

Ps. 89:8

Here again the angels are called the holy ones who are God's confidential intimates but yet feared by them. The divine name '*l* used here implies what makes Him fearsome is

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[107]Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, trans. James Martin, Vol. 5 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d.), 36.

[108]A. A. Anderson, *The Book of Psalms*. New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 234.

[109]*Ibid.*, 234.

[110]Robert Jamieson, et al., A *Commentary Critical, Experimental and Practical on Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1945), 292.

[111]T. H. C. Vriezen, *An Outline of Old Testament Theology* (Boston: Charles T. Bradford Co., 1958), 180.

his infinite power.[112]

YHWH 'lhy ṣb'wt my kmwd ḥsyn yh w'mntk sbybwtyk.

The full title of *YHWH 'lhy Ṣb'wt* occurs here. As such it occurs about 14 times in the Old Testament.[113] Although Israel is occasionally called the hosts of *YHWH* (Ex. 12:41) the term also refers to the heavenly bodies who are taken either as objects of idolatrous worship (Deut. 4:19; 17:3, 2 Kgs. 17:16, Isa. 34:4, Jer. 33:22, Zeph. 1:5, Dan. 8:10) or as the angels (Jos. 5:14, 15, 1 Kgs, 22:19, 2 Chr. 18:18, and Psalms.[114] For further comments see Isa. 6:3 in the Text Critical Notes.

A shortened form of *Yh* is used instead of the regular tetragrammaton.[115]

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[112]Joseph Addison Alexander, *The Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, n.d.), 371.

[113]2 Sam. 5:10; 1 Kgs. 19:10, 14; Jer. 5:14, 15, 16; 35:17; 44:7; Amos 4:13; 5:14, 15, 16, 27; 6:8; Ps. 89:9.

[114]As Joseph Addison Alexander argued that in both senses God may be described as God of Hosts, i.e., as the sovereign both of the material heavens and of their inhabitants in *Psalms,* 113.

[115]For a detailed study of the tetragrammaton see the following articles/books. Noel Freedman, "YHWH" in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren and trans. by John T. Willis, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and David E. Green Vol. 5 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 500-521. R. de Vaux, "The Revelation of the Divine Name 'YHWH,' Proclamation and Presence." Festschrift G. H. Davies (London, 1970): 48-75. G. H. Parke-Taylor, *Yahweh--The Divine Name in the Bible* (Waterloo: Ontario, 1975).

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Summary of Exegesis

The holy angels are gathered in an assembly to praise Him because God has no equal. There is no comparison, nor resemblance between God and His creatures, and between the infinite and the finite.

mzmwr l'sp 'lhym nṣṣḇ b'dt 'l bqrb 'lhym yšpṭ.

Ps. 82:1

The phrase *'lhym* conveys several meanings. It can mean rulers, judges, who are divine representatives at sacred places or simply reflections of divine majesty and power; divine ones which include God and angels; angels or simply gods who are idols or foreign ones.[116] The *crux interpretum* is: does the first word *'lhym* refer to Yahweh? There are two factors. One is the context and secondly when used of God of Israel or the true God, this term usually takes singular agreement, whereas when used of other gods, it takes plural agreement.[117]

nṣb means "to take one's stand, station oneself, or appointed over."[118] God is the subject. The Niphal

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[116]BDB, 43a-b. See also KB, 52; Fuerst, 42; Scott, *TWOT* 1:93; Ringgren, *TDOT* 1:272-273.

[117]Waltke, 7.4.3b, *Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1990) 122. E.g., Ps. 7:10 and Exod. 20:3. "The supposition that *'lhym* is to be regarded as merely a remnant of earlier polytheistic views (i.e., as originally not a numerical plural) is at least highly improbable, and, moreover would not explain the analogous plurals," GKC, 124g. See also Ludwig Köhler, *Old Testament Theology* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1957), 36-37.

[118]BDB, 662.

participle denotes not so much the suddenness and unpreparedness, but rather, the statue-like immobility and terrifying designedness of his appearance.[119]

'*dt* '*l* means divine assembly. The NEB translation is graphic: the court of heaven.[120]

There is no scholarly consensus as to how to render '*lhym*. Basically there are three positions: (a) The heathen rulers are referred to as '*lhym*. They are seen as gods because they are responsible to run this world according to the laws set by God. Representatives of this view are C. A. and E. G. Briggs,[121] P. Boylan[122] and G. H. A. von Ewald.[123] This position is less popular, though it does address the larger issue of injustice in the world,[124] (b) The second

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[119]Keil and Delitzsch, *Psalms*, 402. "It denotes a deliberate and formal act connected with a definite purpose," says Perowne, *Commentary of the Psalms*, 105.

[120]For parallels in the Ancient Near East see Frank Cross, *JNES* 12:274.

[121]C. A. and E. G. Briggs, *Psalms*, 214-216.

[122]P. Boylan, *The Psalms*, vol. 2 (Dublin: M. H. Gill and Son, 1924), 63.

[123]G. H. A. von Ewald, *Commentary on the Psalms*, trans. E. Johnson, vol. 2 (London: Williams and Norgate, 1881), 141-143.

[124]I think that proponents of this view have a valid point that heathen rulers lay claim to being gods (Ez. 28:2-10) and that God does grant authority over nations to rulers (Prov. 8:15-16). Yet the context makes it unlikely to refer to them. Note: The view that the '*lhym* refers to heathen deities has nothing to be commended for. See W. O. E. Oesterly, *The Psalms* (New York: MacMillan Co., 1939), 374ff.

sees the '*lhym* as the rulers and judges of Israel.[125]

Representatives of this view are the Targums, Midrash,[126] Augustine,[127] Luther[128] Calvin,[129] Hengstenberg,[130] Keil and Delitzsch[131] and J. S. Perowne,[132] and (c) The third view which is gaining ascendancy and proposed by contemporary scholars is that '*lhym* refers to the angels who are members of the divine council.[133] Scholars who hold this view are

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[125]The strength of this interpretation is that we have references of '*lhym* being used to refer to Israelite judges (Exod. 21:6, 20:7f, 27; Ps. 58:2). Furthermore, condemnation of judges and rulers is common in the prophets' denunciations, e.g., Isa. 1:17. The New Testament has a reference to this by Jesus himself in John 10:34-38 which evidently points to judges. Although many older commentators argue for this position from the Jewish and Christian tradition, this position is unsatisfactory to me.

[126]*The Midrash on Psalms*, trans. W. G. Braude, Vol. II (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), 59.

[127]St. Augustine, *Expositions on the Book of Psalms* (Oxford: J. Parker, 1850), 133-134. Although not specific, he believes that the judgment is on the Jews, *ibid*.

[128]J. Pelikan, ed. *Luther's Works*, trans. C. M. Jacobs, vol. XIII (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), 39-72.

[129]John Calvin, *Psalms*, 330.

[130]E. W. Hengstenberg, *Commentary on the Psalms*, trans. J. Thomson and P. Fairbairn, Vol. III (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1948), 29-38.

[131]Keil and Delitzsch, *Psalms*, 402.

[132]J. S. Perowne, *The Book of Psalms*, Vol. I (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 105.

[133]My study of this passage convinces me that this is the best interpretation for the following reasons.
Firstly, the context sets the scene and it appears to be in the heavens. As W. F. Cobb remarked that verse one must be decisive. It is certainly a heavenly court which is

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Jerome,[134] Ibn Ezra,[135] T. K. Cheyne[136] and Derek Kidner.[137]

While there seems to be a general consensus that this passage
talks of the celestial council, there is no unanimous
agreement who is or are the 'lhym to be judged.[138]

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summoned, and members therefore must be heavenly, *The Book of
Psalms* (London: Methuen and Co., 1905), 227.

Secondly, an important ancient version, the Syriac,
supports it by rendering it as angels. This was shown to me
by Dennis Magary.

Thirdly, the idea of foreign rulers being acknowledged
as *'lhym* lacks Scriptural evidence.

Fourthly, we have other references to the celestial
council in the Old Testament and *bqrb 'lhym* stand in
parallelism to
b 'dt 'l.

Fifthly, the phrase "you shall die as men die" makes
more sense if the angels are referred to. If the reference is
to the human beings then it does not make much sense.

Sixthly, we have evidences in the Scripture
pinpointing to the judgement of fallen angels who have teamed
up with Satan, like Isa. 24:21-23 and angels acting in
judicial capacity, Zech. 3; Dan. 4:14, 21. Finally, the
parallels of council of gods in the Ancient Near East must be
reckoned with.

[134]Jerome, while he clearly established the setting of
the psalm as the celestial council, he does not indicate who
is the one receiving judgment. See D. G. Morin (ed.), *Sancti
Hieronymi Presbyteri: Commentarioli in Psalmos*, Vol. III
(Oxoniae: J. Parker, 1895), 74-77.

[135]F. Baethgen refers to him in *Die Psalmen*, Vol. II
(Goettingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1982), 252.

[136]T. K. Cheyne, *The Book of Psalms* (London: Kegan
Paul, Trench and Co., 1888), 231.

[137]Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73-100* (London: Intervarsity
Press, 1975), 297.

[138]Mitchell Dahood and G. Ernest Wright see them as
pagan gods. Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms 51-100* (Garden City:
Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1968), 268. G. Ernest Wright, *The
Old Testament against its Environment* (London: SCM Press,
1968), 31-32. It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss
the Gattung, Sitz im Leben, and so called mythological
elements in this Psalm. For an excellent and detailed study

špṭ has the idea of the exercise of power and authority in regal, administrative and other matters.[139] Elsewhere we are also told that God is the supreme judge (Ps. 50:6; 75:8; 94:2; 96:3).

> *'ny 'mrty 'lhym 'tm uḇny `lywn kllḵm.*
>
> <div align="right">Ps. 82:6</div>

Here *'lhym* also means angels. *bny `lywn* literally means "sons of the most high." This combined epithet occurs nowhere else. It seems to be another term for angels. God by calling them *'lhym* and *bny `lywn* is doing this perhaps as a reminder that they are His created beings and representatives who are accountable to Him.[140] These two terms suggest rank and power.

Summary of Exegesis

A heavenly tribunal in session where God passes judgment on the *'lhym* (angels) for failing to do their job.

Concepts

There is a large amount of data suggesting the existence of a celestial council either explicitly or

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see Julius Morgenstern, "The Mythological Background of Psalm 82," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 14 (1938), 29-126. J. S. Ackerman, "An Exegetical Study of Psalm 82" (Th.D. diss., Harvard Divinity School, 1966.)

[139]Robert D. Culver, s.v. "špṭ," *TWOT* 2:2443.

[140]See R. Murphy, *Book of Psalms* (Minneapolis: James Family Publishing, 1977), 449. As Derek Kidner remarked, ". . . there is no reason whatsoever to make them Canaanite gods," *Psalms 73-100*, 299. *Contra* Dahood, *Psalms 51-100*, 270.

implicitly in the Old Testament. We have observed that in

some passages a specific word for council appears while in

others the members are referred to. From the Pentateuch,

prophetic writings to the Hagiographa the council motif is

present. As early as Gen. 1:26[141] the celestial council was

present.

The divine beings who comprised the council are called

'lhym, bny, 'lm, qdšym, bny 'lyn (Ps. 82:6), *'bdm* (Job 4:18,

Isa. 44:26), *mšrtm* (Ps. 104:4), *śrpm* (Isa. 6:2-6) and *krbm*

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[141]How does one interpret the phrase "Let us make man
in our own image?" The answers are extensive. Some see the
reference to Trinity, e.g., Irenaeus in *The Bible and the
Origin of Man* by Jean de Fraine (New York: Descles Co., 1962),
22; John Calvin in his *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses
called Genesis*, trans., John King, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: Calvin
Translation Society, 1847-50), 91-93; Karl Barth, *Church
Dogmatics*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance and trans.
G. T. Thomson, Vol. III (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1936-62),
191-192; H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis*, 2 vols.
(Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1950), I, 85-88.
    Proponents of "plural of majesty" are S. R. Driver,
The Book of Genesis, Westminster Commentaries (London: Methuen
and Co., 1904), 14. Norman Walker, "Do Plural Nouns of
Majesty Exist in Hebrew?" *VT* VII (April 1957): 208.
    Another School of interpretation is that it refers to
Yahweh's council. Advocates are Frank Cross, "The Council of
Yahweh in Second Isaiah," *JNES* 12 (1953): 275; John Skinner, A
Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis, ICC (Edinburgh:
T. & T. Clark, 1910): 31; W. H. Bennett, ed., *Genesis*, The
Century Bible (Edinburgh: T. C. & E. D. Jack, Ltd., n.d.), 83;
Gerald Cooke, "The Sons of (the) God(s)" *ZAW* 76 (1964): 23.
    In light of the extensive council imagery in the Old
Testament (e.g., Job 38:7) and other relevant passages like
Isa. 6, the "celestial council" interpretation best fits the
narrow and broader context. It is to be noted that whatever
position one takes, there are bound to be some difficulties
since an argument can be made that there is a basic difference
between human beings and angels.

(Gen. 3:24) *mls* (Job 33:23),[142] *rwḥ* (I Kgs. 22:21; Ps. 104:3-6) and `*d* (Job 16:19).[143]

The celestial council does have a military function (Ps. 24:8, 10), also a judicial function where it served as a court (Ps. 82; Job 1,2; Zech. 3).[144] Another aspect of the function of council is to deliver the message of YHWH; often times it is a judicial verdict given by Him or through one of his messengers. Isa. 40:1-8 illustrates Yahweh addressing his messengers. It opens with plural imperatives and in the following verses the herald voices transmit the directives of Yahweh to the council.[145] Other examples are Jer. 23:18, 22; 1 Kgs. 22:5-28; Isa. 6:1-12 and Judg. 5:2. Another vital role

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[142]It means mediator or interpreter. In Qumran IQH 6:13 melis occurs in reference to the angels. See also discussion in Menahem Mansoor, *The Thanksgiving Hymns* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), 83-84, 143.

[143]In relationship to the divine council we have `*dt* '*l* (Ps. 82:1), *sd qdšm* (Ps. 89:8), *qhl qdšm* (Psalm 89:6), *m*` *d* (Isa. 14:13), *sd yhwh* (Jer. 23:18), *sd lh* (Job 15:8), *dr* (Amos 8:14) and `*nny šmyy* (Dan. 7:13) as listed by Patrick D. Miller, Jr., *The Divine Warrior in Early Israel* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973), 66. For more detail on whether *sd* is to be recognized as a word relating to the council, see F. J. Neuberg, "An Unrecognized Meaning of Hebrew *DOR*, *JNES* 9 (1950): 215-217 and P. R. Ackroyd, "The Meaning of Hebrew *DOR*, *JSS* 13 (1966): 3-10 for the suggestion that *dôr* may have the meaning of an assembly. However, this proposal has not gained universal acceptance.

[144]See G. Ernest Wright, *God Who Acts*, 30-41; H. Wheeler Robinson, *Council*, 151-157; G. Widengren, "Early Hebrew Myths and their Interpretation," *Myth, Ritual and Kingship*, ed. S. H. Hooke (Oxford University Press, 1958), 159-164. Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 188-190.

[145]Patrick Miller, *Divine Warrior*, 69; Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth*, 186-188.

of the celestial council is that of worshipping and praising
God (Ps. 29).

Yahweh is the head of the council as He is surrounded
by His coterie of angels. As Whybray asserted, Yahweh did not
reign in "splendid isolation but had his household in
heaven."[146]

It is beyond doubt that His supremacy is unchallenged
by them. While He is exalted, they are subordinated.[147] No
one ever instructed Him or can ever frustrate His plans, as is
proclaimed by the prophet Isaiah.

> Who has set limits to the Spirit of the Lord? What
> counsellor stood at his side to instruct him?
> > Isa. 40:12

> For the Lord of Hosts has prepared his plan: who shall
> frustrate it?
> > Isa. 16:27

Thus a clear distinction is drawn between Yahweh and
his retinue. Though they dwell in the heavens they are not
co-equal with Him. Their immortal status can be terminated of
by Him (Isa. 24:21-23; Ps. 82:1-8). They are simply His
servants and creatures. He created them all (Gen. 2:1) and
their beings are derived from Him. His uniqueness stems from
the fact that He is unequalled and incomparable. This is made
clear in 1 Kgs. 8:23 " . . . O Lord God of Israel, there is
no god like thee in heaven or on earth beneath . . ." Neh.

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[146]R. H. Whybray, *The Heavenly Counsellor in Isaiah
40:13-14* (Cambridge: University Press, 1971), 52.

[147]G. Ernest Wright, *God Who Acts*, 38.

9:6 "Thou alone art the Lord: thou hast made heaven the highest heaven with all its host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. Thou preservest all of them and the host of heaven worships thee."

Thus any imagery that may be used from the Canaanite corpus[148] is simply a poetic device to accentuate the difference between Yahweh and the gods of the nations, as is clearly illustrated by the Psalmist who declares "For the Lord is a great God, a great king over all gods" in Ps. 95:3.

The celestial council is a highly organized constituency under the absolute authority of Yahweh. Biblical data indicate that the celestial council meets regularly before the throne of God (Job 1:6). The celestial beings either give report, praise Him or assist Yahweh in dispensing justice or judgment. Matters that are dealt with relate to the present and future.

They are numerous and their designations as messengers, mighty warriors, holy ones, sons of God, seraphim and cherubim may indicate their different functions.

It is important to note that these angelic beings do not constitute any sort of pantheon[149] because not only were

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[148]It appears natural for the Old Testament writer to use metaphors and imageries from the Canaanites for poetic devices or polemical purposes since they lived alongside. Similarities of terminologies with the Ugaritic literature do not imply imitation of Canaanite models. See Whybray, *Heavenly Counselor*, 40; Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan*, 167.

[149]Whybray, *Heavenly Counselor*, 53.

they not named[150] but they did not share equal power with Yahweh. Their being and authority are derived and not primary.

Also to be noted is that the belief in Yahweh's absolute authority and supremacy did not prevent the Israelite from conceiving Yahweh's council convening in heaven, because deliberation with the members of his council before taking a course of action does not imply the surrender of His prerogatives.[151]

Cabinet

God's cabinet consists primarily of the celestial beings and human beings are part of it. Those beings who constitute the council are so widespread that only the more significant ones will be discussed.

YHWH SABAOTH

The designation of *YHWH Ṣb'wt* presents lexical and syntactical problems. There is no consensus in the scholarly opinion in spite of research.[152] Lexically the word *ṣb'wt* has been understood differently. The three most common

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[150]Vriezen, *Old Testament Theology*, 24.

[151]Whybray, *Heavenly Counselor*, 53.

[152]B. N. Wambacq, *L'épithète divine Jahve Seba'ot* (Paris: de Broumer, 1947). See also W. F. Albright's "Review of B. N. Wambacq, *L'épithète divine Jahve Seba'ot*," *JBL* (1948): 377-387. Also Irving Gefter, "Studies in the Use of YHWH *Seba'ot* in its Variant Forms" (Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 1977).

understandings of *sb'wt* are angelic hosts, Israel's armies and all created orders.[153]   For each of these views scriptural support has been claimed.   Scholars who interpret *sb'wt* as angelic hosts see a parallel between YHWH'S kingship over angelic hosts and Israel's monarchy that angels are deposed gods of the nations.[154]   Those who see *sb'wt* as referring to Israel's armies argue that YHWH is seen as Israel's war god who does battle to defend His people.[155]   Another interpretation is to see the designation emphasizing universality of all created things (cosmic and natural activities) under His control.[156]

Syntactically, if YHWH is a proper noun, it has been argued that it could hardly be a *nomen regens* governing a genitive.   Thus the traditional translation presents a

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[153]Some less common are astral deities where YHWH *sb'wt* is viewed as an abbreviation of YHWH *'lhy sb'wt hššmym,* which are believed to be astral forces YHWH calls to account including perhaps his rebellious subject.   G. W. Hengstenberg and W. E. Barnes, *Haggai and Zechariah* (Cambridge, 1917), 4 represent this view.   Others see it referring to YHWH as a nature deity and regard YHWH *sb'wt* as the most ancient title of god of Israel originated at Sinai.   Advocates of this view are mainly German scholars like J. G. Von Heider, *Vom Geist der Hebräischen Poesie II* (Leipzig, 1825), 81-82.

Still less common is the view advocated by Wellhausen, *Kleine Propheten* (Berlin, 1898), 77 and a handful of German scholars that it refers to a Demonic God.

[154]S. R. Driver, "Lord of Hosts," *Hasting's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. James Hastings (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1898), 3:137-38.

[155]BDB, 830a.

[156]S. R. Driver, *The Book of Joel and Amos* (Cambridge: 1907), 231.

problem. To solve this grammatical problem several proposals
have been made. One solution is to understand it according to
GKC as an "ellipsis whereby the noun which really governs the
genitive, i.e., the appellative idea contained in the proper
name is suppressed.[157] Thus YHWH *Sb'wt* may have originally
been YHWH *'lhy Sb'wt*. Others take the *sb'wt* as an apposition
to the name of YHWH.[158] So W. R. Arnold argued that *sb'wt* is
indeterminate and it is an adjectival genitive and the
rendering of which should be *YHWH Militant*.[159] O. Eissfeldt
translated it as *Jahwe, der Zebaothhafte*.[160] M. Tsevat
contended that it is either noun plus appositive (YHWH, the
sb'wt) or a noun sentence to be translated as YHWH (is) *sb'wt*
(YHWH, the Armies).[161] In contrast, Frank Cross and other
Harvard trained scholars proposed that the divine designation
is to be understood as a hiphil verb plus object (He who

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[157]GKC, 125h.

[158]Paul Joüon, *Grammaire de l'Hebreu Biblique* (Rome:
Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1923), 131o.

[159]W. R. Arnold, *Ephod and Ark* (Cambridge, MA, 1917),
142-143.

[160]O. Eissfeldt, "Jahwe Zebaoth" (1950) *Klein Schriften*
3 (Tubingen, 1966): 102-103. *Sb'wt* is taken as an abstract
plural with the literal meaning *Kriegerischkeit* to be
interpreted as *Mächtigkeit*.

[161]M. Tsevat, "Studies in the Book of Samuel, 4,"
Hebrew Union College Annual 36 (1965): 49-58. He argues that
sb'wt is a plural of extension and importance on the basis of
2 Kgs. 13:14 and Numbers 10:36.

created armies).[162] Tryggve Mettinger[163] on the basis of
examples in the Scripture where 'El epithets are combined with
feminine plural nouns (1 Sam. 2:3, Ps. 94:1 and Jer. 51:56),
postulates that the original name was 'l sb'wt and to be
related to 'El. Furthermore, YHWH was originally a generic
appellative for "god."[164]

Lexically, the word sb' as a noun has a wide range of
meanings. KB lists service in war, hosts, fighting men, the
hosts of Israel, stars, the heavens, service in worship and
hard labor.[165] As a noun it basically means to wage war and
to serve in the armed forces.[166] From comparative
lexicography we discover that its common meaning is *wage
war/army* in Ugaritic,[167] Egyptian,[168] Sabean (Old South

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[162]Frank Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*,
Cambridge, MA, 1973), 65-75. Cross regards YHWH sb'wt as an
original part of a longer formula 'l du yahwi sbaot (El who
creates the heavenly hosts). His basis is comparative
mythological parallels.

[163]T. N. D. Mettinger, "YHWH Sabaoth--The Heavenly King
on the Cherubim Throne," in *Studies in the Period of David and
Solomon and other Essays*, ed. T. Ishida (Tokyo: Yamakawa-
Shupansha, 1982), 127-138 especially 128; 134-135.

[164]He calls attention to an epithet *šamaš līmīma* (*šamaš*
of the thousand) in one of the Armana letters (EA 205.6),
Ibid., 135.

[165]BDB has army, hosts, war, warfare, 838.

[166]*Ibid.*, 790, 838.

[167]*UT*, 472.

[168]KB, 790.

Arabic),[169] and Ethiopic.[170] A logical deduction would

suggest that the root[171] meaning of *ṣb'* is army or to wage

war.

Linguistically, *ṣb'* has several semantic fields of

meaning. We will investigate their usage under two broad

categories--common and special in relationship to God.[172]

In common usage, *ṣb'* is used for constellations,

angels, created order, Israelites' army, war, worship and hard

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[169]*The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago*, ed. by Ignace J. Gelb, Benno Laudsberger and A. Leo Oppenheim (Chicago: The Oriental Institute, 1956-), 16:46.

[170]BDB, 838.

[171]I am aware of the root fallacy that is commonly practiced by evangelical scholars as pointed out by James Barr. Read his article, "Did Isaiah know about Root Meaning?" *ET* 75 (1964): 242. His book on *Comparative Philology and the Text of the Old Testament* (London: Oxford, 1969) deals in detail with the abuses of etymology. However, he is not against using etymology as an understanding of its historical development of its usage. Properly used it can assist in recognition of homonyms, explanation of the semantics of, obscure or rare words in connection with its contexts, as argued in his book, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (London: Oxford, 1961), 109, 158. As correctly pointed out that to insist that a word has an etymological meaning and that it is the only proper one, and any discussion must begin with this original meaning is wrong because we can give any doubtful meanings to crucial words, *ibid.*, 107-108. Thus Scripture can be made to mean anything. A better approach would be *usus loquendi* and *locus classicus*.

[172]As James Barr suggested that words should be grouped according to their semantic fields. Within that general field we are to mark off semantic oppositions between one word and another as precise as possible and then proceed to special contexts and collocations where each word occurred. See *Semantics*, 235. Also John D. Grasmick, *Principles and Practice of Greek Exegesis* (Dallas: Dallas Theological Seminary, 1976), 144-161.

service.[173] As a collocation YHWH *Sb'wt* connotes

military,[174] royalty,[175] created order[176] and celestial

council association.[177]

The formative *Sitz im Leben* is to be located within

the context of Shiloh, where the kingship of YHWH was

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[173]Deut. 4:19; 2 Kgs. 23:5; Isa. 40:26; Isa. 24:21;
Dan. 8:10; 1 Kgs. 22:19; Neh. 9:6; Ps. 103:20, 21; Ps. 148: 2,
3; Gen. 2:1; Isa. 45:12; Exod. 6:26, 12:51; Num. 1:3, 31:6, 7;
Josh. 4:13; Exod. 38:8; Num. 4:3, 8:24; Job 7:1, 10:17; Isa.
40:2; Gen. 21:31; 1 Sam. 28:1.

[174]Although the epithet of YHWH has strong military
connotations, surprisingly it is not mentioned in the
Pentateuch, Joshua, or Judges. No satisfactory answer had
been given. See Dan. 8, Josh. 5:13-15, Isa. 13:14; 4:26;
45:12. The LXX translates the title as *pantokrator* (the
Almighty) at least 100 times suggesting its military
character. Hatch-Redpath, s.v. *pantokrator*, 1053. Also Nah.
2:14; 3:5, Ps. 24:8, 10; 46:8, Jer. 32:18; 50:25, Isa. 10:23;
13:13; 14:24-27; 19:16; 22:5; 24:21-23.

[175]The epithet YHWH *Sb'wt* first occurs in the Samuel
narrative in the prayer of Hannah (1 Sam. 1:3, 11). There is
general agreement that YHWH *Sb'wt* and *yšb hkrbym* are
associated with the kingship of YHWH at Shiloh. For
definitive treatment, see Otto Eissfeldt, 386-397. Similarly,
Ben C. Ollenburger argued that at Shiloh Yahweh was crowned as
king and that the Ark was the symbol of his royalty, either as
a throne, as a footstool, or as something else related to a
throne, in *Zion the City of the Great King* (Sheffield: JSOT
1987); 37. Yahweh's kingship can be seen as early as Exod.
15:8, Num. 23:21, Deut. 33:5. For proofs of the texts'
antiquity see F. M. Cross and
D. N. Freedman, *Studies in Ancient Yahwistic Poetry* (Missoula,
Montana: Scholars' Press, 1975), 45-67, 97-122. See 2 Sam.
6:2, 1 Chron. 13:6, Isa. 37:16, 2 Kgs. 19:15, Ps. 80, Ps.
99:1, Isa. 9:5, Jer. 46:18; 48:15; 51:57, Ps. 89:9, Ps. 24:10;
48:9, Isa. 6:5, Mal. 1:14.

[176]Gen. 2:1, Neh. 9:6, Isa. 45:12, Ps. 33:6.

[177]See Pss. 89:9; 15:6-8, Isa. 28:29, 1 Kgs. 22:19-23,
2 Chron. 18:18-22, Ps. 103:19-22, Ps. 148:1-5, Dan. 8:10-13,
Ps. 89:6-19, Isa. 6, 1 Kgs. 18:15, 2 Kgs. 3:14.

established.[178] The semantic force of the word *sb'wt* is

related to the heavenly king on his cherubim.[179] The

designation of YHWH *Sb'wt* appears in the associative field[180]

of the celestial council. Thus we can conclude that *sb'wt*

does allude to the celestial council.[181] Similarly, another

term, watcher (*'r*) is applied to members of the heavenly

council (Dan. 4:13, 17, 23) who act as agents of God. Seow

concluded that YHWH *Sb'wt* denoted a victorious deity enthroned

on the divine council, hence the related epithet *yšb*

hkrbym.[182]

The best solution to the syntactic problem is to see

it as a construct of relation "YHWH of hosts."[183] In light

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[178]Cf. J. Lyons, *Semantics* (Cambridge, 1977), 607-613 where context is stressed for semantic analysis. *Contra.* Patrick Miller, *Divine Warriors*, 152 who argued that the proper method to determine the term's meaning is not context but reconstruction.

[179]As pointed out by Mettinger, *YHWH SABAOTH*, 123.

[180]Associative field comprises all words that are associated with a particular term in any way while lexical field consists only of words very closely related to one another. See J. F. A. Sawyer, *Semantics in Biblical Research* (SBT 2/24, 1972), 30. Also A *Modern Introduction to Biblical Hebrew* (Boston: Oriel Press, 1976), 166-168.

[181]Mettinger, *YHWH SABAOTH*, 126.

[182]C. L. Seow, *Myth, Drama and the Politics of David's Dance* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars' Press, 1989), 16.

[183]I take it to be a grammatical anomaly. This position has been ably defended by G. R. Driver in "Reflection on Recent Articles," *JBL* 73 (1954): 125-136: GKC 125h; See also J. A. Emerton, "New Light on Israelite Religions. The Implications of the Inscriptions from Kuntillet 'Ajrud'" *ZAW* 94 (1982): 2-9. Also P. K. McCarter, "Aspects of the Religion of the Israelite Monarch: Biblica and Epigraphic Data,"

of ten other forms of variation, YHWH *Sḅ'wt* is the original epithet.[184] YHWH *Sḅ'wt* is a genuine Israelite creation without any counterpart in the Near Eastern milieu.[185]

Celestial Beings

The celestial beings who constitute the hosts are called by different names. They are called: *sb hššmym* referring to angelic beings (1 Kgs. 22:19) and constellations (Deut. 4:19). They worship[186] YHWH and go to war with Him.[187] They are also called *sḅ' hmmrwm* (Isa. 24:21); *lğdyw* in Job 25:3 (squadron), *rbw rḇwn* in Dan. 7:10 (myriads of myriads); *qdšym* in Job 5:1; 15:15, Deut. 33:2, Zech. 14:5, Exod. 15:11, etc. This phrase appears at least 21 times. They participate in warfare (Zech. 14:5 and Ps. 20:2), and act as agents of judgment (Dan. 4:17). Other associative fields are *gbbrym* (warriors) in Joel 3:11, Isa. 13:3; *mšrtym* (ministers) in Ps. 103:21, 104:4; *'bdym* (servants) in Job

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Ancient Israelite Religion (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 140 for examples of DN (name of the nation god) and GN (name of a locality where God is worshipped resulting in a construct chain meaning "DN of GN."

[184]For a statistical analysis see Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, *Theological Worterbuch zum Alten Testament*, ed. by Ernst Jenni and Claus Westerman (Munchen: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1978), s.v. "saba" 2:499. *Contra* Mettinger, *YHWH SABAOTH*, 134 who suggested that the original appellation was *'l sḅ'wt*.

[185]*Contra* Frank Cross, "Yahweh and the God of the Patriarch," *Harvard Theological Review* 55 (1962): 225-259.

[186]Neh. 9:6, Ps. 103:21, Ps. 148:2.

[187]Josh. 5:14-15, Isa. 13:4.

4:18, Isa. 44:26; and also the constellations (stars, moon, planets, sun) in Joshua 10:12-13, Judg. 5:20-21, Zech. 14:6, Isa. 13:10. They sing praises of God's glory in Ps. 91:9, 96:11, 98:4-8, 148:3-43 and serve as God's witness against Israel as in Deut. 4:26, 30:19, 31:28, Isa. 1:2.[188]

In the lexical fields, the most common word is *ml'kym* appearing at least 214 times in the Old Testament corpus.[189] They are messengers with a mission. It can refer to celestial or terrestrial beings depending on the context. The LXX use *anggelos* to translate *ml'k*.

As heavenly beings they are agents of God to execute mercy (Gen. 19:16, 24:7, 40, Isa. 63:9, Ps. 91:11) or judgment (1 Chr. 21:9-30, Ps. 35:5-6, Isa. 37:36). They worship God (Ps. 103:20, 148:2), act as intercessors (Zech. 1:12, Job 33:23), information conveyor (Zech. 1:8-11).[190]

Another designation is *bny h'lhym*[191] (Job 1:6, 2:1, 38:7, Ps. 29:1, 89:7, Dan. 3:25). The title does not suggest

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[188]Cf. G. Ernest Wright, *Biblical Archaeology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 5.

[189]ES, 658-659.

[190]It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the *ml'k* YHWH. See P. de Letter, "Trends in Angelology," *Clergy Monthly* 24 (1960): 213. Also R. Ficker, s.v. "*ml'k bote*," *TWAT* 1: 905-908 for different theories.

[191]Cogent arguments are given for *bny h'lhym* as sons of God in Gen. 6:2, 4 by Stephen C. Lovelady, "The Bene-Haelohim Pericope: A Biblical and Theological Study (M.A. thesis, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1986), 9-163. *Contra*, Charles Crabtree, "B'ne Ha-elohim in the Theology of the Old Testament" (B.Th. Thesis, Trinity Seminary and Bible College, 1956).

genealogical derivation[192] but their close contact with God
in His court. They are subordinate to Him and serve Him.
They participate in His council (Job 1:6, 2:1) and part of
their responsibility is to praise Him (Ps. 29:1, Job 38:7).

Krbym appears 93 times[193] in the Old Testament corpus
in the singular and plural forms. They are transliterated or
translated as living creatures (Ezek. 1:5, 13-15, 19-22,
10:15). They are described as carriers of the throne of
Yahweh (Ezek. 1:4-28, 3:13, 10:1-22) and also engaging in
worshiping and service.[194] They are described as celestial
guards to the trees of life in Gen. 3:24. They carry a
flaming sword.[195] This may suggest that they are heavenly
warriors. They also appear as decorative motif on the
curtains of the tabernacle and on the mercy seat in the Most
Holy Place.[196] They are created beings and are of a variety

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[192]E. G. Kaiser, s.v. "Son of God," *Encyclopedia
Dictionary of Religion* (Washington, D.C.: Corpus Publications,
1979) 3:33-45.

[193]ES, 561. As early as the Pentateuch they are
mentioned at least 19 times (Gen. 3:24, Exod. 25:18, 19:3,
Num. 7:89, etc.)

[194]L. R. Harris, s.v. "k'rub," *TWOT* 1:1036.

[195]Cassuto argues that the flaming sword is a sort of
lightning flash. A *Commentary on the Book of Genesis*, trans.,
Israel Abraham (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1978), 176. Ronald
S. Hendel proposed that the flaming sword is another celestial
being, "The Flame of the Whirling Sword: A Note on Genesis
3:24," *JBL* 104 (1985): 672-673.

[196]Exod. 25:18-20, 22; 36:8, 35.

who are at Yahweh's disposal.[197]

The *śrpym* are mentioned twice in Isaiah 6. Though the exact derivation of them is unknown, they are normally related to the root *śrp* which means "to burn or consume."[198] They surround the throne of God not only to praise Him, but ready for service as indicated by the word *mm'l*.[199] As members of the heavenly choir they proclaim God's holiness and sovereignty with powerful voice.[200]

Finally, another member of the council is *hśtn*.[201]

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[197]See Conrad L. Heureux, *In and Out of Paradise* (New York: Paulist Press, 1983), 23. Though it is commonly accepted that the cherubim is like the winged sphinx, a word of caution by W. Boyd Barrik is timely that the evidence is lacking. See his article, "The Straight-legged Cherubim of Ezekiel's inaugural vision (Ezekiel 1:7a)," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 44 (1982): 548.

[198]BDB, 976-977.

[199]Henderson, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah*, 50.

[200]They are to be seen as intelligent beings with effulgent appearance rather that "serpent like lightnings" as proposed by Cheyne, *Isaiah*, 39 or "winged dragons" as affirmed by Delitzsch, *Isaiah*, 180 due to archaeological artifacts. James H. Lloyd has argued that the Cherubim and Living Beings are all the same creatures. See his thesis "Cherubim, Seraphim and Living Beings: A Study in Angelic Identification." (Th.M. thesis, Grace Theological Seminary, 1984), 4-64.

[201]Those who do not see him as part of the council argue that the prepositional phrase *btkm* (among them) and *gm* (other than) suggests that he is an outsider. See Francis I. Andersen, *Job* (London: Intervarsity Press, 1976), 82. I believe he is wrong. God was the initiator of the conversation and the question he asked does not suggest malice. This does not in any way imply that God was consulting him. Furthermore, *gm* is used to single him out because he will be playing a specific role. The preposition *btk* indicates that he had a prominent place in the assembly, says Driver and Gray, *Job*, 11. As John Hartley argued, "But

The definite article suggests that it is a title rather than a personal name.[202] This figure here is not to be associated with the fully developed character of the later Jewish and Christian Satan or devil as correctly pointed out by Pope.[203]

The root may have come from the verb *śtn* which means "to come in the way," "oppose," or "treat with enmity."[204] This opposition can take the form of slander as argued by Dahood[205] in Ps. 38:21; 71:13; 109:4, 20, 29. This verb appears six times in the Old Testament generally as a participle of one who has enmity or animosity.[206] In passages like Job 1-2, Ps. 109:6, 1 Chr. 21:1 and Zech. 3:1-2, the role of this servant in Yahweh's court is that of an

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the main function of this assembly here is to provide an open forum in which Yahweh permits the testing of Job," in *The Book of Job* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 72.

[202]John Sailhamer has correctly suggested that the lack of article in the word *śtn* was to differentiate between an adversary (Israel's enemies) as in 1 Chron. 21 in contrast to the being *Satan*. See his article "1 Chronicles 21:1-A Study in Inter-Biblical Interpretation," *Trinity Journal* (1989): 42. Note that a noun without the article means adversary or enemy.

[203]Marvin H. Pope, *Job* AB (New York: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1973), 9. Also John Hartley, *Job*, 71.

[204]Keil and Delitzsch, *Job*, 53. *Contra* N. H. Tur-Sinai who suggested that *stn* was originally pronounced as *stn* from the root *swt*--to rove about. Thus he is an officer who runs to and fro, *Book of Job* (Jerusalem: Kiryath Sepher, 1967), 34-35. But this does not account for the -an ending and the semantic connection is hardly demonstrable.

[205]Psalms I, 236; Psalms II, 73; Psalms III, 101-02. KB cites an Akkadian cognate *šatānu*, "to attack?" 918.

[206]J. Barton Payne, s.v. "Satan." *TWOT* 2: 2252.

accuser.[207]   Thus *śṭn* functions both as an adversary[208] and

an accuser.[209]

When *hśśṭn* came with the other attendants possibly to

give a ministry report, YHWH enquired his whereabouts.[210]

This roving investigator, *agent provocateur* and vagabond's

response "*mśśwṭ b'rs wmhṯhlk*" does not suggest idle wandering

but "rather purposeful and unresting service, eagerly seeking

to uncover the failings of men. Satan takes his duty too

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[207]Walter L. Michel, *Job*, 15. See also John Hartley,
Job, 72, footnote 7.

[208]In an excellent monograph, Peggy Day has argued
cogently the following: *śṭn* with the definite article in Job
1-2 has forensic connotation (34). It cannot be proven that
Israel had an office of an accuser (39). The word *śṭn* may
mean "adversary" which has a semantic range of terrestrial (1
Sam. 29; 1 Kgs. 5, 11) and celestial (Num. 22) spheres. For
the word "accuser" it may have a human referent (2 Sam. 19;
Ps. 109) or a divine referent (1 Chr. 21). Anyone of the
members may take the role of *śṭn*. Thus there could be many
śṭnm (25-44). I accept her conclusions except for her
statement that there is no Satan in the Hebrew Bible (62) and
that the Book of Job is folk tale (70). Otherwise it is one
of the better monographs. See her monograph, *An Adversary in
Heaven* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1988).

[209]Peggy Day pointed out that the other ancient Semitic
languages have no cognate for the noun *śṭn* although there are
functional parallels in Akkadian *bel debabi*, 40. To see *hśṭn*
as God's secret agents who were called "eyes and ears of the
king," (cf. Zech. 4:10b) patterned after the Persian system of
secret police is extremely unconvincing and irreconcilable with
the omniscience of God as taught in the Old Testament. See
Tur-Sinai, 40. Cf. M. J. Gruenthaner, "The Demonology of the
Old Testament," *CBQ* 6 (1944): 6-27.

[210]H. H. Rowley adduced rightly that God's asking *hśṭn*
his whereabouts is not due to His ignorance but that "the
question is merely the signal for Satan to speak," in *Job*, 31.

seriously, until it poisons his own nature," remarked Rowley.[211]

As one of the sons of God, *hśśtn* is subordinate to YHWH who acts not on his own initiative or authority but YHWH's. As His subject he cannot move beyond the perimeter of YHWH's permission.[212] Though *hśśtn* is an adversary and accuser, ultimately he still serves the purpose of YHWH since He makes even "his evil ministers to do His purpose of salvation, and the working out of His plan in the government of the world.[213]

Terrestrial Beings

In the Council of Yahweh, human beings are thought by some to be admitted to it, especially the prophets as seen from the prophetic literature of Jer. 23:18-22, Zech. 3:1-10, Isa. 6:1-13, Ezek. 1:4-28.[214] The mark of a true prophet is one who has ʻ*md bsd* YHWH[215] which refers "to a heavenly

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[211]*Ibid.*, 31. Cf. Driver and Gray, "Thus the Satan, if a vagabond, is yet a vagabond with a purpose: he scours the earth, leaving no corner unvisited, that he may discover the failings of men," in *Job*, 12.

[212]Driver and Gray, *Job*, 10-11.

[213]Keil and Delitzsch, *Job*, 54.

[214]Cf. Gen. 18:16-33, Zech. 3:1-10, Job 29:4; 15:8.

[215]E. Henderson suggests that "to stand in the counsel of any one is to be familiarly and certainly acquainted with it . . . The language is borrowed from the custom of ministers or royal servants being present in a standing posture auric deliberation in the East," 149. See *The Book of the Prophet Jeremiah* (Andover: Warren F. Draper, 1868). Cf. Jer. 15:19, 18:20 where same concept appears.

council meeting to which prophets are admitted to stand around the divine throne with the other courtiers and hear Yahweh's words," remarked Whybray.[216] Thus the prophet's message carries weight and is authoritative. A true prophet and a false prophet is differentiated on the basis of having stood in YHWH's council (Jer. 23:18-22).[217] The prophet or messenger who has received a message from the Council "has no freedom to give his own opinion, but can only give the verdict reached by the government in heaven.[218]

There is no agreement whether the prophets are members of the divine council or privy to the council. H. Wheeler Robinson[219] argued on the basis of corporate personality that a prophet as God's representative is a member of the council. Similarly L. Elliot Binns[220] who concurred saying that

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[216]Whybray, *Heavenly Counselor*, 52. Cf. Amos 3:7, Prov. 11:13; 20:19; 25:9. See also Ernest W. Nicholson, *The Book of the Prophet Jeremiah* (Cambridge: University Press, 1973), 197. See Tomotoshi Sugimoto, "Jeremiah Criteria for True and False Prophecy," (M.A. thesis, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1984), 101-103.

[217]The word of council is *sd* with its derivative meaning "plan" vouchsafed to the inner circle around Yahweh. See W. L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 635.

[218]Walter Brueggemann, *To Pluck Up, To Tear Down* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 204.

[219]H. Wheeler Robinson, *Corporate Personality in Ancient Israel*, rev. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 196.

[220]L. Elliot Binns, *The Book of the Prophet Jeremiah* (London: Methuen and Co., Ltd., 1919), 177. *Contra* Gerald Cooke who said that we are never told that the prophet actually became a member of the divine council but only that

Jeremiah would not deny that he himself stood in God's council since the fulfillment of his warning in due time would have shown that. Lawrence Boadt has aptly asserted:

> . . . the prophetic examples all point to a certain understanding of their role in which the certitude that God speaks through them comes from an experience of actually being in heavenly court. Whether this experience was a vision, an ecstatic rapture, a dream or matter of hearing something, we cannot know for sure. Possibly the Prophet entered into the divine dialogue in the midst of a profoundly silent meditation.[221]

Relationship

The Old Testament is very explicit that YHWH is the Convener of the council with inherent authority and power. He is called God of gods,[222] YHWH/God of Hosts,[223] God Most High[224] and God the Warrior.[225]

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he had access to it in visionary experience, in *The Son of (the) God(s)*, 41. However, the technical use of `md bsd` YHWH may mitigate against it.

[221]Lawrence Boadt, *Jeremiah 1-25* (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1982), 187. Note that *sôd* is also used for confidential relationships between friends.

[222]Josh. 22:22, Deut. 10:17, Pss. 50:1; 62:1; 77:1, Dan. 2:47; 11:36.

[223]1 Sam. 1:3, 1 Kgs. 18:15, Isa. 8:13, Jer. 7:3. This name occurs 285 times.

[224]Gen. 14:9, Num. 24:16, Deut. 32:8, 1 Sam. 2:10, Isa. 14:14. For a general understanding of God's other names, see Vriezen, *Old Testament Theology*, 194-198; Ludwig Köhler, *Old Testament Theology*, 36-58.

[225]Though the phrase "God of war" does not occur but only `'š mlhmh` (man of war in Exod. 15:3), the imagery of God as a warrior is abundant. For details see Peter C. Craigie's chapter on "God the Warrior" in *The Problem of War in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 33-44; Millard C. Lind, *Yahweh is a Warrior* (Kitchener, Ontario: Herald Press,

What he says cannot be countermanded. YHWH is the majestic king sitting on His throne with the celestial members surrounding Him ready to do His will.[226] Though the council may deliberate, there is no chaos within that meeting. Yahweh has the final word (Gen. 1:26-27).

The Bible does not tell us much of the council's interaction although we have references to council members talking to each other.[227] When the council is in session communication is either directed to the Lord[228] or they are engaging in praises (Isa. 6:3, Ezek. 3:12). There does not seem to be any activity that is initiated without Yahweh's directives.[229] Subjects to be discussed are brought forth by the Lord.[230] Ultimately the celestial council rests on His authority, for He alone issues commands (Isa. 45:12).

Role

They are basically God's agents. They participated

1980), 24-38; Marlin E. Thomas, "Yahweh War in Early Israel: An Enquiry into the Significance of God's Role in the Early Wars of Israel," (Th.M. thesis, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1981).

[226]1 Kgs. 22:19, Isa. 6:1-2, Dan. 7:9-10.

[227]Dan. 8:13, 16; 12:5-7, Isa. 6:3, Zech. 1:11; 2:3-5.

[228]Job 1:7-11; 2:2-5, Ezek. 9:11, 2 Chr. 18:19-21, 1 Kgs. 22:20-22.

[229]See Dan. 4:17, 24.

[230]See Gen. 1:26; 3:22; 11:7, Job 1:7-8; 2:2-3, Ps 82:1-7, Zech. 3:2, Ezek. 9:1-5; 10:1-2, Isa. 6:8, 2 Chr. 18:19, 1 Kgs. 22:20.

with God in creation (Gen. 1:26, Job 38:7); send messengers from the council (Gen. 19:1-29, 2 Kgs. 1:3, 15, Isa. 48:20); have responsibilities over nations (Deut. 4:19; 32:8, Dan. 10:13; 20:20; 12:1.)..

They interpret God's word (Zech. 1:7; 6:8, Ezek. 40, Dan. 7:16-27). They intercede (Zech. 1:12). They help people on behalf of Yahweh (Isa. 41:27, Dan. 3:28, 6:22; Num. 20:16). They patrol the world (Zech. 1:8-17, 6:1-8). They are also involved in combat (Hab. 2:1-19, 2 Kgs. 6:15-17, Judg. 5:20-21). They are executors of God's judgment (Dan. 7:9-27, Zech. 5:5-11, 2 Kgs. 19:35, Job 15:1, 1 Sam. 18:10); agents of God's wrath Ezek. 9:1-11, Ps. 78:49, Exod. 12:23). They serve as witness in God's court (Zech. 3:10, Deut. 31:28, Micah 6:1-2, Ps. 75:2). They labor solely for Yahweh because He is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Summary

The council of Yahweh meets with His coterie of celestial beings in matters pertaining to His people. It is an organized and a dynamic body under His supreme leadership. His council consists of celestial beings who are not gods but creatures. Prophets might have possibly gained access to it. Their function is to assist Him in judgment, be His task force, and give homage and praises to the Almighty.

Two of the celestial beings are named Michael and Gabriel. Michael is mentioned in a military and judicial context related to eschatological intervention on behalf of

God's people, while Gabriel has an interpretive function.

Although the celestial beings have different names like *bny 'lhym*, *qdšym*, *ṣb'wt*, *ml'kym*, *gbbrym*, etc., they are beings created to serve God and to assist Him. Their names suggest their relationship to YHWH rather than their genealogical derivation. In sum, they are His appointed[231] ministers and messengers on errands for God.

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[231]Angels have powers to appear and disappear, strike blindness, destroy armies, protect, perform constructive and destructive mission as part of God's judgments, interpret Yahweh's secrets, etc.

CHAPTER FIVE

A COMPARATIVE STUDY ON PANTHEONS

Cosmic Views

Correspondence

In light of their geographical locations, the Israelites and the Canaanites shared some cultural solidarity[1] and literary affinity.[2] Morton Smith[3] has argued that in the Near Eastern world there is a common theology that pervaded their worldview. The Canaanites and Israelites sought blessings, protection from their God(s) often accompanied by sacrifices.

Even the name of God in the Old Testament like El, El Elyon, El Shadai were taken from common Semitic[4] culture. Nature imagery was used in both cultures in association with

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[1]See G. Herbert Livingston, *The Pentateuch In Its Cultural Environment* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1974), 181-186.

[2]Peter C. Craigie, *Ugarit and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 181-186.

[3]Morton Smith, "Common Theology of Ancient Near East," *JBL* (1952): 135-147.

[4]G. Herbert Livingston, *The Pentateuch*, 182.

the action of the deities.[5]

The god(s) were flattered in prayer and were described anthropomorphically as both merciful and strong. That resulted in bonding between the nation and a god.[6] Thus John Bright asserted:

> The Ras Shamra texts and other evidence show that Israels' sacrificial system, though less elaborate, had numerous similarities to that of the Canaanites in types of animals offered and, to some degree in terminology and outward form of the various sacrifices some connection must be assumed.[7]

Furthermore, in recent years a storm has been brewing concerning Israel's practice of the cults of the dead. In the past, scholars like Kaufmann,[8] de Vaux[9] and Ernest Wright[10] argued vehemently that such practice was non-existent.

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[5]Miller, Israelite Religion," *The Hebrew Bible and its Modern Interpreters*, eds. Douglas A. Knight and Gene M. Tucker, Vol. I (Chico, Cal.: Scholars Press, 1985), 211-212.

[6]Morton Smith, *Common Theology*, 138-142. Cf. John White who listed more areas where similarities acknowledged to a greater extent. See his essay, "Universalization of History in Deuteronomy-Isaiah," *Scripture in Context: Essays on the Comparative method*, eds. Carl Evans et.al. (Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1980), 179-182.

[7]John Bright, A *History of Israel*, 2d ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 197), 163. Cf. G. E. Wright who remarked that it is now evident that much of the sacrificial ritual food found in the book of Leviticus was borrowed from Canaan, in *Biblical Archaeology* 2d ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), 117.

[8]Y. Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel*, trans. and abridged by M. Greenberg (New York: Schocken, 1960), 312.

[9]R. de Vaux, *Ancient Israel* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961), 60.

[10]G. E. Wright, *Deuteronomy* (New York: Abingdon, 1953), 687.

However, in light of ancient Near Eastern comparative

materials discovered at Ebla, Mari, and Ugarit, modern

scholarship has begun to suggest that such practices did exist

in Israel. George C. Heider did a thorough job in reassessing

the cult of Molek.[11] He was followed by author Theodore J.

Lewis[12] who went one step further in assembling Ugaritic and

Biblical evidence for the existence of such practice. The

fact that there was a lack of distinction between the

Israelite and non Israelite burials throughout Palestine in

Iron I and II stages buttressed his argument.[13] This has led

J. Roy Porter to claim:

> . . . Israel formed part of the ancient Near Eastern world
> and it seems clear that many of the elements which help
> make up the view point and structure of Israelite
> historiography find their parallels in the surrounding
> civilizations, suggesting that Israel was heir to already
> established ideas of history and practices of history-
> writing.[14]

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[11]See George C. Heider, *The Cult of Molek: A Reassessment* (JSOT Press: Sheffield, 1985).

[12]Theodore H. Lewis, *Cults of the Dead In Ancient Israel and Ugarit* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1989).

[13]*Ibid.*, 181. See also another new monograph on *Molech: A God of Human Sacrifices in the Old Testament* by John Day (Cambridge University: Oriental Publications: 41, 1989).

[14]J. Roy Porter, "Old Testament Histography," *Tradition and Interpretation: Essays by members of the Society for Old Testament Study*, ed., George Anderson (Oxford, England: Clarendom, 1979), 127. Cf. Jon D. Levenson who also asserted that "almost all the elements of Israel's beliefs in the oneness/uniqueness of YHWH show convincing parallels in the Gentile world," in *Sinai and Zion* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 66.

Contrast

Monotheism Versus Polytheism

This is the most obvious contrast when we compare the Biblical worldview and the Canaanite worldview. The Canaanite gods were characterized by conflict, caprice, plurality and were limited in power. As Jack Finegan has pointed out:[15]

> Canaanite religion was not only polytheistic but also characterized by much that was sanguinary and sensual, features presumably reflecting various aspects of daily life . .

Yehezkel Kaufmann pointed out that the difference between Yahweh and all other gods is the possession of ultimate power. He said:[16]

> . . . the gods are not the source of all that is, nor do they transcend the universe. They are, rather, part of a realm precedent to and independent of them. They are noted in this realm and are bound by nature, are subservient to its laws. To be sure paganism has personal gods who create and govern the world of men. But a divine will, sovereign and absolute, which governs all and is the cause of all being--such a conception is unknown.

God's Incomparability Versus Comparability of the Gods

The most significant monograph in recent years has been written by C. J. Labuschagne who has argued convincingly that the central theme of the Old Testament is Yahweh's incomparability through the use of negation. Israel knew one

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[15]Jack Finegan, *Myth and Mystery*, 153.

[16]Yehezkel Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel* (New York, 1972), 21-22. H. W. F. Saggs remarked that God is not immanent in the heavenly bodies or the wind . . . God is not representable in human form or animal form, . . . the divine has not a multiplicity of forms," *The Encounter with the Divine in Mesopotamia and Israel* (London, 1978), 92.

thing, and that was that her religion was different from other religions exactly *because her God was different from all other gods*.[17] Two examples of the use of the negation are: "There is none . . ." and in rhetorical questions like "Who is like . . .?"[18] He concluded that:

> The dominant characteristic causing Yahweh to be incomparable is His miraculous intervention in history as the redeeming God. This obviously includes a whole range of concatenated qualities: He is warrior, great, mighty, holy . . . Through the whole of the Old Testament there is a very real and close connection between Yahweh's incomparability and the fact that *He intervenes in history as the redeeming God.*[19]

Conversely, the gods of the nations could not redeem nor render assistance when people were in dire need. They were unable to work miracles. They were gods who were made with human hands. Thus it was their *significance* that was denied rather than their *existence*.[20] It was simply Elohim versus Elilim!

God of History Versus Gods of Nature

Yahweh was considered as Lord over nature. They refused to identify Him with natural phenomena. So they

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[17]C. J. Labuschagne, *The Incomparability of Yahweh in the Old Testament* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1966), 4.

[18]See Exod. 8:6, Ps. 81:8, Deut. 33:26, 1 Sam. 2:2, 2 Sam. 7:22, 1 Kgs. 8:23, Jer. 10:6, Pss. 35:10; 89:9, Exod. 15:11, Mic. 7:18, Ps. 77:14.

[19]C. J. Labuschagne, *Yahweh*, 91. See Exod. 20:2. "This act of redemption became the foundation of the Israelite belief, *ibid.*, 136.

[20]*Ibid.*, 148.

"bound in the bundle of life" with God who was not immanent in nature but the Creator of nature.[21]

On the other hand, the Canaanite viewed nature as significant. As George Ernest Wright said, "Nature with its changing season was cyclical, and human life constantly integrating itself with nature by means of cultic activity . . ."[22] The Israelites' interest in nature was only in the way God used it with His historical acts to reveal Himself and accomplish His purpose.[23]

The Israelites had an overall understanding of history where God did intervene in human affairs. Yahweh worked His plan in the historical arena. Herbert Butterfield concluded that:

> . . . the tradition which came to dominate Israel attached itself to the God of history rather than the God of nature. The Yahweh who brought his children out of the land of Egypt seemed to matter more than even the Yahweh who created the world.[24]

As the Lord of history, Yahweh was unaffected by the cycles of nature and he set Himself to accomplish His plans. Thus the Israelites' confession of faith were basically historical reviews of what God had done and how the people

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[21]George E. Wright, *Biblical Archaeology*, 24.

[22]George Ernest Wright, "Old Testament against its Environment," *Studies in Biblical Theology*, vol. 8 (London: SCM, 1950), 71.

[23]*Ibid.*, 71.

[24]Herbert Butterfield, *The Origins*, 86.

responded.[25]

Though it might be possible to see the intervention of the Canaanite deities, it must not be overlooked that it was more of divine maintenance of the status quo rather than a move towards some ultimate goal. Wilfrid Lambert asserted that the deities intervened to maintain certain cultic norms when angered by the kings who defiled the shrines. Furthermore, destruction by deities would be temporary and that city would rebound to its former glory and receive special blessings of the gods. But there was no change.[26]

But the intervention of Yahweh through His prophets was a call to social and religious repentance and it was truly *Heilsgeschichte*. Even James Barr conceded:[27]

> . . . there really is a *Heilsgeschichte*, a series of
> events set within the plan of human life and in
> historical sequence, through which God revealed
> himself . . . this can be taken as the central theme
> of the Bible, that it forms the main link between the
> Old and New Testaments, and that its presence and
> importance clearly marks the biblical faith off from
> other religions.

In a recent monograph,[28] Jeaneane D. Fowler has convincingly argued and shown that the religion of Israel was highly distinct from other people's through analyzing the

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[25]George E. Wright, *Old Testament*, 71.

[26]Wilfrid Lambert, *History and the Gods*, 173-175.

[27]James Barr, "The Interpretation of Scripture: II. Revelation through History in the Old Testament and in Modern Theology," *Interpretation* 17 (1963): 201.

[28]Jeaneane D. Fowler, *Theophoric Personal Names in Ancient Hebrew* (JSOT Press: Sheffield, 1988).

theophoric personal names in the Hebrew language. Hebrew
religion was *sui generis* in that it was monotheistic and thus
there was no divine consort for the Israelite God, so that
female deities are totally lacking in Hebrew.[29]

In sum, Kenneth A. Kitchen's words are to be heeded:

> It should be said that there is nothing inherently
> wrong in cultural borrowing or transfer: it can be a
> source of enrichment. And it is worth remarking that
> the God of the Old Testament is portrayed as
> exercising control not only over Israel, but also over
> Israel's environment.
>
> On the other hand, denial of unique elements in any
> culture, or misreading the elements of one culture in
> terms of another, only produces gross distortion of the
> understandings, whether it be in relation to Old Testament
> religion and literature or to any other Ancient Near
> Eastern culture . . .[30]

Councils

Correspondence

Substantiation

Both the Canaanite and the Hebrew Literature
substantiate the existence of a celestial council. Celestial
beings are part of the council. Both have messengers.

Size

Both literatures confirm the myriads of beings who

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[29]*Ibid.*, 313.

[30]K. A. Kitchen, *Ancient Orient and Old Testament*
(Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1966), 87-88. Cf. Claus
Schedl's statement that Israel knew the old myths but "the
prophets and poets make use of this cultural find in an effort
to describe the truly singular power and grandeur of Yahweh,"
in *History of the Old Testament*, vol. I (New York: Alba House,
1973), 267.

are members of the council. They are part of the spiritual realm. There are good and evil celestial beings. They are depicted in various forms.

Service

The major deities would have apprentice gods who have various functions and Yahweh has his assistance.

Strength

They are described as being more powerful than human beings. They can protect as well as harm.

Similarity

Both languages have common terms like *ml'k*. A series of imperatives in the message is the style of the messengers. They also use different terms such as the common designation for assembly in the Ugaritic is *phr* and *mhrt* which appear nowhere in Scripture.[31]

Contrast

Structure

The Canaanite corpus clearly establishes a pantheon of gods and goddesses that makes up the council. The Hebrew corpus does not. There is a sharing of powers among the pantheon in the Canaanite council but not in the Bible. YHWH holds the supreme and absolute power. In fact, He is the

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[31]Patrick Miller's explanation is Lexical Shift, in *Divine Warrior*, 70.

council.

Status

Members of the Canaanite pantheon are gods and are identified by names. Any major god can overrule the council. They have major and minor deities. This is not so of the celestial council in the Bible. The celestial beings do not usurp God's power or authority. They are simply His attendants waiting to do His will. They are not co-equal or co-eternal with YHWH. They are never presented as lesser gods. Indeed the heavenly beings were not independent, self-sufficient, major deities, but part of a coterie of beings subject to YHWH's will. This is not so elsewhere.[32]

Style

The style of leadership appears to be laissez faire. In the Canaanite council you find competition, conflict, clashes where a coterie of contumacious, cantankerous gods jockeying for power and kingship. You also have younger deities dethroning older deities in conflict. This is not true for the council of YHWH.

Summons

A council can be convened when the security of the pantheon is jeopardized. Calamities that befall on mankind does threaten their existence. The gods would then be summoned by any major deity who expressed and communicated the

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[32]*Ibid.*, 70.

command through a messenger. Final decisions of the council would be announced by divine messengers. The reverse is not true for the celestial council of the Hebrews.

Species

In the Canaanite pantheon the sons of gods are gods of the pantheon who were the result of theogony. The older gods fathered newer gods. In the Bible, the celestial beings are called sons of gods not to indicate their genealogy but that they are a special class of being. Theogony is absent from the Biblical council.

Specifics

While the celestial beings in the Canaanite corpus are divine arbiters of human destiny, whereas the angels in the celestial council are never mentioned as judges of mankind. They are only executors of judgment that God decrees.

Special Service

The celestial beings in the Scripture take delight in worshipping and praising God. The seraphim and cherubim have distinct functions. Both are in close relationship with God. The seraphim surround the throne of God and are members of the heavenly choir proclaiming God's holiness and cosmic sovereignty antiphonally. Cherubim perform sentinel duties and are perhaps the closest attendants of YHWH. They are described anthropomorphically like four faced creatures, four-

winged, possessing multiple vision, etc. The worshipping and praising aspect is absent in the members of the Canaanite council.

Conclusion

In light of the data presented, there are more contrasts than correspondences. Hence it is difficult to make out a dependence of the Hebrew theology on the Canaanites. Patrick Miller summarizes the difference best when he concluded:

> . . . the polytheistic impulse of surrounding cultures tend to produce the conception of the divine assembly marked by specificity, complexity, independence, and democratic rule, whereas the monotheistic impulse of Israelite religion tended toward a notion of the council of Yahweh marked by anonymity, uniformity, powerlessness, and autocratic rule.[33]

Polytheism at times certainly infiltrated into the worldview and cultural life of the Israelites as evidenced by the denunciation of the prophets who called upon the people to repent. However, in its final expression the Israelite people rejected a worldview of polytheism and arrived at a radically different understanding of God and His relation to man and the world.[34]

Therefore, if they were asked to account for the ordered world and man's unique place in it, their answer would simply be Yahweh! "Who ruled the universe and was the creator

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[33]*Ibid.*, 74.

[34]Ernest W. Nicholson, *God and His People* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 201.

of life?" Yahweh! "What was the basis of the formation of Israel as God's chosen people?" Yahweh! "Who was the incomparable God?" Yahweh![35]

Construct

In any comparative study of worldview and culture of the Canaanites and Israelites three questions ultimately arise. Since Israel lived alongside with her neighbors, did she borrow or imbibe her neighbors' ideas, worldviews, culture, theology, etc? If she did, to what extent? If she did not, how do we explain a number of similarities of vocabulary, grammatical and poetic structures and parallelism?

I would like to propose a model[36] which represents the various views.

Divergence

One paradigm sees Israel and her neighbors dealing with separate dimensions of reality and experience. There is no borrowing whatsoever of ideas, structures and lifestyle. Representatives of this view would include Yehezkal Kaufmann, Irving Zeitlin and strict fundamentalists.

Distance

Both Israel and Canaan saw the same realities but in

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[35]Eakin, *Culture and Religion*, 123.

[36]I am indebted to J. Robert Nelson for this model which was used for another purpose. *Science and our Trouble Conscience* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 43.

different ways. Representatives of this group would be George

Ernest Wright, Helmer Ringgren, Theodore Vriezen, W. F.

Albright and some evangelicals.[37] There is no borrowing of

theology. The main purpose of using Canaanite vocabulary

would be for polemical purposes. Any similarities in both

cultures are usually traced back to a common tradition. As

Helmer Ringgren articulated:

> Similarities between Biblical and extra-biblical texts
> are not necessarily due to foreign influence but they
> shared a common heritage.[38]

Dialogue

According to a view commonly held among modern

scholars, the Israelites and Canaanites interacted with each

other. Their basic approach to realities was the same since

they were dealing with similar subject matters. In the

process, Israelites borrowed some if not all of the concepts

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[37]Walter Kaiser argues that the cosmological structure
of the Ancient Near East is different from the Israelite
conception. He said "the worldview of a three storied
universe is the ingenuity and imagination of original
raconteurs." 57 "The Literary Form of Genesis 1-11," *New
Perspectives in the Old Testament*, edited by Barton Payne
(Waco: Word Book Publishers, 1970). See also his article on
"*May, mayim*" section 1187, 500-503 in *TWOT*, vol. 1 (Chicago:
Moody Press, 1980) ed. R. Laird Harris, etal. See also John
N. Oswalt, "The Myth of the Dragon and Old Testament Faith,"
The Evangelical Quarterly 19 (1977): 163-172. He said that
after the Exodus (and perhaps before) myth formed no part of
normative Hebrew religion. This is reflected in Gen. 1 where
the writer is careful to expunge any appearance of such
allusion (myth), 167-168.

[38]Helmer Ringgren, "The impact of the Ancient Near East
on Israelite Tradition," in *Tradition and Theology on the Old
Testament*, ed. Douglas Knight (London: SPCK, 1977), 45.

from them. In the process, demythologization, adaptive
transformation and adaptive modification took place.[39] Israel
is seen as drawing her beliefs and inheriting some values from
her neighbors but in the end she moved beyond the contemporary
cultures. Frank Cross suggested that Israel emerged from the
old matrix of Canaanite beliefs and adapted them in new
form.[40] Scholars who hold this view are Klaus Koch, John
Hayes, Frank Cross, Patrick Miller and others.

Disjunction

Both cultures interacted and approached the same
realities in the same way but *retaining their separate
identity*. It sees the presence of the so called Canaanite
vocabulary and mythical allusions like Rahab, Leviathan, not
in terms of borrowing but as metaphors that corresponded to
reality. Othmar Keel who used Near Eastern Iconography to
show common heritage conceded that "Israel's conception of God
could not be easily harmonized with the various conceptions of
God prevalent in the new environment."[41] G. B. Caird,[42]

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[39]See Walter Brueggemann, "A Shape for Old Testament
Theology, I: Structural Legitimation," *CBQ* 47 (1985): 28-46.

[40]Frank Cross, *Canaanite Myth*, 143.

[41]Othmar Keel, 178.

[42]"Myths and eschatology are used in the Old Testament
and New Testament as metaphor systems for theological
interpretations of historical events," 219. *The Language and
Imagery of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980).

Ronald Allen,[43] and Theodore H. Gaster[44] are of this view.

Developmental

Israelites and Canaanites approached reality in the same way and in the process absorbed the Canaanite culture and worldviews. It was overtaken by so called higher culture of the Canaanites. Thus the uniqueness of Israel was lost. Scholars of this view are Gösta Ahlström, Julius Wellhausen, Rolf Rendtorff, and others. As Gösta Ahlström remarked:[45]

> Although the people abandoned the Canaanite societies, they took with them the culture and religion which they had always known and retained them in their new settlements.

Conclusion

In light of my research, the model that best fits the data and explains Israel's relation to her neighbors is the *disjunction model*. It must be admitted that whatever Israel borrowed, they certainly borrowed the Canaanite alphabet! What was once thought to be the unique contribution of Israel to the world, archaeology has proven that concepts such as covenant, divine council, high literary genre, social justice,

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[43]Ronald B. Allen, "The Levithan-Rahab-Dragon Motif in the Old Testament," (Master's Thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1965). He argued that Biblical writers used myths as emblems and it was not *borrowed theology* but rather *borrowed imagery*.

[44]Theodore H. Gaster, *Myth, Legend and Custom in the Old Testament* (New York: Harper and Row, 1950).

[45]Gösta Ahlström, *Where were the Israelites?* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1986), 7.

human equality and divine intervention were common themes in the Near East.

The final part of this thesis is to suggest some guidelines in handling parallelism[46] and commonality of words.

1. Elements of culture common to two or more nations do not necessarily imply a legacy of one nation over the other. They may have been derived from a previous generation with whom both nations have been in some way connected.[47]

2. In comparative study between Israel and her neighbors, we must observe that there are unique elements in one nation that do not exist in the other.

3. Even if writers borrowed widely from another source, they tend to transform all that was borrowed.[48]

4. Imageries, terminologies used by Biblical writers may be explained as an attempt to express direct polemic against certain gods.[49]

5. Affinities in vocabulary, idioms, grammar between the Bible and Ugarit should be seen as general terms belonging

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[46]As an example, see Roger T. O'Callaghan, "Echoes of Canaanite Literature in the Psalms," *VT* Vol. 4 (1956): 164-176.

[47]Edward König, *The Bible and Babylon* (Cleveland: F. M. Barton, 1905), 49-62.

[48]George Ernest Wright, *The Old Testament against its Environment*, 28.

[49]Norman C. Habel, *Yahweh vs Baal* (New York: Bookman Associates, 1964), 117.

to the common matrix of Semitic language in the Near East.[50]

6. In dealing with poetry[51], we need to ask: (a) Was there linguistic evidence which indicated cultural or cultic interplay between the two peoples? This has to do with *linguistic* relationships, (b) Was the proximity between the oral renderings or scribal recording of the accounts, synchronically or diachronically? A synchronic relationship requires works to be written at the approximate time, while a diachronic relationship would be reflected in cultural, literary or religious interchange through the years. This has to do with *Chronologies* of literature being examined, and (c) Are the two works of the same literary classification? This deals with *genre* of relationship.

These guidelines will enable us to avoid the error of parralelomania based on superficial similarities.[52] Since the Israelites were of Semitic origin, it is not surprising to find similar phrases, expressions and literary forms.[53] Similar parallels may not fulfill the same identical function

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[50]John Gray, *The Legacy of Canaan* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1965), 196.

[51]P. C. Cragie has given three helpful guidelines. They come from his article, "The Poetry of Ugarit and Israel," *Tyndale Bulletin* 22 (1971): 3-31.

[52]See Helmer Ringgren, "Remarks on the Method of Comparative Mythology," *Near Eastern Studies in Honor of William Foxwell Albright* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1971), 407-411.

[53]Robert Karl Gnuse, *The Dream Theophany of Samuel* (Lanham: University of America Press, 1984), 2.

in the life of a community. Although the Old Testament was
familiar with other religious ideals and aspirations, they
never attained the coherency which we find in the Old
Testament. As Norman Habel eloquently puts it:[54]

> In the religious milieu of the ancient Near East,
> Israel was indeed *qadoš* (set apart) but not *nikrat*
> (cut off).

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[54]Norman C. Habel, *Yahweh vs Baal*, 115.

APPENDIX A

A SCIENTIFIC MODEL

NAME	PREPOSITION	EXAMPLE	SUMMARY
1. Divergence	Against	Kaufmann Zeitlin	Separate dimension of Reality and experience
2. Distance	Beside	Ringgren Vriezen Kaiser	Seeing the same realities in different ways
3. Dialogue	With	Cross Miller Hayes	Interacting approaches to the same reality
4. Disjunction	Alongside	Gaster Caird Allen	Interacting but keeping separate identities
5. Developmental	Into	Alström Rendtorff Wellhausen	Complementarity by absorption of a higher system

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