THE DIVINE COUNCIL AND ISRAELITE MONOTHEISM

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FOR MY WIFE

KRISTA

AND FOR OUR CHILDREN

REBECCA, GORDON AND CRANMER

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ABSTRACT

THE DIVINE COUNCIL AND ISRAELITE MONOTHEISM

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The Old Testament contains a number of depictions of a divine council or assembly of the gods in the heavens. Several of these scenes form episodic narratives that provide a window into the divine realm and insight into the workings of the heavenly court.

The closest cultural and linguistic parallel to the biblical council is found in the Ugaritic texts from Ras Shamra. The parallel members in the Old Testament are seldom considered gods by scholars, in contrast to those in the pantheon in the Ugaritic literature.

This thesis calls into question the validity of this distinction and proposes that *in these episodic scenes* these members are deities under the presidency of YHWH. Power in the heavens is consolidated in the council permitting a view of god that is pluralistic and yet unified. YHWH is its head and he sets its agenda, announces its decisions and commissions its agents.

PREFACE

A conversation about the nature of the "sons of God" in Genesis 6 while on a trip to the east coast in April 1993 marks the beginning of the journey that led to this thesis. Professor Peter J. Gentry challenged my naïve assumption that this was simply a reference to the godly line of Seth. A number of years later in an advanced Old Testament theology course I was introduced to the divine council as a way of conceptualizing God in the OT. I found in the divine council texts a rare glimpse of God that, on the surface at least, appeared to conflict with the monotheism I had come to expect from the Bible. This fascination and conflict has led to the present study.

I wish to express gratitude to Dr. Claude Cox who coached me through a reading course as a way of introducing me to the literature of Canaan and its impact upon the language of the Psalms. His concern to help me pursue this study led me to a number of books in the early stages that helped to get the process grounded and off to a somewhat better directed beginning then it might otherwise have had.

Professor Mark J. Boda, upon his arrival at the Divinity College to the Chair of Old Testament Studies, excitedly took up the task of supervising my project and provided the kind of encouragement and chastisement that this procrastinating Pastor needed to complete the project. His help in securing access to a number

of books and studies along with his stimulating conversations made the whole process much easier.

During the process of writing this thesis I have been privileged to minister at Erin Mills Baptist Church in Mississauga as Pastor. I am grateful to the many people of EMBC for their support and encouragement and for the gift of a ministry among them. In particular I wish to convey appreciation to Mrs. Denise West, my Secretary, who guarded my time so efficiently and who through her personal interest in me and my family provided stimulating diversions.

The completion of this thesis would not have been possible without the assistance of my parents, Margaret and Gordon McGinn, my brother Stephen, and my wife's father and step-mother, Paul and Edie Landis, each who have contributed financially to our family. My son, Cranmer Landis McGinn, was conceived and born during the course of this project and his addition to our family has led to a number of pleasant interruptions and adds the promise for even more joy for the future. His siblings, Rebecca and Gordon, have watched their father hide away in his closet for days on end, bursting in on occasion for the comfort, encouragement and love that childhood desperately needs. They have shared in the suffering, and so they too will share in the triumph.

My sincerest thanks are reserved for my wife Krista. Ever faithful and always encouraging, she has kept house and home, labouring as a Pastor's wife, mother of three, and loving companion through this whole process. It is to her, first of all, and then to our three children that I dedicate this work.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AHH	Lowell K. Handy, *Among the Host of Heaven: The Syro-Palestinian Pantheon as Bureaucracy.* Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994.
BETL	Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologicarum lovaniensium
CAT	M. Dietrich, O. Loretz, and J. Sanmartin, eds. *The Cuneiform Alphabetic Texts from Ugarit, Ras Ibn Hani and Other Places.* Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1995.
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
CTA	A Herdner, ed. *Corpus des tablettes en cunéiforms alphabétiques découvertes à Ras Shamra-Ugarit de 1929 à 1939.* Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1963.
CMCOT	Richard J. Clifford, *The Cosmic Mountain in Canaan and the Old Testament.* HSM 4. Cambridge, MA. Harvard University Press, 1972.
CMHE	Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel.* Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1973.
DCCEHL	E. Theodore Mullen, *The Divine Council in Canaanite and Early Hebrew Literature.* HSM 24. Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1980.
DCSTJL	Michael S. Heiser, "The Divine Council in Late Canonical and Non-Canonical Second Temple Jewish Literature." Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2004.
DCTS	David Marron Fleming, "The Divine Council as Type Scene in the Hebrew Bible." Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1989.
EHG	Mark S. Smith, *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel.* Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2002.
ETS	Evangelical Theological Society

EUT Marvin H. Pope, *El in the Ugaritic Texts.* Vetus Testamentum Supplements. 2. Leiden: Brill, 1955.

HUCA *Hebrew Union College Annual*

HSM Harvard Semitic Monographs

HTR *Harvard Theological Review*

JAOS *Journal of the American Oriental Society*

JBL *Journal of Biblical Literature*

JHS *Journal of the Hebrew Scriptures*

JJS *Journal of Jewish Studies*

JNES *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*

JSOT *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*

JSOTSup Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series

JSS *Journal of Semitic Studies*

JTS *Journal of Theological Studies*

LGANE K. Merling Alomia, "Lesser Gods of the Ancient Near East and Some Comparisons with Heavenly Beings of the Old Testament." Ph.D. diss., Andrews University Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, 1987.

MY Messenger of YHWH; מַלְאַךְ יְהוָה (māl'āk YHWH)

NICOT New International Commentary on the Old Testament

NIVAC NIV Application Commentary

OBM Mark S. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel's Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts* New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2001.

OTAE	G. Ernest Wright, *The Old Testament Against Its Environment.* London: SCM Press, 1950.
OTL	Old Testament Library
RCG	Conrad E. L'Heureux, *Rank Among the Canaanite Gods: El, Ba`al and the Repha'im.* Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1979.
SBL WAW	Society of Biblical Literature Writings of the Ancient World Series
VTSup	Vetus Testamentum Supplement Series
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary

1.0. Introduction

References to the divine council, or assembly of the gods, occur commonly in the literature of the religions of the ancient Near East. Prior to the discovery of the Canaanite cuneiform texts from Ras Shamra, information about the religion of the Northwest Semitic people and their conception of the divine council was limited to the Hebrew scriptures and Phoenician inscriptions, supplemented through comparisons made to such classic sources as the theogony of Sanchuniathon or the theogony of Mochus. It had been thought that the source of the council in this tradition was derived from Mesopotamia where abundant references are made in such works as the Enuma Elish and the Epic of Gilgamesh.[1]

The recovery of the texts from Ras Shamra and their subsequent decipherment has led to a new understanding. The origins of the divine council in the Old Testament is no longer traced to Babylonian traditions, though these traditions are recognized as helpful in understanding the council. Significant parallels are noticeable in the Ugaritic literature that allows us to make more confident connections in this direction. In particular, parallels between the role of the high god of the Canaanite pantheon, El, and YHWH in the Old Testament demonstrate striking similarities. These similarities are illuminating for our understanding of the images of the divine council in the Old Testament.

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[1] H. Wheeler Robinson, "The Council of Yahweh," *JTS* 45 (1944): 151–157.

The divine council by definition anticipates a plurality of deities to comprise a council. Later Jewish and subsequent Christian theologies are manifestly and uncompromisingly monotheistic. Pluralities detected in the early texts are often explained as vestiges of an earlier mythology[2] or as non-divine heavenly beings in the service of YHWH.[3] Comparative studies with the Ugaritic literature are leading to a wider recognition that the motif in the Old Testament has a close parallel in the Canaanite culture of which Israel was a part. It is becoming more plausible that Israel's own council is not to be viewed as a form of accommodation, but as a significant element in its own early conception of deity.

In this introductory section, we will consider the divine council as valid motif in the ancient Near East generally and in the Old Testament specifically. Next we will outline the literary texts that we will use in our study. Finally we will indicate the motivation behind the present study.

1.1. Divine Council Motif

The basic structure for understanding the polity of the gods was the concept of the divine assembly, a concept which has been studied in detail by E.

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[2] William F. Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan: A Historical Analysis of Two Contrasting Faiths* (London: University of London, 1968; reprint, Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 183–193.

[3] K. Merling Alomia, "Lesser Gods of the Ancient Near East and Some Comparisons With Heavenly Beings of the Old Testament" (Ph.D. diss., Andrews University, Seventh-Day Adventist Theological Seminary, 1987), 536.

T. Mullen and L. K. Handy.[4] As a concept for making sense of the divine, the "council" or "assembly of the gods" was a common religious motif in the cultures of Egypt, Mesopotamia, Canaan, Phoenicia and Israel during the Bronze Age period.[5] Mark S. Smith, commenting on the prominence of the concept, concludes that "indeed, this divine social structure seems to be the dominant way to refer to the gods and goddesses as a group."[6]

The presence of the divine council motif in the literature of the ancient Near East, including Mesopotamia, Canaan, Egypt and Israel, is widely recognized by scholars.[7] Council scenes in this literature comprising a plurality of deities assembled together appears to be a significant feature of the divine world, providing a convenient way of accessing the gods. It functions primarily as a celestial court of judgement in which the fates of the gods and humanity are decided and then secondarily as a means of revelation of the fateful decisions arrived at in the council. [8]

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[4] E. Theodore Mullen, *The Divine Council in Canaanite and Early Hebrew Literature* (HSM 24; Chico, CA: Scholars, 1980); Lowell K. Handy, "Dissenting Deities or Obedient Angels: Divine Hierarchies in Ugarit and the Bible," *Biblical Research 35* (1990): 18-35; Idem, *Among the Host of Heaven: The Syro-Palestinian Pantheon as Bureaucracy* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994); and Idem, "The Appearance of the Pantheon," in *The Triumph of Elohim: From Yahwisms to Judaisms* (ed. D. V. Edelman; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 27-43.
[5] Mullen, *DCCEHL*, 113.
[6] Mark S. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel's Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 41.
[7] David Marron Fleming, "The Divine Council As Type Scene In the Hebrew Bible" (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1989), 1; Smith, *OBM*, 41; Mullen, *DCCEHL*, 284. Albright, *YGC*, 191-194.
[8] Fleming, DCTS, 25.

T. Jakobsen has studied the divine council in the literature from Mesopotamia in detail and has concluded that, in Mesopotamia, the council motif can be traced to a time when the assembly met to deal with specific crises. During these meetings, the assembly would appoint temporary leaders to deal with the matter at hand. He termed this process "primitive democracy" as a way of indicating that one of the central functions of the council was the discussion and exchange of ideas. Often this exchange is recorded in the texts, revealing the council in deliberation providing an authoritative explanation for the reason that a certain course of action was taken.[9]

To call the divine council a motif is to treat it as a conspicuous and recurring element or device that is used to provide, at the least, a kind of subconscious recollection or correspondence of events, characters, ideas or places. It functions as a signal that a particular kind of fateful event is about to take place. It also provides an authoritative explanation for significant events. As a broader cultural motif, the divine council appears in a significant cross-section of the literature of the ancient Near East with enough frequency to be recognized as important. Its use becomes typical and as part of the common pool of cultural motifs crosses political, geographical and cultural boundaries. A council scene

[9] T. Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness: A History of Mesopotamian Religion* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1976), 78, 83-84, 86-87; Idem, "Mesopotamian Gods and Pantheons" and "Early Political Development in Mesopotamia" in *Toward the Image of Tammuz and Other Essays on Mesopotamian History and Culture* (ed. W. L. Moran; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970), 18, 128, 372, n. 13.

would have had some conceptual significance for all the peoples of the ancient Near East.

Frequency is a feature of a motif. It must appear often enough to be recognizable. However, it must not appear too often or too prominently, or it may become distracting. The divine council does not appear in the literature of the ancient Near East for its own purposes, but rather as means of explanation or support for other more central themes. Its occurrences are rare enough or appropriately subdued in its presentation that it does not itself become a dominating theme.

Motifs tend to operate mainly on the structural level of a narrative, surfacing occasionally to remind the reader of its presence and importance for understanding the theme aright.[10] The vocabulary, imagery and other associative elements of the council occur with sufficient frequency to establish it as a major theme, and yet they are not so prominent that the council takes over the text.[11] In some contexts there are overt and developed references to the council with some attention given to its activities and operations. In other places there are minimal references located in key words or choice phrasing that hint at its operations behind the scenes. These more overt expressions would appear to provide a kind of concrete shape to the idea of the council, which is then "understood" to be operative in those areas where reference is less explicit. The

[10] William Freedman, "The Literary Motif: A Definition and Evaluation," *Novel* 4 (1971): 123-131.
[11] Fleming, DCTS, 4.

prominence of the council invites investigation into its significance for a biblical conception of God with a wider consideration of the nature of deity in the biblical literature of the Old Testament. In particular it calls for some kind of explanation in light of the near universal claim among scholars for some kind of monotheism as dominant in Israel.

This study is interested in exploring the relationship of the divine council as an accepted and obviously meaningful motif in the Old Testament against the concept of monotheism in early Israelite religion. To do this, a study comparing the divine council as it appears in the Ugaritic literature with the presentation of the council in the Old Testament will be undertaken. An extensive evaluation of a number of the primary divine council texts in the Old Testament will form the central portion of this study. These texts are what might be called "episodic."[12] They include an account of what happened in the council. In these places the council functions both as a narrative event with its own structure and as an event in the larger narrative framework that it serves to advance. This study will focus mainly on the episode of the council with only a cursory investigation into its function in the narrative as a whole. We are more interested in studying the motif as a presentation of the divine world and a window on divine relations than to understand how the motif operated in a given context, whether universal or local.

The present study proposes that the divine council is an operative motif in the Old Testament. The repetition of this motif in varying contexts suggests that the

[12] Fleming, DCTS, 32.

concept of the divine council was meaningful for the religion of Israel and that it was consistent with an Israelite understanding of deity. Contrary to modern conceptions of monotheism, the divine council proposes a view of God that is pluralistic, but provides for a monism that explains unity in the godhead. Modern notions of polytheism normally treat the polytheistic conceptions as monotheism multiplied by a given number of deities and functions. Simplistic monotheisms tend to view One God as possessing the sum total of divine power and function in a single divine being.[13] This study proposes a view of God that acknowledges that the Old Testament accepts that other beings exist in the heavens that possess deity, but that they exist in relationship to a single God around whom they stand and whose agenda they serve.

In the next section, the literary limitations shall be set for the study. This section will explain why the focus is limited to Ugaritic Canaanite texts from Ras Shamra. It will also indicate some concerns about the terminology that is used to refer to Canaanite and Israelite religions.

1.2. Literary Limitations

This study will limit concentration to attestations of the divine council in the Old Testament with attention to connections between the divine council as a conceptual element in the religion of Canaan. The mythological and epic texts from Ugarit will serve as the source of Canaanite religious belief. Israelite

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[13] Smith, *OBM*, 13.

conceptions will be drawn solely from the Old Testament. Allusions to the divine council are prominent in the post-biblical writings of Israel, in the Apocrypha, the Pseudepigrapha, and the writings from Qumrân, yet we shall not be considering these since the major elements of the council are sufficiently attested in the biblical writings.

The terms "Canaan" and "Israel" are derived from the biblical record in which they are set in opposition as designations for two contrasting faiths. The historical investigations of W. F. Albright and A. Alt indicate that "'Canaan' designates a geographical entity in the Amarna administration of Syro-Palestine, but cannot be identified with a real historical ethnos."[14] In biblical usage, "Canaan" and "Canaanites" are terms coined by the writers to create a people to compare to "Israel." "Israel" too, however, must be recognized as an ideological construct, at least insofar as its relationship to Canaan is concerned.[15] Recent research reveals that Israel as a people never existed as an entity distinguishable from its Canaanite context. This has prompted M. Coogan to view Israelite religion as a subset of Canaanite religion.[16]

The language and culture of the Israelites and that of the Canaanites of the Late Bronze and Iron I (ca. 1550-1000 BCE) periods can only be distinguished

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[14] Herbert Niehr, "The Rise of YHWH in Judahite and Israelite Religion" in *The Triumph of Elohim: From Yahwisms to Judaisms* (ed. Diana Vikander Edelman; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 48-49.
[15] Niehr, "Rise of YHWH," 49.
[16] M. D. Coogan, "Canaanite Origins and Lineage: Reflections on the Religion of Ancient Israel" in *Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honor of F. M. Cross* (ed. P. D. Miller, Jr., P. D. Hanson, and S. D. McBride; Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1987), 115.

from each through the use of historical data.[17] Linguistic and cultural correlation has led some to doubt that Hebrew and Ugaritic are in fact distinct languages; these scholars prefer to view them as essentially regional dialects of one common Northwest Semitic language.[18] Consequently Smith can assert that "Ugaritic and biblical texts attest [to] so many of the same deities, religious practices, and notions, the Ugaritic texts may be used with caution for religious material in the West Semitic sphere which Israelite tradition inherited."[19]

It is this recognition that Israelite religion is a subset of the broader Canaanite religious milieu that sets the limitations for this study. The sharing of deities and vocabulary for describing religious ritual and cult leads to the conclusion that the best place to find a parallel to the biblical picture of the divine council is in Canaan and not Mesopotamia.[20] Though Akkadian literature was also found at Ugarit, indicating a possible source of influence from this sphere, it is not clear what influence it had on the Canaanite conception of the divine council.

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[17] Mark S. Smith, *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 20.
[18] Peter C. Craigie, *Ugarit and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983), 51.
[19] Smith, *EHG*, 29-30.
[20] Cf., Mullen, *DCCEHL*, 3, introduces his study by stating that "the numerous parallels between the divine council in the Ugaritic texts and the heavenly assembly in early Hebrew literature lead us to believe that the Hebrew concept of the divine council is more closely paralleled by the Canaanite assembly than by the Mesopotamian. The corresponding descriptions of the setting, the members and their function, and the function of the council itself display a common source." Since Mullen published his work, significant research has been done demonstrating that Israelite and Canaanite culture and religion share a common heritage. It is not simply a matter of each one drawing from the same pool, but that each has emerged from the same source. This realization indicates that many parallels are genetic and not common accommodations to social and cultural environmental influences challenging each in its own historical development. It is the differences that indicate development and not, of necessity, the similarities between Israelite and Canaanite religious cult and practice. Cf., Smith, *Early History*.

Furthermore, it is difficult to ascertain whether this potential influence extended also to the Israelite conception of the divine council.

The primary agreement between the Canaanite and Israelite conceptions of the divine council is that in both Canaanite and Israelite depictions the role of the high God was very similar. El, in the Ugaritic texts, and YHWH, in the Old Testament, are both depicted as creator, king, and absolute ruler of the gods.[21] This agreement at the highest level in the pantheon establishes a unique agreement between these two religious perspectives.

The study will proceed with a summary investigation into related scholarship since the publication of the Ugaritic texts. It will continue with a brief synopsis of the nature of the Canaanite divine council demonstrated in the Ugaritic texts. Following this will be an extensive study of the primary texts in the Old Testament attesting to the divine council in episodic fashion. The data from this section will be summarized in a section on the divine council in the Old Testament. Our study will conclude with a summation of our findings and some projections for further study.

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[21] Mullen, *DCCEHL*, 4.

2.0. Survey of Scholarship

In this section a survey of some of the prominent scholarship that bears upon the subject of the divine council in either the literature from Ugarit or the Old Testament will be undertaken. We begin with two articles published after the Ugaritic tablets were discovered and deciphered but that do not take this literature into account.

After this, we divide our investigations into three periods. These divisions were chosen because they reflect significant periods in the study of the Ugaritic literature. The first period marks a time of intense activity and initial excitement over the significance of the texts for biblical Old Testament studies. In particular this period was marked by the contrast that was made between the religions of Canaan and Israel.

The second period surrounds the release of more texts that incited another round of studies. During this period the marked contrasts give way to a more helpful analysis of shared themes. The first major work on the divine council is published during this time. The final section focuses on the period from 1985-present. This period is marked by the recognition that Israelite religion is a subset of Canaanite religion. It is also a time in which varying methodologies are applied to the study of the council.

2.1. Early Studies — Pre-Ugarit

2.1.1. J. Morgenstern 1941

Psalm 82 has long been recognized as central to an Old Testament understanding of the divine assembly. Julian Morgenstern wrote a lengthy article on this psalm that sought primarily to place the Psalm within a mythological context.[22] The article did not have as its main concern the divine council though a considerable amount of attention was given to this theme.

Morgenstern's study was concerned to demonstrate that behind the psalm lay an ancient mythical storehouse of ideas that were drawn upon in its composition. In particular he was interested in those myths that tell of the fall of the divine beings in the heavens. In the study, Morgenstern treated the divine council as an annual judgement event that took place during the spring equinox, corresponding with the New Year festival.[23] The *śāṭān*, while not present in Psalm 82, is a recognized member of this council from other contexts where he functions as the accuser appointed by the high god of the council. Drawing on the contexts of Job 1 and 2, Zechariah 3:1-7 and Isaiah 6, Morgenstern considered judgement to be a prominent function of the council. Membership of the council included YHWH, *śāṭān*, and, drawing upon Isaiah 6, the *seraphim*, whom Morgenstern considered as having a parallel role to the host of heaven in 1 Kings 22:19-23.

[22] Julian Morgenstern, "The Mythological Background of Psalm 82," *HUCA* 14 (1939): 29-132.
[23] Morgenstern, "Mythological Background," 43-44.

YHWH presides over the council, and is likely to be envisioned as seated on his throne, as in other contexts. Likewise, he would be attended by an entourage elsewhere called by the names of "*seraphim*" or "the host of heaven," but here by the Psalmist, "obviously troubled by no prophetic, monolatrous scruples, 'gods'."[24]

Morgenstern's consideration of Psalm 82 indicated that the divine council in the Old Testament was comprised of divine beings of differing rank. In his construction, Yahweh is the head of the pantheon and the "sons of god," the "*seraphim,*" the "hosts of heaven" and the "standing ones" are his attendants who minister to him and who are the agents of his will. The council meets annually on the New Year Feast day for judgement. His study showed that elements that comprise the divine council motif are found in numerous places in fragmented form in the Old Testament along with a small number of clear references portraying the inner workings of the council. The myths behind this construction he believed to be of north Semitic origin, possibly the work of a Galilean poet under the influence of his Phoenician neighbours.[25] A strict theology of monotheism does not yet appear to be operative, with only a portion and not the whole of the pantheon suffering judgement. While not interacting with the Ras Shamra discoveries to any significant extent, Morgenstern was sympathetic in his interaction with the larger mythic milieu.

[24] Morgenstern, "Mythological Background," 71.
[25] Morgenstern, "Mythological Background," 121.

2.1.2. H. Wheeler Robinson 1944

In a 1944 article, H. Wheeler Robinson made the point that "the council of Yahweh was felt to be just as much a reality as Yahweh Himself."[26] Robinson spoke these words against a tendency in scholarship to treat these passages as if they were figures rather than descriptions of the ancient conception of reality. His call has set the programme for the study of the divine council and really marked a change in the way the council is considered. His concern was oriented primarily towards gaining an understanding of prophetic consciousness, though an inevitable consideration of the nature of deity ensued. From his investigation, Robinson envisioned the prophet as a participant in the divine council who collaborated personally and intimately with the divine. From out of this experience in the divine council, arose the conviction that he spoke for God. Robinson spoke of this interactive experience as divine-human interplay.[27]

Though the texts from Ugarit were available, Robinson did not interact with them and understood that the ultimate origin of this conception of YHWH's council was to be located in Babylonia, where the deliberations of the gods in the stories of creation can be overheard.[28] Origins of the concept, however, were not his main interest. He was more concerned to assert the reality of the divine

[26] H. Wheeler Robinson, "The Council of Yahweh," *JTS* 45 (1944): 152.
[27] Robinson, "The Council of Yahweh," 156.
[28] Robinson, "The Council of Yahweh," 152, n 1.

council and cited several different texts to support this contention.[29] The council scenes helped to open up the prophetic consciousness to greater scrutiny since in these scenes we are able to gain an understanding as to how the prophets came to know that theirs was the voice of God to humanity.[30] Second, taking the council seriously as a reality warns against reading "mysticism" into the Old Testament. The divine council, when understood as a reality, provides an answer to the problems that the transcendence of God creates and helps the believer to maintain a living relationship with him, since the myriad of agencies that God might use may turn out to be more personal than we suppose.[31]

2.2. Post War Period 1945-1970

This period has been called by Mark S. Smith a time of synthesis and comparisons for studies in Ugaritic.[32] Myth-and-ritual approaches to comparative studies dominated in some areas, treating the corpora of Ugarit and Israel as the products of their respective cults. Part of the constellation of topics which became the core ideas of this school included royal liturgies, renewed attention to divine kingship motifs, a renewed interest in the New Year Feast as well as topics such as "dying and rising gods."[33] Against this tradition stood a number of

[29] Cf., Ps 82; 89:5; Amos 3:7; Job 1:6-12; 2:1-7; 15:8; Isa 6.
[30] Robinson, "The Council of Yahweh," 156.
[31] Robinson, "The Council of Yahweh," 157.
[32] Mark S. Smith, *Untold Stories: The Bible and Ugaritic Studies in the Twentieth Century* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2001), 51-128.
[33] Smith, *Stories*, 83.

scholars, largely in Germany and America, whose interests in philology and history overshadowed and often conflicted with that of myth-and-ritual schools of thought. Germany, in addition to philology and history, had a well-established scholarly tradition of research grounded in form- and tradition-criticism that militated against this approach.

Studies in the history of early Israelite religion at this time were dominated by contrast, particularly respecting its relationship with Canaan. Albright is representative of this time, and as the title of his influential *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan: A Historical Analysis of Two Contrasting Faiths* indicates, approaches the task with a view to emphasizing the differences between them.[34] Generally, it might be noted that this period is often marked by more than a little contempt towards the religion and morality of the Canaanites.[35] Mark S. Smith summarizes how the contrastive approaches dealt with the religions of Canaan and Israel with the following chart:[36]

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[34] Albright, *YGC.*

[35] Albright speaks of the "the extremely low level of the Canaanite religion, which inherited a relatively primitive mythology and had adopted some of the most demoralizing cultic practices." W. F. Albright, "The Role of the Canaanites in the History of Civilization," in *The Bible and the Ancient Near East: Essays in Honor of W. F. Albright* (ed. G. E. Wright; New York: Doubleday, 1961), 338. John Gray, *The Legacy of Canaan: The Ras Shamra Texts and Their Relevance to the Old Testament* (2d rev. ed; VTSup 5; Leiden: Brill, 1965), calls the religion of the Canaanites "magical" and "a-moral." Ulf Oldenburg, *The Conflict between El and Ba'al in the Canaanite Religion* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1969), xxvii, remarks: "The more I studied pre-Israelite religion, the more I was amazed with its utter depravity and wickedness. Indeed there was *nothing* in it to inspire the sublime faith of Yahweh. His coming is like the rising sun dispelling the darkness of Canaanite superstition." Italics his.

[36] Smith, *Stories,* 99.

Canaan	***Israel***
polytheistic	monotheistic
wicked/depraved	moral
natural (fertility)	historical
mythical	historical
magical	moral
power	covenantal

Studies in Ugaritica of this era largely focused on the gods and their relationship to one another, with a particular emphasis upon the relationship of El and Baal. Most recognized that El was the head of the pantheon, though as Albright has noted, he had declined in prominence, remaining active only at some local shrines.[37] El is treated as otiose along the lines of Kronos in the Greek myths.[38] Some, like Marvin Pope and Ulf Oldenburg, saw Baal overtaking El, having bested him in some form of conflict. Oldenburg argued that the conflict was divided along family lines, with Baal the son of Dagan besting El and his beloved sons Yamm and Mot. He went so far as to suggest that Baal had castrated El, rendering him impotent.[39] Pope also considered El's high position in the pantheon to be indisputable, yet acknowledged that by the time the Ugaritic stories were written, he had lost his position to Baal.[40] Arvid S. Kapelrud shared a similar view, arguing that Baal had defeated El in a long and drawn out

[37] Albright, *YGC*, 120; cf., Marvin H. Pope, *El in the Ugaritic Texts* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1955), 72-81.
[38] Albright, *YGC*, 124-125; cf., Arvid S. Kapelrud, *The Ras Shamra Discoveries and the Old Testament* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965), 24.
[39] Ulf Oldenburg, *Conflict*, 112.
[40] Pope, *El in the Ugaritic Texts*, 28.

struggle in which neither god appears to have achieved full victory.[41] The diminished El remains the nominal head of the pantheon while Baal has the more active and prominent role.

This relationship is significant because elements from each of these gods have often been linked to YHWH of the Old Testament, though El shows greater affinity and a near complete appropriation. Baal, who is thought to have been in conflict with El is largely rejected as being anything like YHWH. Other gods from the Ugaritic pantheon are less obvious in the Old Testament and so do not have the same interest. The conflict supposed to have taken place between El and Baal is likely fueled by an unconscious recognition of a conflict between YHWH and Baal in the Old Testament and simply serves to both reinforce the identification of El with YHWH and to indicate the long standing nature of the Baal-YHWH conflict.[42]

The assembly of the gods figures in Pope's conception of the family of El, which meets on a mountain and over which the patriarch presides.[43] Albright treats the council in the Old Testament as a vestige of ancient polytheistic elements that have been largely removed through a process that he calls "archaic demythologization."[44] The members of the council in the Old Testament

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[41] Arvid S. Kapelrud, *Baal in the Ras Shamra Texts* (Copenhagen: G. E. C. Gad, 1952), 86.
[42] Oldenburg, *Conflict,* 178, "As the young warrior god Ba'al-Hadad had intruded into the Canaanite pantheon and usurped the kingship of the Canaanite El, so now it seemed that he was trying with all his might to drive Yahweh from his throne."
[43] Pope, *El in the Ugaritic Texts*, 72-81.
[44] Albright, *YGC*, 186-188.

are treated simply as angels, retaining no active role in council deliberations. They are maintained simply as messengers who receive God's orders and then execute them.[45] Oldenburg is loath to speak of a council in any real way in the Old Testament. YHWH is a jealous God who will not allow others to stand with him, unlike the El of the Canaanite religion who stood as head over the pantheon.[46]

Albright continued the paradigm of opposition setting Canaanite polytheism against Israelite monotheism.[47] It was no surprise to Albright that there was no pantheon in Israelite religion to be contemplated, though he noted with striking contrast that the creation account in Genesis 2:4b-7a has "in spite of the completely monotheistic character of the passage, its background in pagan cosmogony."[48] Pagan backgrounds to Genesis 1 come from Babylonia, Egypt and Phoenicia, though it is largely obscured by a later Israelite demythologization. The pagan origins of Genesis 2 are very definitely Mesopotamian.[49] He does not deny that the early Hebrews were influenced by the Canaanites, and recognizes that there were beliefs and practices common to

[45] Albright, *YGC*, 192.
[46] Oldenburg, *Conflict*, 174.
[47] Smith, *Stories*, 34-35.
[48] Smith, *Stories*, 93.
[49] Smith, *Stories*, 92.

both and fostered in part through an ongoing practice of appropriation, borrowing and adaptation from Canaanite culture.[50]

Considering monotheism to be an original and central component to the faith of Israel, Albright faced a number of criticisms from as early as 1936. Believing this monotheism to be ancient and not new to Moses, he writes: "Indeed there are very ancient elements in the Mosaic tradition. Among them we may count a strong basic tendency towards monotheism."[51] This of course stood in direct contrast to the religion of Canaan where the gods and their battles loom large. G. Ernest Wright wades into this discussion treating knowledge of the divine as coming through an experience of power expressed in nature. This experience is then filtered through a mythical cosmic structure in Mesopotamia, resulting in a plurality of gods derived from the plurality of nature.[52] In contrast to this mythical pluralism, the Old Testament contains no myth. Instead, in it the power of God is experienced in unity as a singular force that comes at a single point in history—at Sinai. The revelation of YHWH at Sinai is historical, not mythical, and no plurality of causes is deemed to have played a part. The acts of God are experienced historically and treated as history, not as myth.[53]

This leads Wright to a distinctive form of monotheism. Not a monotheism ontologically defined, but an existential monotheism in which the power of God is

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[50] Smith, *Stories*, 206.
[51] Albright, *YGC*, 167.
[52] G. Ernest Wright, *The Old Testament Against Its Environment* (London: S. C. M. Press, 1950), 18.
[53] Wright, *OTAE*, 26.

experienced in the giving of a law that creates out of a number of tribes a nation. Monotheism, for Wright, is the most characteristic and unique feature of Israel and may be summed up in the words *"the exclusive exaltation of the one source of all power, authority and creativity."*[54]

Oldenburg treats the Yahwistic monotheism to be a return to a form of El monotheism that was not yet corrupted by Baal influences in Canaan.[55] G. W. Ahlström wrote in 1963, breaking from the idea of the superiority of the Israelite religion so prominent at the time. He questioned, in particular, whether a close comparison with extra-biblical texts would warrant such a position of opposition regnant in most scholars' work.[56]

We can summarize this period as acknowledging the reality of the divine council in the texts from Ugarit, but as treating the council in the Old Testament as a mythic vestige from Canaanite religion or as some kind of figure of the divine. The council is left largely undeveloped, since it is incompatible with the assumed monotheism that governs the text. The members of the council are treated as angels and not as divine beings, even though in the Canaanite context they clearly belong to this class of beings. Correlation between divine council language and imagery is noted, but contrasting elements are emphasized.

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[54] Wright, *OTAE*, 39, italics his.
[55] Oldenburg, *Conflict*, 175.
[56] Smith, *Stories*, 98.

2.3. *Ugaritica V* 1970-1985

The release of *Ugaritica V* in 1968 reignited studies in Ugaritic literature and resulted in a less contrastive approach to comparison with the Old Testament.[57] Frank Moore Cross in his monumental *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*[58] is representative, as he demonstrates a number of shared points of religious identity between Israel and Canaan which previously were treated as being in opposition. He began by equating El of the Ugaritic religion with "the god of the fathers" in the patriarchal narratives of the Bible. He summarizes El's role in the council as being patriarchal and not royal, which set the stage for treating El and Baal in the Ugaritic texts as complementary rather than conflicting deities. He sees his function as parallel to that of a judge in a council league of tribes.[59]

YHWH and El stand in close relationship. For Cross, they are the same deity, with the name YHWH originally functioning as an epithet of El.[60] He understands the epithet to be a causative, which likely had the original meaning of "he who creates the heavenly armies" emphasizing El's warrior character.[61] This is further developed in his studies on Psalm 24 and the Song of the Sea in Exodus 15:1b-18. The notable feature of his approach is that, rather than rejecting myth

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[57] Cl. F. A. Schaeffer, *Ugaritica* Vol V (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1968).
[58] Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973).
[59] Cross, *CMHE*, 39.
[60] He writes, "If Yahweh is recognized as originally a cultic name of ʾEl, perhaps the epithet of ʾEl the patron deity of the Midianite League in the south, a number of problems in the history of Israel can be solved." Cross, *CMHE*, 71.
[61] Cross, *CMHE*, 60ff

altogether, he understands myth to be in tension with the history-of-redemption framework, though he relegates dominance of myth to the Canaanite side of the equation.[62]

Students of Cross challenged the near consensus on the nature of the relations in the Ugaritic pantheon. Conrad E. L'Heureux, Richard J. Clifford and E. Theodore Mullen, Jr. each took part in the process of challenging various points of the consensus with a particular emphasis upon the relationship of El and Baal in the Canaanite context.[63] Their conclusions were that El and Baal are not to be viewed as being in any kind of serious conflict as was proposed by Kapelrud, Pope and Oldenburg. Mullen was able to assert that both El and Baal are kings but that their kingship is of a different nature. El's kingship is rooted in his nature as creator, warrior and head over the pantheon whereas Baal's kingship is not over the gods, but over the created order or cosmos.[64] Such a construction permits the two gods to share space and not be in each other's way. Mullen summarizes the nature of the relationship between the kingships of El and Baal in the following way:

> *Ba'al, Yamm,* and *Môt* were subject to *'El's* rule. Their conflicts did not concern the throne of *'El.* With the possible exception of his intervention in the struggle

[62] Smith, *Stories*, 156; Cross, *CMHE*, 120, writes: "The biblical creation accounts, however, are atypical. The 'primordial' events have been radically historicized in the Israelite environment so that the beginning is 'merely' the first event in a historical sequence."
[63] Conrad E. L'Heureux, *Rank Among the Canaanite God El, Ba'al, and the Repha'im* (HSM 2; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1979); Richard J. Clifford, *The Cosmic Mountain in Canaan and the Old Testament* (HSM 4; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972); Mullen, *DCCEHL*.
[64] L'Heureux, *RCG*, 85.

> between *Ba'al* and *Môt* (CTA 6.VI.23-29), *'El* never interfered in the wars between the younger gods. This failure of action on *'El's* part was not due to any weakness of the deity. It was due to the fact that the battles between his sons, the younger gods who controlled the functions of the cosmos, in no way challenged his position or authority. No conflict existed between the kingship of *'El* and the kingship of *Ba'al*. *'El's* kingship was eternal and unalterable; *Ba'al's* was dynamic, having constantly to be maintained and reasserted against the threats of his adversaries.[65]

The battle between Baal and Yamm is not as Kapelrud, Pope and Oldenburg have indicated, that Yamm as the beloved of El is fighting on behalf of El and El's family over against that of Baal and the family Dagan. Rather, the conflict is between Baal and Yamm, and later Mot, to determine which god would be king over the cosmos. El's power over the institution of kingship is demonstrated by his declaration of Yamm as king and then by recalling Mot from battle to preserve the rule of Baal.[66]

Such notions are rooted in a distinction among the gods first formulated by Cross. Cross divides the gods into those that belong to the theogonic level and those that belong to the cosmogonic level. Theogonic gods are those who are responsible for the foundations of all created things and are paired and named according to the fundamental structures of the universe: Heaven and Earth, Abyss and Sources, Day and Night. In tracing out the lineage of the gods, Cross

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[65] L'Heureux, *RCG*, 89.
[66] L'Heureux, *RCG*, 94.

notes that power flows from one generation to the next generally through patricide and incest. However, in parallel myths, the last generation of the theogonic pairs, the father is not killed, but emasculated and finally peace is established.

Cosmogonic deities are executive deities, not associated with the fundamental structures, but with the operations of the cosmos. The transitional figure between the gods of the theogonic myths and the gods of the cosmogonic myths is a patriarchal god who comes to rule the heavens and heads the pantheon. This figure in the Canaanite and Old Testament literature is represented in the god El.[67]

Since the paradigm set up by Cross included an identification of YHWH with El, the relationship between YHWH and Baal needs to be addressed. L'Heureux answers those who seek to understand the conflict between YHWH and Baal in the Old Testament as continuous with the supposed conflict between El and Baal in the Ugaritic literature by pointing out that the conflict between YHWH and Baal does not break out until the ninth century BCE.[68] The two appear to have existed together in Israel until this time quite peacefully. Furthermore, he denies that it is possible to equate on a one to one basis Baal of the Ugaritic texts and the many

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[67] Cross, *CMHE*, 40-43; cf., Mullen, *DCCEHL*, 146.
[68] L'Heureux, *RCG*, 59, 64.

local numens called the Baals of the Old Testament, many of them having their own local shrines.[69]

Patrick Miller, also a student of Cross, writing on the motif of the divine warrior in early Israel, associates the divine council with a military council. This is partially based on his conclusions that basic terminology for the council members, variously called "host," "armies" and "assembly"' in the Old Testament is used synonymously.[70] Mullen, writing on the council motif, concurs, elaborating on this military theme of the council. He first indicates that presiding over the council indicates kingship, and such kingship was normally attained in the ancient Near East through warfare.[71] He understands El in the Ugaritic texts to have attained his kingship in this way and that those who surround him in the council are his subordinates who assisted him in the battle.[72] He describes this military retinue as sitting in a princely capacity. Having achieved the victory with El, they now sit around him awaiting his decree.

Most studies on the council during this period follow a fairly typical pattern: terminology, meeting place, membership, and function. The terminology occasions no particular debate, with the near unanimous agreement as to its

[69] L'Heureux, *RCG*, 66.
[70] Patrick D. Miller, Jr., *The Divine Warrior in Early Israel* (HSM 5; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 67.
[71] Mullen, *DCCEHL*, 28.
[72] Mullen, *DCCEHL*, 35; Cross (*CMHE*, 105) writes that "the ideology of holy war in early Israel and in pre-Israelite times was characterized by a number of cosmic elements. This may be seen in the imagery of the heavenly council of Yahweh, which may take on the characteristics of a judicial court or assembly, a royal court, or of a Divine Warrior leading heavenly armies."

meaning and connection to the council.[73] Discussions on the meeting place have met with no definitive solution,[74] though often they were undertaken with a view to vindicating El from the charge that he was overthrown by Baal. Pope thought he had been banished to the underworld by Baal.[75] Clifford takes issue with this reading by challenging Pope's understanding of *ḫršn,* which Pope takes as a reference to the subterranean entrance to the underworld and which marked the location of El's dwelling place. Clifford notes that the concept of *ḫršn* is less likely associated with a place of ordeal located at the border of the underworld than to a rocky substratum in the soil out of which the river has cut narrow channels resulting in places where swift flowing water was able to function as a judge over those who were subjected to the ordeal.[76] The meeting place, which corresponds to El's dwelling place, is Mount Ll.

Membership in the council is summarized by Miller as including the great gods, who often had their own retinues of divine beings, messenger deities, the *rp'm* who may have been a warrior class, a skilled class which he calls the *kṯrt* and finally the *kbkbm/kkbm.*[77] Mullen, as we have already noted, viewed them as the military retinue of El, once active military personnel alongside their leader,

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[73] For detailed discussions on terminology see Mullen, *DCCEHL*, 117-120.

[74] Cross, *CMHE*, 179, "The place of the meeting of the divine council is not wholly clear. It may be that the ambiguity stems from the dualism of the feast, the feast at the god's shrine, and its paradigm in the cosmic mount of the assembly."

[75] Pope, *El in the Ugaritic Texts,* 27.

[76] Clifford, *Cosmic Mountain*, 23-24, 38.

[77] Miller, *Divine Warrior*, 15-22.

now enthroned under his rule in a princely capacity.[78] The biblical descriptions of these members is "host of heaven," "sons of God" or "sons of the gods" and "messengers" or "angels."

Frank Cross summarized the council activities as basically two: revelation and judgement.[79] The revelation function of the council is entailed largely in the work of the messenger of the council who exists for the purposes of making the decrees of the council known. The prophetic role has its origin in the function of the council messenger and exists for the purposes of making known the decrees of El. Prophetic consciousness is thought to be connected with this council function. Cross remarks on Isaiah's role as prophet by saying:

> Isaiah hears Yahweh's address to the council, "Who will go for us?" and replies himself, "Send me," subsequently receiving the oracle or decree of Yahweh which he is to announce to his people. Thus the prophet becomes in effect the *mal'āk* or herald of Yahweh's council, and like a supernatural ambassador mediates the divine pronouncement.[80]

The second council function of judgement is a variant form of the covenant lawsuit or *rīb.* Cross understands this function to be rooted in the covenant form of the tribal league system, in which YHWH takes on two roles, one as party to the covenant and the second as the judge of the assembly. He functions thus as both plaintiff and judge, with the members of the council serving the role of

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[78] Mullen, *DCCEHL*, 185-186.
[79] Mullen (*DCCEHL*, 209-243) basically affirms these two functions. His dissertation on the divine council includes one chapter on the messenger of the divine council separate from that of the other members of the council, and another chapter on the judgement of the council.
[80] Cross, *CMHE*, 187.

covenant witnesses. He remarks on the prophet's role by saying that "form-critical analysis of the prophetic form of speech has yielded the information that the prophet's office is that of messenger and that the fundamental message he brings is the judgment."[81]

Scholarship after the publication of *Ugaritica V* in 1968, particularly at Harvard under Frank Moore Cross, began a process of recognizing the place of the Religion of Israel as being within the Canaanite milieu. No longer was it in vogue to understand the Israelite religion as unique and in conflict with Canaan from the beginning. This process led to a number of changes in the way in which these scholars conceived deity in Israel. The divine council was recognized as a key component for understanding deity in the ancient Near East in general, and Israelite religion was not exempt from this. Studies demonstrate a propensity to understand deity in pluralistic terms, with recognition of the divine council as an essential part of this understanding.

Israelite monotheism still dominated, but now as a historical development within Israel and not as a unique and original feature of Israelite religion. Consequently, Old Testament references to the divine council, and in particular to the various classes of beings comprising the divine council membership, were understood in this period to have correspondence to the gods of the Canaanite religion. These deities were thought to have undergone a change in status, essentially losing their deity, with many of their features either being lost because

[81] Cross, *CMHE*, 189.

they were deemed to be incompatible, or being appropriated into either the one God, YHWH, or the lesser class of beings, angels. The purpose of the divine council in the scholarship of this period served to orient all divine activity around one deity, YHWH, and carried out the function of judgement and declaration of the divine will through prophetic ministry.

2.4. 1985-Present

Studies in the divine council and biblical monotheism have not abated. Lowell K. Handy, reorganized the pantheon of Ugarit into four tiers in his 1987 University of Chicago dissertation reworked and published in 1994.[82] In it Handy applied a social-sciences methodology and sought to understand the pantheon predominantly as a bureaucracy along lines formulated by Max Weber.[83] In this paradigm, the deities of the divine council are organized according to function, which reveals rank. In contrast to this, Mark S. Smith organized the tiers around a family structure rather than a modern bureaucratic model. The top tier is held by the divine or royal parents, El and his consort Athirat. The second tier includes the royal children known as "the seventy sons of Athirat" (CAT 1.4.VI.46). The third tier is deemed by both Handy and Smith to be poorly attested. Only one god that may be attributed to this category with certainty, and he is a recognized outsider, culturally speaking, belonging geographically to

[82] Handy, *AHH.*
[83] Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (trans. by A. M. Henderson and Talcott Parsons; New York, NY: Free Press, 1947).

Egypt and not Canaan. This god, Kothar wa-Hasis, serves the upper two tiers of the divine family with his specialized skills and expertise, building palaces and fashioning weapons of warfare. The fourth tier includes the minor deities who serve other deities. This class of deity is often termed after its dominant members as a messenger class of deity.[84] Handy titles his four tiers respectively: (1) Authoritative Deities, (2) Active Deities, (3) Artisan Deities, and (4) Messenger Deities.

The four-tiered structure is not without its critics. Michael S. Heiser in his recent dissertation from the University of Wisconsin-Madison considers the third tier to be represented too inadequately to warrant acceptance of its presence in the council.[85] Heiser also denies that the class of deities that comprise messenger deities actually functioned as members of the council. He prefers to limit the council purely to those who comprised the ruling council, including only El and Athirat and their offspring. He acknowledges the presence of others in the council, but simply as servants of the council and not as members. He even denies these lesser deities their status as gods.[86]

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[84] Smith, *OBM,* 45-46.

[85] Michael S. Heiser, "The Divine Council in Late Canonical and Non-Canonical Second Temple Jewish Literature" (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2004), 40. The numbering of pages for this dissertation is approximate. This writer received an acrobat pdf file directly from the author, the page numbering differing from the original, though the contents were unchanged. Pages were numbered from '1' at the beginning of chapter one and will place the content between 0-25 pages of the accepted dissertation depending upon how far along in the dissertation the reference is. The dissertation as formatted for presentation and submission was 25 pages longer than the pdf.

[86] Heiser, DCSTJL, 37.

When he compares the structure from Ugarit to that found in the Old Testament, Heiser is loath to admit the third tier and equates the fourth with the biblical category of angel without ever having to contemplate them as holding a position equivalent to deity.[87] In considering this relation in the literature from Ugarit, Heiser remarks that the fourth tier is only called *'ilm* (gods) because they represent deity, not because they possess deity.[88]

Monotheism is a significant interest during the scholarship of this period. Cross' contention, echoed in J. C. de Moor's work,[89] that El and YHWH were the same deity is rejected in favor of recognizing YHWH as a separate deity.[90] Yahweh's origins are traced to the south outside of the land of Israel in the area of Midian.[91] Differentiating YHWH from El has also led to a greater recognition of YHWH's association with warfare and with storm-god imagery in contrast to El whose original character is more patriarchal and associated with creation and paternity.

Mark S. Smith's book, *The Early History of God*, established the categories of convergence and differentiation for understanding Israel's relationship with the religion of Canaan. In this model, various characteristics of the gods have

[87] Heiser, DCSTJL, 42-43.
[88] Heiser, DCSTJL, 45.
[89] J. C. de Moor, *The Rise of Yahwism* (BETL 91; Leuven: Leuven University Press and Peeters, 1990), 223-60; others who share this perspective include D. N. Freedman and N. Wyatt, from Smith, *OBM*, 146.
[90] John Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan* (JSOTSup 265; New York, NY: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 13-15.
[91] Smith, *OBM*, 145.

converged in YHWH, while at the same time YHWH is differentiated from them and given a position of primacy.[92]

Monotheism is treated largely as the outcome of Josiah's reforms and finds unequivocal expression in the rhetoric of Second Isaiah.[93] It is doubtful before this time that any kind of monotheism might be posited. In fact he treats monotheism as a kind of inner community discourse, a way for ancient Israel to reinforce its exclusive relationship with its deity. He writes:

> Monotheistic statements [in the Old Testament] do not herald a new age of religion but explain Yahwistic monolatry in absolute terms. As rhetoric, monotheism reinforced Israel's exclusive relationship with its deity. Monotheism is a kind of inner community discourse establishing a distance from outsiders; it uses the language of Yahweh's exceptional divine status beyond and in all reality ("there are no other deities but the Lord") to absolutize Yahweh's claim on Israel and to express Israel's ultimate fidelity to Yahweh. Monotheism is not a new cultural step but expresses Israel's relationship with Yahweh.[94]

This new stage in Israel's rhetoric takes place in a context in which political boundaries and institutions of the past no longer offered a place in which to identify the politically and socially reduced nation. What was previously formulated along human and political lines is restated religiously along cosmic

[92] Cf. Gnuse, *No Other Gods,* 198.
[93] While Smith (*OBM,* 154) uses the title "Second Isaiah" he always places it in quotation marks. He doubts that it was ever intended to be circulated independently from "First Isaiah" and concludes that "textually there is only one book of Isaiah."
[94] Smith, *OBM,* 154.

lines.[95] Consequently, Smith does not view monotheism of this period to be an intellectual breakthrough.

The divine council does not figure in Smith's work as an outstanding feature, but as one that stands behind the image of God as a way of conceptualizing deity. It is one of the structures used to configure deity in a manner that makes sense. To assist in his structuring of divinity, Smith speaks in a number of different ways. First he speaks of anthropomorphisms and monsters. To do this he divides the conceptual world into the three levels of space called near, foreign and far. The near relates to the cultivated or domesticated, the foreign to those cultures which can be differentiated but yet remain accessible. The far refers to the uncultivated or outback areas. Gods are assigned places according to these areas. Those that fall into the realm of the near are the indigenous and domestic gods that have a cult; foreign gods may be sought for blessing, but they do not have a cult. Those that range from the outback or far areas are treated as monsters, and might include deities like Mot in Ugarit. The foreign realm acts as a buffer between the known of the near and the unknown of the far.[96] The gods are pictured according to the spatial realm they occupy: anthropomorphic or domesticated animals serve as representatives of the near; monsters or wild animals serve as representatives of the far.

[95] Smith, *OBM*, 193.
[96] Smith, *OBM*, 28–30.

After using spatial metaphors to conceive of divine relations, Smith structures conceptions of deity by means of the divine council. This conception is used as a way of organizing the gods as a whole, usually around specific deities, though no individual deity represents the pantheon as a whole. The council is structured into tiers providing a way of organizing the pantheon into ranks. Four tiers are noted in Ugarit, though in the Old Testament the vestiges of three might be discerned with only two remaining in any definitive way. He speaks of the pantheon undergoing a collapse in Israel, in which the elements of deity that remained as part of the "near" were converged into YHWH and those that represented part of the "far" were excised. The other members of the pantheon were demoted from their divine status and become angels who exist solely to serve the one. Council language and imagery are retained in many places because they were not deemed to be opposed to the later monotheistic rhetoric. He writes that all that the rhetoric of monotheism required was "one divine assembly headed by one divine ruler, but it makes little or no impact on the language of assembly in itself."[97]

The third structural element was the model of the patrimonial household and, in particular, the royal patrimonial household. In this model the patriarch mediates internal, domestic conflict and protects against external threat. The goals of the patrimonial family are to preserve the family line, its prosperity, land and reputation. As a royal patrimonial family, it symbolizes "the family of

[97] Smith, *OBM*, 51.

families," or the top of the social pyramid.[98] Relationships among the deities are described along family lines, with El and Athirat described as creator and creatrix and those under them as the sons of El and the seventy sons of Athirat.

El is viewed by Smith as the God originally associated with the Exodus from Egypt in early Israelite tradition. This El was secondarily associated with YHWH when the two gods became identified in the tradition. Because Smith understands Israelite religion to be a branch of Canaanite religion, the El of the Old Testament is simply one expression of this deity. It was the emergence of the state and the centralization of the national state cult that caused the emergence of a national high god and an accompanying monolatry in Israel. The YHWH alone party emerged in the ninth century BCE in the midst of international political conflict, giving rise to the image of YHWH's power over other peoples and supporting the idea of his universal dominion.

Baal also is identified with YHWH. At first this identification was treated positively, though with the entrance of the Tyrian Baal from Phoenicia in the ninth century BCE, the equation of YHWH and Baal became problematic. The conflict recorded in Judges 6-7 is to be understood as a conflict with this Baal, and not the Canaanite Baal.

K. Merling Alomia notes that the Old Testament is aware of an elaborate tradition of polytheism in the ancient Near East, but that Israel was unique in its possession of a monotheistic view. In consideration of the Ugaritic literature, he

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[98] Smith, *OBM*, 54-66.

notes the significance of the divine council and the central role that it played in dealing with the affairs of the gods.[99] He admits that in the Old Testament, heavenly beings are both explicitly attested as well as implicitly mentioned and that they exist as an innumerable host. They also exist in a variety of forms, though they are most vividly portrayed in the accounts of the heavenly council.

He notes that this council is an organized and dynamic body that operates under the absolute leadership of YHWH.[100] Alomia also indicates that its composition is made up of God and his angels, who are not gods, but created beings.[101] The council passages indicate that it met with regularity before the throne of YHWH. It had at least three notable functions: (1) to present information before God; (2) to render homage and praise to God; (3) to assist YHWH in his judgement.[102]

Alomia's study is concerned primarily to compare the lesser gods of the ancient Near East with the angels of the Old Testament. He concludes by asserting that it appears that the ancient Near East literary-graphic imagery of the celestial population and the biblical angelology have to do with the same reality, though they speak about it in differing ways.[103] The title of his dissertation signals this distinction most forcefully. In it he calls the lower ranked deities of

[99] Alomia, LGANE.
[100] Alomia,LGANE, 558.
[101] Alomia,LGANE, 373.
[102] Alomia,LGANE, 559.
[103] Alomia,LGANE, 577.

the ancient Near East "lesser gods" while those that appear in parallel positions in the Old Testament he calls "heavenly beings." Alomia considers the religion of Israel to be unique in its conception of God. And this he demonstrates through his treatment of the gods of the ancient Near East and their counterparts in the Old Testament.

As council studies have developed, the motif is treated more extensively. David Maron Fleming has sought to apply narrative approaches to the study of the divine council, treating it as a type scene.[104] He demonstrates that the divine council is a motif in the literature of the ancient Near East by indicating the extensive use of a fixed terminology and the use of shared concepts, objects, events, characters, functions and imagery.[105] These things are all present in the Old Testament, indicating that this motif is operative here as well.

He treats the use of the divine council motif in the Old Testament as a type-scene. A type-scene is a narrative tool employed to signal a significant event. It uses archetypical repetition of patterns to signify to the reader that what is happening shares certain properties with other events of the same pattern. These patterns may occur repeatedly in the same piece of literature, or be carried over from a common pool shared by a larger culture. Their effectiveness is found in their ability to trigger a connection with other places where the scene is used. Repetition is thus a key feature. Variance in the repetition also

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[104] Fleming, DCTS.
[105] Fleming, DCTS, 5–31.

functions as a trigger. It signals when the type-scene ought to bring about a different result than in previous occurrences.

The divine council type-scene function in the Old Testament to signal fateful events in the narrative.[106] These events may be either positive or negative for those involved, and they may pertain to an individual or a group. Of those divine council scenes that Fleming has termed "singulative type-scenes,"[107] all conform to a typical pattern and each functions literarily as a device to signal the divine council motif. Variations that exist suit the context and do not have significance for the motif except to make it applicable to the context. He notes that these scenes each have a decidedly prophetic flavour that serves primarily to validate an unusual prophetic message.[108] It functions to convince the reader that the ideological repertoire of the text is legitimate by grounding the prophetic word in YHWH's council.[109] The regularity of the concept of the divine council and ancient Near East literature in general ought to convince the reader that it is a legitimate means of talking about God. It serves as a vehicle for communicating to the reader a coherent conceptual framework for understanding the realm of the gods and humanity's relationship to that world.[110]

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[106] Fleming, DCTS, 63.
[107] These scenes include: 1 Kings 22:19–23/ 2 Chronicles 18:18–22; Isaiah 6:1–13; Isaiah 40:1-11 and Psalm 82. He treats the council scenes in Job 1 & 2 and the council scenes in the visions of Zechariah as clustered type-scenes.
[108] Fleming, DCTS, 151.
[109] Fleming, DCTS, 154.
[110] Fleming, DCTS, 156.

His discussion of the clustered type-scenes leads him to conclude that in later periods, the divine council continues to be a legitimate means of talking about YHWH and his activities. They "provide structure and archetypal expressiveness to authenticate the ideological concerns and assertions of the narrator."[111] The divine council type-scene is concerned with the establishment of order. In the divine council, YHWH acts to restore order. This is accomplished through the commissioning of prophetic messages and through the moving of the boundaries between order and chaos through the decrees of YHWH.[112] The divine council may function to affirm current structures or to signal that a change is about to take place. Because these things are rooted in the council, they are to be embraced and accepted by the reader as from God.

We have treated Michael Heiser's disagreement with the four tiers of the pantheon above. It is necessary to say a little more about his work. The contribution of Heiser's work is his attempt to demonstrate that the divine council continues to operate as a valid conceptual motif in the Second Temple period. He challenges the consensus view that sees this period as one in which a true monotheism emerged in Israel that denied absolutely the existence of other gods besides YHWH. He notes that the literature of this period is replete with references to multiple gods, including references to the divine council. He notes a lack of consistency in the way these are treated, since they are viewed by

[111] Fleming, DCTS, 210.
[112] Fleming, DCTS, 217.

scholars to be representative of Israelite faith prior to the exile, though after the exile they are treated as references to lesser beings and called angels.[113]

He understands the uniqueness of Israel's religion in this period not in its belief in an ontological monotheism, but in the area of worship. YHWH is treated as incomparable among the gods. He notes that in the later literature, a plurality of divine beings is still operative, albeit in a manner subservient to YHWH. This leads him to conclude that an absolute and intolerant monotheism cannot be sustained as a representative picture of Israel's faith in this period. The monotheism that operates is one that treats YHWH as existing in a position over the gods. He thus treats all monotheistic statements in the Old Testament as statements of incomparability.[114] The divine council worldview that existed before the exile is viewed as having survived the exile, where it served as the soil for the cultivation of a belief in two powers in heaven that was operative in the Dead Sea scrolls and also in Judaism until it was declared heretical in the second century CE.

Heiser demonstrates that the divine council was a live option in some segments of Judaism even into the Common Era. He has helped to understand how the council could operate in a context where one God, YHWH, was deemed to have prominence and was able to command absolute recognition and worship from his adherents. He has also indicated that it is not necessary to see other

[113] Heiser, DCSTJL, 18.
[114] Heiser, DCSTJL, 234.

heavenly beings as less than deity. Their possession of divine status does not have to pose a threat to YHWH theologically, since he retains his unique position, not from an ontological standpoint, but from the standpoint of worship. Because he is without comparison, Israel is forbidden to worship any other god but YHWH.

2.5. Summary

The above survey of scholarship on the divine council and monotheism indicates that the religion of Canaan, as manifest in the texts from Ugarit, can no longer be viewed as hostile to the religion of Israel. A consensus has emerged that accepts that Israel's religion is largely indistinguishable from the Canaanite religion until the time of the exile. The idea of a monotheism that can be traced back to Moses is largely abandoned in favour of the recognition that Israel's early faith was polytheistic.

Comparison between El in the literature from Ugarit and El in the Bible has led many scholars to treat these as the same God. Frank Moore Cross has led the way in this, though hints were present in earlier scholars who treated the picture of the Ugaritic El. Cross treated El and YHWH as being identical, though it seems that most scholars now understand these to be two separate deities who were later identified. Smith breaks with the consensus in treating El as the original God of the Exodus from Egypt in the tradition of Israel; most consider YHWH to hold this position.

Recent studies have begun to treat the divine council and the pantheon with a variety of methodologies. Lowell Handy used a social-sciences approach and treated the council as bureaucracy. Literary approaches were used by David Fleming. Theological interests seem to stand behind Michael Heiser's thesis as he seeks to defend the uniqueness of the God of Israel while admitting evidence that other deities were admitted through the use of divine council language and references to the gods in typical fashion. All scholarship since the publication of H. Wheeler Robinson's programmatic essay on the divine council have acknowledged that this is a significant motif. E. T. Mullen was the first to contribute a book long study to the topic, and further significant contribution was not immediately forthcoming. The increase in studies since the early 1980s suggests that studies in the divine council are making something of a resurgence.

3.0. The Divine Council in Ugarit

There is significant evidence to demonstrate the existence of the divine council in the literature from Ugarit. It is the dominant way in which the totality of the gods are conceived in the ancient Near East, making it an essential component in any discussion of deity.[115] Even in contexts in which council terminology is not mentioned it is often clear that the structures and hierarchies that make up the council continue to be operative.[116] Many of the deities mentioned in the Ugaritic texts are themselves involved in one way or another in the activities of the council, indicating the interconnectedness of the deities with the council.

We will investigate the council in the Ugaritic texts first by studying the divine council terminology. We shall then give consideration to the location of the council gatherings. The third section will consider the membership of the council and a final section will investigate the operations of the council.

3.1. Terminology

The easiest way to access the divine council is through the terminology used to refer to the council.[117] In past studies, emphasis has been given to those

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[115] Smith, *OBM*, 41; T. Jacobsen, "Primitive Democracy in Ancient Mesopotamia," *JNES* 2 (1943): 159-72; G. Evans, "Ancient Mesopotamian Assemblies: An Addendum," *JAOS* 78 (1958), 114.
[116] Cross, *CMHE*, 37, 183. Cross would go so far as to say that whenever two or more deities with El are present, there the general divine assembly meets. This is likely an overstatement of his case. But it is probably fair to say that ideology of the council continues to operate, even if the council itself is not explicitly manifest or assembled formally in these contexts.
[117] Michael S. Heiser, DCSTJL , 30-32; Mark S. Smith, *OBM*, 41-42; Mullen, *DCCEHL*, 117-128.

terms that are also found in biblical literature, since generally the council has been studied with the intention of determining congruence between the divine council in the Ugaritic literature and the divine council as it appears in the Old Testament. In this section we shall only consider the terms appearing in the Ugaritic corpus.

3.1.1. *pḫr*

The most common designations for the divine council in the literature from Ugarit involve the root **pḫr*, which is also linked to the Akkadian *puḫru* which has the meaning "assembly" or "totality."[118] Ugaritic usage confirms the Akkadian meaning by its use in contexts that imply the idea of a group, as for example in CAT 1.23.57: "and the assembly sings" (*wyšr pḫr*). When used of the gods the term always appears in phrases. The following permutations exist:

pḫr 'ilm	the assembly of the gods	CAT 1.47.29
mpḫrt / pḫr bn 'ilm;	the assembly of the sons of El/the gods	CAT 1.4.III.14; CAT 1.65.3; 30.3; 32.I.3, 9, 17, 26, 34
pḫr m'd	the assembly of meeting	CAT 1.2.I.14, 15, 20, 31
pḫr kkbm	the assembly of the stars	CAT 1.10.I.4

The *pḫr 'ilm* appearing in CAT 1.47.29 is found in a list of deities to be honoured in the sacrificial rites. None of the lists that parallel this one (i.e., RS 1.017, 24.264, 24.643:1-9) is a complete list, each list apparently representing a restricted assembly or grouping of deities.

[118] Cyrus H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Textbook: Glossary and Indicies* (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Intituto Biblico, 1998), 468.

Mark Smith notes that scholarship is divided over whether or not to understand *mpḫrt / pḫr bn 'ilm* as a reference to any assembly of the gods or only to El's assembly.[119] The discussion centers on whether or not the *m* on *'ilm* is enclictic or marks the plural. CAT 1.40.25, 42 record the prayer that the sacrifices offered would be borne to El. In that text, *mpḫrt bn 'il* refers to the assembly of El's sons and not to an unspecified grouping of deities. It appears in a series of parallels that place El as father over an assembly of his sons, thus indicating how family and council language are used interchangeably:

> *ytš'i[.l 'ab. bn 'il]/*
> *ytš'i . l dr . bn . 'il .*
> *l . mpḫrt . bn . 'i[l]*
> (CAT 1.40.24–25)
>
> May it be borne [to the father of the sons of El]/
> may it be born to the circle of the sons of El
> to the assembly of the sons of E[l][120]

The term *pḫr* is also used to refer to restricted groupings. The assemblies of Baal (*pḫr b'l* in CAT 1.162.17) and Ditanu (*pḫr qbs dtn* in CAT1.15.III.15) are cases in point. These references might be leveraged to show that the assembly in some contexts may be restricted to those associated with a particular deity. El's assembly and Baal's assembly appear together in a variant of CAT 1.40.16–17 (RS [Varia 20]) with differing terminology used to refer to each one's council:

> *l dr 'il*
> *w pḫr b'l*

[119] Smith, *OBM*, 41.
[120] The Ugaritic texts in this paper are from Simon B. Parker, ed., *Ugaritic Narrative Poetry* (SBL WAW 9; Scholars Press, 1997) and Dennis Pardee, *Ritual and Cult* (SBL WAW 10; Leiden: Brill, 2002). Translations are mine unless indicated.

for the circle of El
And the assembly of Baal

This indicates that El's assembly is represented differently than Baal's and may also suggest that El's council is to be differentiated from the divine council that embraces the pantheon as a whole.[121] This leads us to conclude that the *m* on the *'ilm* must be a plural ending and not an enclictic.[122] In any case, in the places where the *m* does not occur, El's assembly is certainly in view.

The word *'il* in Ugaritic is used both as an appellative for deity as well as for the personal name of the high god, El. This shared usage indicates that those who bear the title *bn 'il/m* do so because they exist in a particular kind of relationship to El. Thus in considering the vexing question of whether the assembly is El's or a more general grouping of the gods, it is helpful to keep in mind that all the gods (*'ilm*) are to be defined and understood to some degree by the relationship that they have with El whose name has been extended to include all who are associated with him either by alliance or by procreation.

To refer to the assembly when gathering to make decisions the phrase *pḫr m'd* is used. The word *m'd* appears to be derived from the rood *y'd*, "to appoint,

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[121] Mark S. Smith, *The Ugaritic Baal Cycle* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994), 231.
[122] The enclitic can apparently be attached to any part of speech. It is also found on words in construct, as in Biblical Hebrew. Daniel Sivan, *A Grammar of the Ugaritic Language* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 193–4. It is used in various ways in languages cognate with Hebrew, where it sometimes has emphatic force, and at others appears to be a morpheme for indetermination. It is used most commonly in the middle of the construct chain. In Ugaritic, however, it is almost never found on nouns in construct. Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew and Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 158–59, esp. n. 43.

to decide." It occurs five times in the Ugaritic texts and in each case in the phrase *pḫr m'd*, all of which occur in CAT 1.2.I. Its use appears to further define the meaning of *pḫr* indicating an assembly that is gathered for decision making purposes and thus could be translated "gathered assembly."[123] In the context in which it appears it refers to the meeting of the council under the presidency of El.

In CAT 1.10.I.4 the phrase *pḫr kkbm* (assembly of the stars) appears. Mullen provides the following reconstruction and translation:

> *[wrgm] dlyd'bn 'il*
> *[d l ybn] pḫr kkbm*
> *[- - - -] dr dt šmm*
> (CAT 1.10.I.3–5)
>
> [And tell,] that the sons of El may know,
> [And that] the assembly of the stars [may understand]
> [- - - -] the council of the heavens [may ?][124]

The passage may indicate a parallelism between the sons of El (*bn 'il*) and the assembly of the stars (*pḫr kkbm*) and the circle of the heavens (*dr dt šmm*). If so, it indicates that the sons of El and the assembly of the stars together form part of the heavenly council. In the Keret Epic, El sits at the head of the assembly and four times addresses its members as either *'ilm* "gods" or *bny* "my sons" (CAT1.16.V.1–28). The multiplicity of deities that comprise the pantheon,

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[123] Mullen, *DCCEHL*, 128-129; Clifford, *Cosmic Mountain*, 43.
[124] Mullen, *DCCEHL*, 195. Mullen takes this reconstruction for the first two lines from G. R. Driver, *Canaanite Myths and Legends* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956), 114-116.

however, suggests that El's council, comprised of his own sons was part of a still larger general council.[125]

3.1.2. *ʻdt*

A second word used in connection with the council is the word *ʻdt*, which appears in CAT 1.15.II.7, 11 where it is used to speak of a party of gods (*ʻdt ʼilm*) attending a reception hosted by Kirta. This reception is held to celebrate Kirta taking Lady Huraya from King Pabuli following a siege of his city in response to a dream vision from El. This in turn was a response to an appeal by Kirta for offspring to perpetuate his royal house. The *ʻdt ʼilm* apparently refers to a number of the gods, including the following who are specifically named: Almighty Baal (*aliyn bʻl*), Prince Yarikh, (*yrḫ zbl*) Kothar wa-Hasis (*kṯr wḫss*), Rahmay (*rḥmy*), Prince Rashap (*ršp zbl*) and apparently also El, whom Baal implores to stay and bless Kirta. In the context, the *ʻdt ʼilm* is then set in parallel to the *dr ʼil* (the circle of El, CAT1.15.III.19).

3.1.3. *dr*

The phrase *dr ʼil* is the most common designation for the assembly of El.[126] It appears in the following constructions:

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[125] Michael S. Heiser, "Introduction to Divine Council Scholarship and Terminology" (unpublished paper, n.d.).
[126] CAT 1.65.2; 1.40.7, 17, 25-26, 33-34; 1.39.7.

dr 'il	circle of El	CAT 1.15.III.19;1.39.7; 1.162.16; 1.87.18
dr bn 'il	circle of the sons of El	CAT 1.40.25, 33-34
dr dt šmm	circle of those of heaven	CAT 1.10.I.3, 5
dr 'il wpḫr b'l	circle of El and assembly of Baal	CAT 1.39.7; 1.87.18

Literally *dr* has the meaning of "circle of El," though Mark Smith suggests that it might be better rendered "El's family."[127] The word is attested in a number of West-Semitic languages, including Akkadian, Hebrew, and Aramaic. In these it is used to refer to periods of time and has been rendered by such words as "age," "generation" and "eternity." It also carries the meaning of "circle" or "ball." Its use in the Ugaritic suggests a "family" or "grouping" identified by its association with El. It is used in conjunction with the description "the sons of El" making the idea of "family" appropriate in these contexts. In other places, if the idea of family cannot be transferred, it at least has the sense of "company" or "party." This grouping is directly associated with El.

3.1.4. Summary

The terminology used to refer to the divine council in the literature from Ugarit indicates that the divine council is generally conceived of as having some kind of connection with El. Occasionally the word *pḫr* is used with the names of other deities to speak of restricted groupings or councils under the sponsorship of these deities. The use of council language when speaking of these other deities may be a derivative use referring to their retinues. The language of family

[127] Smith, *OBM*, 135.

predominates when El's council is in view, suggesting that those who belong to his council are paternally related to him. The terminology affirms the existence of a council or grouping of the gods and the *m'd pḫr* speaks specifically to its function as a decision making body.

3.2. Meeting Place

CAT 1.2.I.14, 20 indicates that the assembly of the gods (*pḫr m'd*) meets at a place called "the mount Ll" (*ǵr ll*). This is consistent with the general conception in the ancient Near East that the assembly of the gods took place on a "cosmic mountain."[128] The association of Mount Ll with the divine council is clear from the parallelism of *pḫr m'd* and *ǵr ll* in CAT 1.2.I.14, 20. Likewise, *pḫr m'd* twice parallels the phrase "at the feet of El" (CAT 1.2.I.14-15, 30-31) and once "Bull my Father" (CAT 1.2.I.16-17), an epithet for El (CAT 1.2.III.16, 17, 19, 21; 2.I.33, 36), which leads to the association of *pḫr m'd* and the place of the council meeting, Mount Ll, with El. It would seem warranted to conclude that Mount Ll is the designated meeting place of the "gathered" or "appointed assembly" (*pḫr m'd*).

[128] Clifford, *Cosmic Mountain,* deals with this theme extensively, considering attestations in Mesopotamia, Egypt and among the Hurrians and Hittites as well as Ugarit and the Old Testament. The cosmic mountain has been found in contexts which involved fertility, creation, assembly of the gods, dwelling place of the high god, the meeting place of heaven and earth, the pillar that upholds creation order, or a place of theophany (p. 5). He continues by underscoring that the cosmic mountain designates a place set apart because divine presence or activity which, acting upon the world of man, brings order or stability to the world. It is in simple terms, the point at which earth touches the divine sphere as manifest in certain natural phenomena (p. 7-8). In Ugarit, two mountains are deemed by Clifford to fit this category, that of El and that of Baal. He summarizes that "El's mountain is where the gods meet to decide issues that affect the universe...; Baal's mountain is a place of combat in which issues of life and death are decided" (p. 97).

This has led to further associations of the council meeting place with El's dwelling place.

El's abode is located "at the springs of the two-rivers, at the meeting place of the double deeps" (CAT 1.100.3) or "[among the strea]ms of the deeps...the precinct of El...the camp [or tent] of the King" (CAT 1.17.VI.48-49; cf. 1.2.III.4-5; 1.3.V.6-8; 1.4.IV.21-24; 1.5.VI.1-26.I.32-36). Likewise, his abode is said to be "in the mountain, Mount KS" (CAT 1.1.III.12,22) and the parallel, "El's mountain, the tent of the King" (CAT 1.1.III.23-24). Such designations indicate that the dwelling place of El was both mountainous and watery in nature. Its location at the meeting place of the "double deeps" may indicate that his abode was at the meeting place of the two cosmic oceans, the upper waters and the lower waters of the primordial sea. The use of the term *ḫršn* in two texts to describe El's mountain also indicates both mountainous and watery features of the mountain. Clifford discusses this term in detail and decisively demonstrates that El's mountain is not an infernal one, and that the use of *ḫršn* does not support the idea that El has suffered demotion.[129] Its use in Akkadian texts shows that it is a logogram or determinative for mountain and should simply be translated "mountain".[130]

[129] Pope, *El in the Ugaritic Texts*, 92-104, has used this term to support the idea that El was a deposed and banished king. Utilizing parallel myths concerning vanquished and banished gods, he felt that the use of *ḫršn* in relation to El's dwelling place indicated that El had been banished from his mountain, Saphon, and confined to the subterranean underworld by Baal.
[130] Clifford, *Cosmic Mountain*, 39. The word *ḫršn* has also been used to speak of the "river ordeal," a reference to some form of judgement which the dead underwent on their entrance into the underworld. That it is used of El's dwelling suggests that the foot of El's mountain constituted

While El's dwelling is described as being located on a cosmic mountain, it is also described as being a tent dwelling (CAT 1.4.IV.20-24; 1.6.I.32-36;1.17.VI.46-49). The description of the conversation between El and Anat, which takes place at El's tent abode through the closed doors of eight chambers (CAT 1.3.V.10-12, 25-27), indicates that El's tent contained more than one room.[131] El as a tent dweller associates him with the patriarchal way of life and identifies him as a patriarchal figure.

The association of the tent of El (*ḏd 'il*) with the council comports with the council as the place where the decrees of El are issued. The council meets on the cosmic mountain in the tents of El, at the very place where heaven and earth intersect, in order that the decisions important in the earthly realm might be made known.

El's mountain is not the only mountain that is associated with divine activity. Baal's mountain, Mount Saphon, also includes references that share cosmic connotations. Included are references to *'il ṣpn* (divine Saphon, 1.3.III.29), that describes a pleasant place (*n'm*) where the gods of Saphon meet (1.47.1) and at which feasts of the gods were said to take place (*dbḥ ṣpn*, 1.148.1; 1.91.3). The language is similar to the language used of the garden paradise often associated

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the entrance to the underworld. It is this connection that leads Pope to see the mountain of El as being an infernal, subterranean dwelling place (Pope, *El in the Ugaritic Texts*, 70-71). Clifford would simply understand this to demonstrate that El's mountain was indeed a cosmic mountain in that it unites all three levels of cosmic space: the underworld, earth, and heaven.

[131] Mullen, *DCCEHL*, 134.

with the center of the cosmos.[132] Descriptions that equate Baal's mountain with cosmic themes do not equate Baal with El, nor suggest that Baal's assembly was equivalent to, equal to, or in conflict with that of El. Rather, each major deity of the pantheon under El may have had his or her own retinue that formed a council (circle) around them. Saphon, Ks and Ll each denote the respective meeting places of these councils.[133] We do not have, however, any definitive evidence of a major assembly of the gods having taken place either on Baal's mountain or under the presidency of Baal, leading us to conclude that his councils and mountain are secondary to that of El.

3.3. Membership

The membership of the Divine Council is designated by the term *'ilm,* "gods," in the Ugaritic texts, as is evinced by references to the council as *pḫr (bn) 'ilm*, *mpḫrt bn 'l*, and *dr bn 'il.* In the section above dealing with council terminology, we noted that the *'ilm* should be understood as being derived from El as those who are in some way associated with him. Normally this association is expressed by the language of sonship (*bn 'il/'ilm*).

In CAT 1.2.I.21, 38 the members of the council are also called *bn qdš* and in CAT 1.3.IV.48; 3.V.36, 39; 6.I.40 *bn 'atrt*, "sons of Athirat," and *šb'm.bn.aṯrt*, "the seventy sons of Athirat," in CAT 1.4.VI.46. *Qdš* is disputed, considered by some

[132] Smith, *OBM*, 29.
[133] Smith, *OBM*, 43; Michael S. Heiser, "Introduction to Divine Council Scholarship and Terminology," n.p. [cited 15 March 2005]. Online: http://www.thedivinecouncil.com. Mullen, *DCCEHL*, 130, treats Ks and Ll as referring to the same mountain.

to be an epithet of Athirat, which would seem to limit the council to the seventy sons of Athirat.[134] Smith, on the other hand, sees *qdš* as a possible epithet for El. He argues that "there is no particular warrant for seeing the goddess' epithet in this designation for the divine council, as there is no clear Ugaritic instance of *qdš* as a title for the goddess."[135] While Smith argues persuasively against seeing it as an epithet for El, he does remain somewhat noncommittal with a suggestion that it may refer to a servant of Athirat. He writes that "in any case, the title 'holy one,' belongs to one deity or the other. Athirat's servant bears the compound name, *Qdš w-'Amrr*."[136] What might be stated with confidence, is that all of the *bn 'ilm* share this designation, and thus all are in some way marked out for holiness. Thus "holiness" is a characteristic trait of deity, if not in general, at least in reference to those who belong to the council.

Most of the members in the council are not named and are designated simply as *'ilm*, "gods" or in El's speech as *bny*, "my sons." In the main council text, CAT 1.2.II, Yamm, El and Baal, Anat and Athtart are mentioned. Yamm is present only in his two messengers (*ml'ak*). Anat and Athtart are named when they restrain a violent Baal who has proceeded to beat the messengers of Yamm

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[134] CAT 1.14.IV.34-36. Cf., Mullen, *DCCEHL*, 213-14n172. Also, CAT 1.16.I.11 in which *qdš* has been taken by some to be an abstract noun referring to Asherah. For discussion on this and the rejection of this see John Gray, *The KRT Text in the Literature of Ras Shamra* (2nd edn.; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1964), 66. F. M. Cross is clear that he feels this is an epithet of Asherah. He remarks that "another epithet of Asherah found in Ugarit and in Egypt is *Qudšu*, "Holiness," *CMHE*, 33. He continues this discussion with references to relief portrayals and iconographic figurines (33-35). Also, CAT 1.17.I.21-22 with its reference to *bn qdš* is seen as alluding to the seventy sons of Asherah.

[135] Smith, *UBC*, 295.

[136] Smith, *OBM*, 93.

following El's acquiescence to Yamm's request made by his messengers. Baal is described differently than the other gods, who are seated on royal thrones (*nkḥt zblkm*) dining, whereas Baal is described as standing over El (*b'l qm 'l il*). In addressing the council Yamm's messengers demand that Baal son of Dagan be handed over, and later, El in declaring agreement, calls Baal the son of Dagan.

This description of Baal indicates clearly that Baal stood as an outsider to the council. His paternity differed from the other gods, who are called by El 'my sons,' while he is called the son of Dagan. His position standing over El may indicate his status as one who waited on El, though this is not undisputed. Brian Peckham has noted that Baal's position standing by El might suggest subservience if the reason he was standing there was to serve El. However, he doubts that this is likely since the messengers of Yamm stand before El, and their posture is obviously not one of subservience.[137] Smith treats Baal as the equivalent of a courtier before his lord, and so translates Baal's actions as "waiting upon" and not "standing over."[138] Smith's position would seem to be the best way of understanding Baal's position since it indicates Baal's lesser status in the assembly at this point in the cycle. After Baal has defeated Yamm, he appeals to El through Anat and Athirat for a palace like the gods. This indicates that Baal's victories are what have earned him his status among the gods. This status El is reluctant to grant him, but finally acquiesces with Baal taking his

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[137] Brian Peckham, personal correspondence, 30 September 2004.
[138] Smith, *UBC*, 295.

place in the council, not in subservience to El and the other gods, but as a vice-regent of El.

The *ml'ak* (messengers) also deserve consideration. When the divine council is considered by scholars to include all of the gods, the messengers are necessarily included. Most acknowledge the messengers to be divine beings from the statement made in CAT 1.3.III.32 that Anat, upon seeing Baal's messengers Gapn and Ugar, is reported to have "perceived the gods" (*'nt tph ilm*). Heiser limits the council to the divine family and argues that the presence of the messenger deities in the council is necessitated by the service they perform for the council. They do not, however, participate in the deliberations or decisions of the council and so are not, properly speaking, members. The activities of the *ml'ak* observable in the text show these deities to be completely subservient to their deity, repeating verbatim the messages of the second tier deities who send them.[139] This leads Heiser to distinguish between the authoritative council and those that serve it.[140] In fact, Heiser denies that these are even proper deities. The *ml'ak* are called *'ilm*, not because they are gods, but because they have been sent by and represent gods of higher rank. Thus he writes, "*mlkm* are called *'ilm* because they represent second-tier deities before an audience."[141]

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[139] We will consider the tiers of the council in the section on the structure of the divine council.
[140] Heiser, DCSTJL, 37, 40-41.
[141] Heiser, DCSTJL, 45.

This distinction, however, appears forced. Heiser's concern is to show that the angels in the Old Testament, which he views as parallel to these beings in the council at Ugarit, are not demoted gods, but rather angels who have always had this status. He is seeking to garner support for this by seeking a parallel in the Ugaritic council among the *ml'ak*. The announcement that Anat saw the messengers as gods (*'ilm*), however, cannot be so easily set aside.[142] These gods did represent deities of a higher rank and so are in some way to be identified with them, but they remain messengers and not the gods who sent them. It would seem from the context the reference to "gods" (plural) does not refer to the one (singular) whom they represent, but to the messengers as messengers. It is, after all, the messengers who are called gods by the omniscient narrator who describes what Anat perceived when she saw them approaching. In the similar passage in which Yamm sends his messengers, the messengers are called "lads" (*ǵlm,* 1.2.I.13, 19, 39).[143] Should we suppose that Yamm too is a "lad" as represented by his messengers? In that context no attempt is made to equate the messengers with the deity, though clearly they represent him and his interests in the council. The same must be said of Baal's messengers here. They represent him and his interests, but they do not change from being "not gods" to "gods" for the duration. While Heiser's explanation

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[142] CAT 1.3.III.34.
[143] Baal's messengers are also called by this term in 1.3.III.8, before they appear before Anat, and then again in 1.3.IV.5.

represents a creative attempt to escape the dilemma that this line calling Baal's messengers "gods" creates for his thesis, it is not supported in the text.

Because the messenger in the council has been the subject of much scholarly inquiry, a detailed description of the messenger will be undertaken here. One of the strongest texts associated with the council is recorded in CAT 1.2.I. The column begins in lines 1-10 with imprecations from Baal to Yamm. The section that follows (lines 11-46) is a well preserved and coherent record of Yamm giving instructions to his messengers and the messengers conveyance of that message to the assembled council (*pḫr m'd*). The messengers are designated as *mlakm*, *t'dt* and *ǵlm* (CAT 1.2.I.11, 13). After an exhortation to make haste, they are instructed in comportment:

> *[lp'n.il]/al.tpl.*
> *al. tšṯḥwy.pḫr [m'd]*
> *[qmm. amr. am]/r*
> *ṯny. d'tkm.*
> (CAT 1.2.I.14-16)
>
> [At the feet of El] do not bow down,
> Do not prostrate yourselves before the [Assembled] Council.
> [Standing, make your spee]ch,
> Recite your instructions.

Lines 17-19 record the message that they were to give to the council which is repeated verbatim in lines 33-35. The record of their comportment before the Council is recorded in lines 30-33. Lines 30-32a coincides exactly with the instructions of lines 14-16. Lines 32a-33 simply add:

išt.ištm.yitmr.
ḥrb.lṭšt[lš]nhm

A flame, two flames they appear,
Their [ton]gue a sharp sword.

In speaking about the role of the messenger, particularly respecting the authority the messenger had over the content of the message, Mullen points out that the form and content is never changed, "it is delivered in precisely the same words that had been given to the divine couriers."[144] This verbatim repetition of the messengers in other contexts is amply demonstrated in the texts in which El and Baal send out their messengers (CAT 1.1.II.13-24; III.4-16; 3.III.8-31, 3.IV.5-20; 3.VI.1-25, 4.I.4-22).

The deity of the messenger is not clearly signaled in CAT 1.2.I, however, there are indications from other texts that they were gods. We have observed already, that in CAT 1.3.III.32 Anat sees the two messengers of Baal, Gapn and Ugar, who are called *ǵlmm* (CAT 1.3.III.8; IV.5) and we are told that she perceives the gods - *'ilm* (CAT 1.3.III.32, cf., CAT 1.5.I.9; II.13-15).[145] Likewise, Kothar wa-Hasis addresses his messengers as *ilm* in CAT 1.1.III. 18-19 and 2.III.2-3.

A further expression of the deity of the messengers is their description as *'nn ilm*, normally rendered "divine servants" (CAT 1.III.17; 3.IV.32; 4.VIII.15). This

[144] Mullen, *DCCEHL,* 209-210.
[145] Handy, *AHH,* 157 writes: "When Baal's messengers approached Anat with his message for her, the author declares, in the role of the omniscient teller of the story, that the personnel approaching the goddess were gods."

inclusion among the rank of the gods is not an exalted one, as they are sometimes designated "slaves" because of their obedience, acquiescence and prompt compliance.[146]

The messengers of Yamm are sent back to Yamm by El with the decision of the council, and so in this regard they function not merely as messengers of Yamm to the council, but as messengers of the council to Yamm (CAT 1.2.I.36–38). This reciprocal role is accepted by the messengers on this and on other occasions, presumably because as the messengers of Yamm they become his representative presence at the council.

The messengers in this passage, as in other examples that we have, do not exhibit any significant individuality or independence. They are summoned, instructed and sent by their owner deity and are reported as doing precisely what they are told. Baal is reported to have attacked the messengers of Yamm, and though he is rebuked for attacking them, this rebuke appears not to be for the protection of the messengers, but for the breach of protocol that his action represents. There is no report of the messengers showing fear or cowering in any way at the attack, their secondary nature rendering such concern unimportant. Nor are there accounts in which the messengers deviate from the instructions given to them in any way or speak, even in acknowledgment of their commission, on their own volition. They are simply portrayed in the text as doing what they are told and repeating what they are given to say. There is no record

[146] so. Handy, *AHH*, 163n55, and Alomia, LGANE, 238.

of malfunction among the messenger class of deity.[147] We might surmise that Baal's attack upon the messengers of Yamm was not simply an act of frustration and an attempt to punish Yamm, but a message to Yamm through them. If this is true, then the rebuke would not be for a breach of council protocol, but rather for sending a message contrary to the one El had commissioned the messengers to deliver. The text that follows is either severely fragmented or missing, though it apparently included a declaration of battle by either Yamm and/or Baal.[148]

3.4. Structure

It is universally recognized that some kind of hierarchical structure exists in the Ugaritic conception of the pantheon and recent studies acknowledge that a four-tiered structure is helpful in classifying the gods.[149] At the top of the pantheon is the divine couple, El and his consort Athirat. These two gods form the highest level of authority and are distinguished from the other gods by two unique designations: (1) that of creators/owners[150] of the gods (*qnyt ilm*) and, (2) that of parents of the gods. The designation of the gods as sons of El or as sons

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[147] The idea of malfunctioning deities is proposed by Handy, who sees either independence or malfunction at every level of deity with the exception of the messenger class. Cf., Handy, *AHH.*
[148] Mark S. Smith, "The Baal Cycle," in *Ugaritic Narrative Poetry* (ed. Simon B. Parker; SBL WAW 9; Scholars Press, 1997), 102.
[149] Smith, *OBM*, 45-46; Handy, *AHH.*
[150] Peter Katz, "The Meaning of the Root קנה," *JJS* 5 (1954):126-31; and Bruce Vawter, "Yahweh: Lord of the Heavens and the Earth," *CBQ* 48 (1986): 466-67, have argued for a meaning of "acquire" or "own" for קנה in the Hebrew. Both El and Athirat are referred to as *qny* in the Ugaritic texts. It has been thus argued that rather than understanding the word to mean "creator" it is better to understand it as "owner." Cf., Handy, *AHH*, 76.

of Athirat and El as the beneficent Father attest to this divine parentage. The title "creator/owner of the gods" may also bear a similar kind of meaning. Even though it is clear that El and Athirat were not the parents of all the gods through sexual procreation, their position as parents is a *de facto* one that indicates their overall authority. Even the outsider Baal calls El "my Father" (CAT 1.3.V.35; 1.4.IV.47; cf., CAT 1.4.I.4-6) and El is called the father of humanity (*ab adm*) in CAT 1.14.I.37.

A third title, not unique to El, is *mlk*, "king" (of El, CAT 1.2.III.5; 1.4.IV.38–39, 48, of Baal, CAT 1.4.IV.43 of Athtar, CAT 1.2.III.18), yet it is clear that El's kingship is unique among the gods. Mullen has shown that the kingship of El and Baal differ radically. El's kingship is over the gods, whereas Baal's kingship is over the cosmos (i.e., the created order). El's kingship is revealed in his decrees and in the need for his decrees to authorize certain divine activities (the enslavement of Baal by Yamm, the building of a palace by Baal, the appointment of Athtar to Baal's spot when Baal was defeated by Mot). El's kingship is permanent, whereas Baal rises to the kingship with his victory over Yamm. El is the controlling authority over the gods of the pantheon. Baal's kingship is limited to areas of fertility associated with his role as the storm-god.[151] In discussions about kingship, it is helpful to recall that the root of *mlk* means "to rule" and not "to rule alone." It is used for more than one person in the pantheon because

[151] For detailed discussion, see Mullen, *DCCEHL*, 84-92.

there are multiple domains over which these function as rulers. It does not indicate that they possess absolute dominance in the pantheon.

The second tier of the pantheon is represented by the gods Baal, Anat, Mot, Yam, Athtart, Shemesh/shapshu and a host of lesser known deities. This group comprise the royal children, called the seventy sons of Athirat (CAT 1.4.VI.46). Smith speculates that these might also possess the epithet *'ilm rbm*, "the great gods."[152] Handy designates this group of gods as "active deities," whose function is to ensure that the will of the authoritative couple is carried out through the smooth operation of cosmic order.[153] This level of the pantheon is limited largely to the seventy sons of Athirat (CAT 1.4.VI.46), though Baal, an outsider, can claim some kind of familial relationship to El, of whom it is said that he calls "Bull El his father" (CAT 1.3.V.35; 1.4.IV.47) and seventy sons of Athirat are called his brothers and family (CAT 1.4.VI.44–46).

There are some indications in the Ugaritic texts that El's family was understood to be astral in character. We have already noted under the council terminology that the phrase *pḫr kkbm*, "assembly of the stars" occurs in one text in close proximity with the *bn 'il*, though it is impossible from this text (CAT 1.10.I.3–5) to determine whether the assembly of the stars is to be understood as another way of speaking of the sons of El or that it was considered as another grouping alongside of El. There are, however, other indicators to suggest that

[152] Smith, *OBM*, 45.
[153] Handy, *AHH*, 97-129.

there is some kind of astral connection with El's family. Shahar, "Dawn," and Shalim, "Dusk," are two of El's sons according to CAT 1.23. Likewise, the moon-god Yarih is called *n'mn ['I]lm*, "the favourite of El," in CAT 1.24.25. Mark Smith indicates that Athtar and Athtart, both part of El's family, appear to represent the morning and evening star.[154] It appears then, from the Ugaritic texts, that El's family included deities that were identified with the astral elements, indicating that these bore some association to El.

This level of the divine family is often involved in conflict. This indicates a martial character to the members of this tier and supports the thesis of Mullen that the council is comprised of those who have fought the theogonic wars of succession with El and, having achieved the victory, are now stationed around the aged El awaiting his decree.[155] The conflict in the Ugaritic Baal cycle appears to be concerned with the investiture of kingship as those gods from this level of the pantheon vie with each other for ascendancy.

The third tier is poorly attested, if in fact it exists at all. The craftsman god Kothar wa-Hasis is acknowledged as representative of this level. He serves the upper two tiers of the pantheon through the use of his specialized wisdom and craftsman skills. He is ordered by El to build houses for Yamm and Baal. In the cosmogonic battles he serves Baal through the fashioning of weapons that enable Baal to defeat his enemy, Yamm. Shataqat may also fit into this category

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[154] Smith, *OBM*, 62.
[155] Mullen, *DCCEHL*, 181, 185.

of deity. She was fashioned by El to dispel a mortal disease which had afflicted King Kirta and from which none of the other gods was able to deliver Kirta (CAT 1.16.V.10-VI.14).

Heiser ignores this level of deities altogether in favour of a three tiered structure for the pantheon in Ugarit.[156] Since there is little evidence to support this tier, Heiser is probably right in doing this. Kothar wa-Hasis is recognized as a foreign deity, evidenced by the location of his dwelling place in Memphis and Kaphtor (CAT 1.3.I.14–16). Smith treats him as occupying a middle position between the greater deities, El, Baal and Athirat and the lesser deities of the Baal cycle.[157] At the same time, his foreign dwelling places locate him spatially and cultically outside of the orbit of the domestic Ugaritic pantheon. His position as a foreigner from a foreign place does not forbid him recognition, but does not accord him a cult. Consequently, his relationship with the pantheon in general and the council in particular is one that acknowledges the services that he might provide, but which grants him no inherent status among them. Likewise, the inclusion of Shataqat to this level of deity also appears to be tenuous. Apart from the titles she receives, she appears to be no different in function than those of the fourth tier. She fits the general description of those deities given by Handy, as one who is created for the purpose of fulfilling a specific function that she

[156] Michael S. Heiser, "Introduction."
[157] Mark S. Smith, "Kothar wa-Hasis, the Ugaritic Craftsman God," (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1985), 463.

accomplishes while exhibiting very little independent personality. Shataqat does not appear to support the existence of a third tier in the pantheon.

We might note that the pantheon appears to be divided into two major parts: (1) the divine family and (2) those that serve the divine family.[158] The division takes place between the top two tiers and the bottom two tiers. Since the interests of the Ugaritic texts are in the activities that take place in the upper two tiers, the lower tiers appear only in their relationship to these tiers. The further subdivision of those who serve the divine royal family into the craftsmen and artisan deities is not adequately attested in the texts to make this a reasonable hypothesis for our purposes.

The fourth tier of the pantheon, which is our third and final tier, is comprised of those deities that serve the major deities in various capacities. These deities are so poorly attested apart from the *ml'ak*, "messenger" deities, that these deities come to define the whole category. Smith's summary of this tier serves as a case in point:

> The fourth level of the pantheon includes minor deities who serve other deities, such as the messenger-gods. Other minor gods serving in the retinue of major deities might also be placed at this level, such as those collectivities that serve as the military retinue of a major deity. Finally, other minor divinities may be placed at this level.[159]

[158] Smith, *OBM*, 55.
[159] Smith, *OBM*, 46.

As we have noted above, the messenger deities are described by many scholars as simply becoming the messages they were sent to convey. Handy is representative and remarks, "They became the words of the deity who sent them, repeating a message verbatim and engaging in no other activities."[160]

What is significant is that apart from Heiser, it would seem that a consensus among scholars exists in treating this level of the pantheon as possessing deity. This we have already pointed out is derived from the descriptions of them by the omniscient narrator of the texts as *'ilm* (CAT 1.3.III.32; 1.5.I.9; II.13). Their function as *ǵlm*, "envoys," *ml'ak*, "messengers," *t'dt* "emissaries" or *'nn*, "attendants" signals their relationship to the royal household but not their status as gods. They serve within the royal house but do not possess the dominion associated with it. They are gods, just not gods of the ruling class.

This tiered structure is very helpful for arranging the deities within the pantheon. Smith demonstrates that the dominant model for the presentation of deity in Ugaritic was not council or assembly, but the patriarchal family.[161] The various structures of the family bear remarkable similarity to those tiers attributed to the council, suggesting that the council may have come into existence to

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[160] Handy, *AHH*, 160; Mullen (*DCCEH*, 209–210) remarks: "After the commissioning of the messenger, the message was delivered in precisely the same words that had been given to the divine couriers. The form of the message, as repeated, leaves no doubt as to the concept of the authority of the messenger — the envoy had the same authority as the deity who dispatched him." In this respect, Mullen and Handy can be distinguished. Handy treats the messenger class of deity as having no authority and treats them merely as living letters. Mullen sees them as possessing a derived authority. In either case, however, the messenger is not free to manipulate the message at all. He delivers it as he receives it with the form and content being dictated by the sending deity. To speak of these deities as having any kind of authority is to recognize that it is derived and not inherent.

[161] Smith, *OBM*, 54-66, esp. 58-61.

answer the problems associated with a changing social structure from a patriarchal one to a city state governed by a royal family. The top two tiers comprise the members of the royal household while the remaining tier(s) correspond to the various household staff who directly serve the members with various skilled trades. The advantage of this structure is that it makes it possible to organize the functions of the gods as well as to consider their relationship to each other hierarchically.

3.5. Function

Smith remarks that one of the main activities of the Council is feasting.[162] In like fashion Alomia tells us that "the deities of the Canaanite pantheon are depicted as being assembled mainly for banquets."[163] It would seem that such gatherings were seen as festive occasions by the gods, celebrations of the "high life." In CAT 1.114 El arranges a banquet for the gods which is to take place at his place of residence. At the banquet he himself participates in the revelries to excess and winds up inebriated, staggering about on the arms of Thukamuna and Shunama, even collapsing and falling to the floor in his own excrement.[164]

The feasting activity of the council, while presented as a regular feature of council activity, simply provides a backdrop to the functional purpose of the

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[162] Smith, *OBM,* 45.
[163] Alomia, LGANE, 56-57.
[164] Cyrus H. Gordon (*The Ancient Near East* [3rd edition revised; New York, NY: W. W. Norton and Company, 1965], 95) makes an interesting note about the conduct of the ideal son, whose filial responsibilities included among other things, holding up his father while he was in his cups. Cf., Mark J. Boda, "Ideal Sonship in Ugarit," *Ugarit-Forschungen* 25 (1993): 19.

council. From the Kirta epic in CAT 1.15.V a council deliberation is recorded. King Kirta has been stricken mortally by Athirat when he fails to fulfill a vow that he made to her. El summons the gods, whom he petitions seven times in search of one who can remove Kirta's illness, but none can be found. Finally, El acts using his own skills of creation to fashion Shataqat, a "remover of illness, a dispeller of disease" (CAT 1.15.V.26-28). The purpose for the assembling of the council in this text is to deliberate and effect certain decisions pertaining to the well being of Kirta, King of Khubur. As king in the human realm, Kirta enjoys a certain intimacy with the gods. He is described as a son of El in CAT 1.14.II.6. The interest of the gods in Kirta's well being is not at all surprising, since the welfare of his kingdom is tied to the state of his house. If there is disarray in the royal house, the city will likewise be in disarray and very likely lead to an interruption or diminishing of cultic participation by both the officials in the house and the people at large. As the gods are in some measure dependent upon human cultic activity, the well being of their human subjects would be a cause of concern for the gods.

Deliberations of the council are also a part of CAT 1.2.I in which the council responds to the request of Yamm delivered by his two messengers. The scene records no discussion among the Council members, excepting the initial rebuke of the gods by Baal for their compliant response, followed by a charge to the messengers by both El and Baal. A scene of defiance in the council in which Baal attacked the two messengers is stopped with a rebuke of Baal by his own

supporters, Anat and Athtart. In this text, it appears that the council is convened to receive the messengers of Yamm and to make response to the request of Yamm.

The deliberation of the council is limited to three speeches. First, Baal addresses the council, challenging them to deny the request of Yamm. It would seem that their lowered heads indicate consent to the request of Yamm. That they have lowered their heads even before the messengers have spoken tells us that they were gathered in anticipation of the messengers' arrival, and maybe even at the request of Yamm. If their lowered heads indicate that they do not oppose Yamm's request, the raising of their heads for Baal would seem to indicate a willingness to allow him to address the council.

The second speech is made by the messengers of Yamm, who ask that Baal be handed over to Yamm and his dominion be given to Yamm. Though Baal has declared his intent to answer the legation from Yamm, it is El who answers, and his response is one of agreement to the request of Yamm. Baal responds rashly and with physical violence against the messengers of Yamm, likely as a way of challenging Yamm and sending a contrary message. It is clear at any rate that Baal did not approve of the council's decision.

The last portion of the column is badly broken and impossible to reconstruct. It appears that Baal sends a challenge to Yamm. The third column is completely illegible, with activity resuming in column four. In that column preparations are

made for a battle between Baal and Yamm from which Baal emerges the uncontested victor.

The fragmented parts of column two and the missing parts from column three likely would have contained more council activity, though what that is we are unable to tell. It is quite possible that El would have had more to say, since after his declaration in the council he disappears from the scene until Baal wants to build his palace and needs El's approval to do so. It is probably not inappropriate, though highly speculative, to imagine that in the missing portion, El has given some kind of approval to the contest between Baal and Yamm. All that we can say for sure is that the deliberations are incomplete and what happened after Baal's tirade against the messengers of Yamm until the preparations for the battle take place is not recorded in the extant texts.

El as the head of the pantheon gives answer to the request of Yamm, and Baal is handed over with the words:

> *'bdk.b'l.yymm.*
> *'bdk.b'l/[nhr]m.*
> *bn.dgn.a[s]rkm.*
>
> *hw.ybl.argmnk.*
> *kilm/[t'yk]ybl.*
> *wbn.qdš.mnḥyk*
> (CAT 1.2.I.36b-38a)
>
> Your slave is Baal, O Yamm,
> Your slave is Baal, [O River,]
> The Son of Dagan, your captive.
>
> He will bring tribute to you,
> Like the Gods, bring [a gift to you,]
> Like the Holy Ones, offerings to you.

El's words indicate that Yamm was the king of the gods to whom tribute was brought. His kingship was that of vice-regent under El, which is why El's decree is necessary. Baal, who appears in this text in a subservient role, is apparently on the rise in the pantheon at Ugarit and the Baal cycle was part of the way of explaining his usurpation of Yamm's place. In this decree, Baal is made a slave of Yamm and forced to bring him tribute like the other gods. The deliberation of the council in this text is apparently to determine who would possess the kingship over the gods. Mullen parallels this episode with one in the *Enūma eliš* in which the kingship is granted to the god, Marduk. El stands in parallel to the high god, Anu, and his word is the word of the Council. In Mullen's words, El was equivalent to the council.[165]

In the two passages we have considered, we note that both are concerned with matters of kingship. The first is concerned with the health of Kirta, a human ruler, who suffers a curse for failing to fulfill a vow. The council is called for the purposes of preserving Kirta's kingship and by extension stability in the human realm leading to an uninterrupted supply of sacrifices for the gods. In the second text the kingship is an issue among the second-tier deities in the council, which deliberates to determine who among the gods will have functional rule over the cosmos. Since the cosmic order is imperative for human well being it too is a concern of the gods.

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[165] Mullen, *DCCEHL*, 177-178.

It would seem then that the convening of the council coincides with critical situations that menaced the security of the pantheon.[166] Daniel, man of Rapiu, is presented in CAT 1.17.I as appealing to the gods for a son through the giving of food and drink to the gods, presumably through sacrifices and drink offerings. This process goes on for seven days until Baal has compassion on him and petitions El to prosper him. El accedes to the request and Daniel is able to beget Aqhat. No council scene is explicit, and yet it is implied in the on going sacrifices that provide food for the council's banqueting. Baal's address to El is presumably carried out in the context of the council and El declares the decision of the council. That the human Daniel is able to provide food for the gods indicates the dependency of the gods upon human cultic activity for their provision. Caring for their human subjects is in their own self interest.

The function of the divine council in Ugarit appears to be three: (1) it served as a venue for feasting and banqueting by the gods, possibly on the sacrificial offerings of their human worshippers; (2) it met for deliberation on matters pertaining to earthly kingship, including the health of the earthly ruler; and (3) it met to address matters of internal dispute, such as the relationships between the various second-tier deities.

[166] Alomia, LGANE, 544.

3.6. Summary

From this section we have noted that the divine council at Ugarit possessed a unique vocabulary that it shared with other regions in the ancient Near East. The meeting place of the council was on the top of a cosmic mountain, very possibly in the residence of the high god El who presided over the council. The mountain as a cosmic mountain signaled a spatial dimension at which the heavens, the earth and the underworld were aligned. The council's meeting on the top of this mountain signals that its concerns were significant for all of these realms. The membership of the council was confined to the high god and his consort, their children, and a host of lesser deities. The deliberative branch of the council was probably limited to the immediate members of the divine royal family of El. Its structure can be adequately discerned either bureaucratically through four tiers, including Authoritative, Active, Artisan and Messenger deities or through the lens of a patriarchal royal family including parents, children and various household workers and servants. Quite possibly those who fall outside of the top two tiers do not comprise active membership in the council and thus do not represent true council membership. Finally, we noted that the council met for feasting and deliberation, concerning itself largely with matters concerned with the investiture of kingship in both the earthly and heavenly spheres.

4.0. Divine Council Texts in the Old Testament

A number of texts in the Old Testament stand out as significant examples of divine council texts. These texts are marked by an explicit reference to the divine council through the use of typical divine council terminology or fixed images that are associated with the council. We have chosen for discussion in this section those texts that are explicit in their mention of the divine council or which are dependent upon the divine council as leit-motif.

We have already considered the terminology used for the divine council in the Ugaritic literature. We will begin this section with a summary consideration of the terms used in the Old Testament before proceeding with a consideration of our selected texts. The motivation for the selection of these texts is twofold: first they have long been recognized as texts in which the divine council is present and as a result have an established corpus of scholarly literature that addresses this feature. Second, most of these texts can be distinguished from other council references by the extended treatment that they give to divine council activities. In these texts more than in most others we are able to witness the activities of the council, even if only as those eavesdropping on a conversation.

4.1. Terminology

There are four words that are used in the Old Testament to refer to the divine council: עדת, מעד, דור, סוד, and קהל. The word *pḫr* that is the common

designation for the council in the Ugaritic and Akkadian council texts does not occur in the Hebrew. We shall consider each word briefly.

4.1.1. עדת

עדת occurs with great frequency in the Old Testament. Most of these occurrences refer to the "congregation of Israel" (Ex 12:3; Num 16:9) or the "congregation of the sons of Israel" (Ex 16:1, 9; Lev 16:5; Num 14:5). It occurs four times in construct with YHWH to refer the tribes of Israel as the "congregation of YHWH" (Num 27:17; 31:16; Josh 22:16, 17). Psalm 82:1 is also a reference to YHWH's congregation, except here it refers to the divine council. Psalm 7:8 (ET v. 7) speaks of an assembly of the people that surround YHWH. The remaining verses refer to collections of animate objects, such as a "swarm of bees" (Judg 14:8), a "herd of bulls" (Psa 68:31), or parties of either godless or violent men (Job 15:34; Psa 22:6; 86:14), righteous men (Psa 1:5) or to a band of men from among the Israelites who opposed Moses (Num 26:9; 27:3; Psa 106:17).

The word conveys the sense of "assembly, company, band, gathering." The word does not signal apart from the context the type of gathering that is in view. Its use in Psalm 82:1 is set in parallel to "gods" (אלהים) indicating that those who are gathered are divine beings. This provides the initial indication that this is a divine council text. What remains consistent in the use of this term in its

varying contexts is that it is used to refer to a gathering that is identifiable by a particular characteristic. Thus they are gatherings of Israel, a swarm of bees or a herd of bulls. The characteristic that distinguishes them may be cultural, "Israel," religious, "YHWH", or ethical, "godless, righteous, violent." Its use in Psalm 82 indicates that the defining characteristic of this particular assembly, in the midst of which YHWH stands, is that it belongs to him. Its further definition as a plurality of gods suggests that this is the particular feature that marks it out as his assembly. A cognate of this word is used in the Ugaritic texts to refer to a party of gods that met in celebration at a feast provided by King Kirta (CAT 1.15.II.7, 11).

4.1.2. מעד

מעד is derived from the same root as עדת. It is used to speak of appointed places or times. It is used more than 140 times to refer to the tent of meeting (אהל מועד), which is also identified with the wilderness tabernacle (Exo 40:34). In Isaiah 14:13 it is used to refer to "the mount of assembly" in what may be a reflex of a revolt of the gods in heaven that is recast to refer to the pride of the King of Babylon.[167] The mount of assembly echoes the Ugaritic texts which tell of the council meeting on Mount Ll (CAT 1.2.I.20).

[167] Mullen, *DCEHL*, 238.

4.1.3. דור

In common with the Ugaritic word *dr*, the Hebrew word דור appears in a number of texts that have been identified by various scholars as referring to "assembly." This meaning was first noted by F. J. Neuberg in a study on Amos 8:14 for a troubling reading of the MT.[168] The MT reads:

> חֵי אֱלֹהֶיךָ דָּן
> וְחֵי דֶּרֶךְ בְּאֵר־שָׁבַע
>
> As your gods live, O Dan,
> and as the way of Beersheba lives.

Neuberg repointed the MT rendering of דֶּרֶךְ, "way" to דֹּרְךָ, "your circle" and rendered it with the sense of "your pantheon." The reading is to be preferred, since it retains the balance of the parallel by giving the reading, "As your gods live, O Dan, and as your pantheon lives, O Beersheba," and no emendation of the consonantal text is required. It also brings the text into harmony with the LXX which reads:

> ζῇ ὁ θεός σου Δαν
> καὶ ζῇ ὁ θεός σου Βηρσαβεε
> (Amos 8:14)
>
> Your God lives, O Dan
> and your God lives, O Beersheba.

Neuberg then found this meaning in Pss 14:5; 49:20; 73:15; 84:11; 112:2 and Jeremiah 2:31. P. R. Ackroyd has added Ps 95:10; Isa 53:8; Jer 7:29; and Prov

[168] F. J. Neuberg, "An Unrecognized Meaning of Hebrew DÔR," *JNES* 9 (1950): 215–217.

30:11-14 to this list.[169] It is not apparent in the texts we considered, though the word did appear in the Ugaritic texts to speak of the family of El in the phrases *dr ʾil/dr bn ʾil* (CAT 1.65.2; 1.40.I.2, 17,25–26).

4.1.4. סוד

A more common word in Hebrew to refer to the council is the word סוד. It appears in Psalm 89:8 (ET 7), Jeremiah 23:18, 20, Amos 3:7 and Job 15:8. The primary meaning is "secret counsel" or "secret speech" as is attested in some cognate languages. It is extended to indicate a circle of trusted intimates who give advice (Psa 55:15 [ET 14]).[170] It is used of the divine council to indicate the secret counsels of God. In Psalm 89:8 (ET 7) it refers to a council of holy ones (סוד־קדשים). The "holy ones" are a reference to the gods. We noted earlier that holiness is a quality of deity. The gods at Ugarit were referred to by the phrase "sons of holiness" (*bn qdš*, CAT 1.2.I.20-21, 38; 1.17.I.3, 8, 10–11, 13, 22). Zechariah 14:5 assumes the same sense when it speaks of YHWH coming and bringing his holy ones with him.

This word is used in Jeremiah 23:18, 23 to refer to the council as the source of prophetic revelation. The prophet who has stood in the council of YHWH is able to declare the secrets of God. This sense also applies to Amos 3:7.

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[169] P. R. Ackroyd, "The Meaning of the Hebrew דור Considered," *JSS* 13 (1968): 5-8.

[170] R. D. Patterson, "סוד" in *The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke; Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1980), 2:619.

4.1.5. קהל

קהל appears in parallel to סוד in Psalm 89. It occurs parallel to עדת in Exodus 12:6, indicating its conceptual agreement with these terms.[171] The primary meaning of קהל is "assembly, congregation, company." It is used for assembly with regard to purpose, which must be determined from the context. As we shall soon see, Psalm 89:6-9 indicates that the council was assembled to extol the incomparability of YHWH. In the larger context it is probably convened to consider the Davidic covenant and when to reinstate it.

4.1.6. Summary

A survey of council terminology does not provide definitive insight into the nature of the council. A number of different terms are used in various contexts to refer to the divine council or to collectivities of the gods, and yet in the explicit divine council texts this terminology is not obvious. Access to the council in the Old Testament must be sought through an investigation of those texts that present an obvious divine council scene. From these scenes, structural elements for a divine council motif may be ascertained and used to signal the presence of the divine council in other places.

[171] Cf., Heiser, DCSTJL, 31-32.

The presence of divine council terminology is only one feature that reveals the presence of the council. In the section that follows we shall investigate a number of texts in which the divine council exists.

4.2. 1 Kings 22:19-23

The paradigmatic portrayal of the divine council in the Old Testament is the record of the vision of Micaiah ben-Imlah, prophet of YHWH, spoken as part of his oracle to the kings of Israel and Judah. In this vision, Micaiah is privy to the deliberations of the Council and is able to explain to Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, and Ahab, king of Israel, why it is that the court prophets are unanimous in their support of their agreement to attack Ramoth-gilead and seize it from the king of Aram. According to Micaiah, YHWH has sent a lying spirit to deceive the prophets and to entice Ahab to Ramoth-gilead so that he would fall there.

It would appear from the context that a deliberate contrast is being established between Ahab of Israel and YHWH. The recounting of the vision begins with the assertion that YHWH is sitting on his throne (v. 19) just as the two kings are. These kings are described as "each sitting on his throne, arrayed in robes...and all the prophets prophesying before them" (v. 10). Jehoshaphat and Ahab are deliberating war and the word "throne" is a signal of the government or rule of these kings as they carry out their responsibilities as heads

of state and occupy positions of glory and honour.[172] YHWH is presented as their heavenly superior, for his throne in heaven possesses a greater capacity than the thrones of Jehoshaphat and Ahab.

Before the two enthroned earthly kings is congregated the whole guild of the court prophets (כל־הנביאים) who are prophesying when Zedekiah ben-Chenaanah enacts a prophetic oracle of victory for Ahab. To do this he makes for Ahab horns of iron which he wears and then in the name of YHWH declares to Ahab: "With these you will gore the Arameans until they are consumed." To this oracle of victory all of the prophets acquiesce giving agreement with the words, "Go up to Ramoth-gilead and prosper, for YHWH will give it into the hand of the king."[173] These prophets indicate that there is an agreement between Ahab of Israel and YHWH of Heaven to go to war.

In the same way that the whole courtly prophetic guild is before the two earthly kings, Micah reports that the whole host of heaven (כל־צבא השמים) is present in YHWH's court. Their position in the court is indicated by the Hebrew phrase עמד על, which is a technical term that indicates that they are participants in the court.[174] Specifically, these hosts of heaven "stand by" YHWH

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[172] John N. Oswalt, "כסא," in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (ed. R. Laird Harris, G. L. Archer Jr. and B. K. Waltke; Chicago, IL: Moody Bible Institute, 1980), 1:448.
[173] Simon J. DeVries, *1 Kings* (WBC 12; Waco, TX: Word Books, 1985), 267.
[174] Wolter H. Rose, *Zemah and Zerubbabel: Messianic Expectations in the Early Postexilic Period* (JSOTSup 304; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 198. Rose details that the expression

who is seated, which clarifies their position *beside* YHWH and not *before* him. Such a position, Rose comments, is the position of prominent dignitaries and not merely that of the personal servant for the king.[175] Such a position indicates that the whole host of heaven exists in the courts in a position analogous to those who participate in the royal earthly courts. They are not the personal servants of the king, but attendants of the throne and so are present as administrators of court affairs.

The "host of heaven" is a widely recognized reference to heavenly beings that comprise the heavenly court in Judah and Israel.[176] Patrick Miller argues that the word צבא, "hosts," is actually a military term used to indicate an army or warfare and that the host of heaven are non-human, divine participants.[177] Usually these hosts are associated with astral elements including the sun, the moon and the stars (Deut 4:19; 17:3).[178] E. T. Mullen notes the anonymity of this celestial host and seeks their identity in the primal mythical understanding of YHWH as a warrior. He like Miller equates the divine council with a military retinue.[179] This

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עמד על is common to both Akkadian and Hebrew where it carries this technical sense. Cf., Frank M. Cross, Jr., "The Council of Yahweh in Second Isaiah," *JNES* 12 (1953): 274-275 n.3.

[175] Rose, *Zemah*, 197 n.62.

[176] Handy, *AHH*, 120; DeVries, *1 Kings*, 268.

[177] Patrick D Miller Jr., *The Divine Warrior in Early Israel* (HSM 5; Cambridge: Harvard University Press,1973), 154.

[178] Miller, *Divine Warrior*, 67. This astral character is also noted by Mark Smith who associates the astral deities in the Ugaritic myths with the family of El. This same association with Israel's God is not, however, suggested by Smith, though it may prove relevant for understanding the nature of the host of heaven if one keeps in mind the epithet "Yahweh of Hosts" in reference to Israel's God. Smith, *OBM*, 61-66.

[179] Mullen, *DCCEHL*, 183-184.

host of heaven — the sun, moon and stars — comprises the army and council of YHWH.[180]

Furthermore, Mullen treats these astral deities as identical with the *qĕḏōšîm* of Psalm 89:6-9 who are identified in that text as the *benê 'elîm*.[181] Mullen then describes these hosts as those who are assembled in princely capacity, having fought with YHWH and having achieved the victory with him. Now that the battles have been completed, these hosts are stationed before the great warrior awaiting his decree.[182]

In Micaiah's vision, the hosts are standing by YHWH, who is seated on his throne, as the heavenly counterparts to the earthly royal court. They are not stationed in anticipation of the decree of YHWH, as Mullen has suggested, but are administrative participants in the council deliberations. The absence of an identifiable audience for the question asked by YHWH and introduced by the formula "and YHWH said" (ויאמר יהוה), leaves the צבאות as the most likely recipients of his words. These are invited by YHWH to contribute a solution to the problem of finding a way to bring about the earlier prophetic oracle of

180 Mullen, *DCCEHL*, 194.
181 Mullen, *DCCEHL*, 190-2
182 Mullen (*DCCEHL*, 190) commenting on Deut 33:2b-3 remarks: "Though the heavenly host are present, they have little existence apart from Yahweh. They march with him and they worship him. More importantly, they carry out his decisions. Their existence is clearly depicted as being dependent upon the decree, the word of Yahweh. Their function is to carry it to completion."

condemnation spoken against Ahab by Elijah the Tishbite (1 Kings 21:17-24) and in so doing effect a change of kingship in Israel.[183]

The members of the court of King Ahab include Ahab and Jehoshaphat, Ahab's servants (v.3, עבד), an unnamed court official (v. 9, סריס) who either sends or becomes known as the messenger (v. 13, המלאך) sent to retrieve Micaiah ben-Imlah, and the nearly 400 prophets among whom Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah becomes prominent. Verse 3 is a question posed by King Ahab to his servants. While no discussion is reported, it would seem that his question is posed with a view to determining the advisability of capturing Ramoth-gilead from the Arameans. In the following verse he invites Jehoshaphat of Judah to join him in the quest.

The heavenly court includes YHWH seated on his throne flanked by the "hosts of heaven," the spirit (הרוח) and presumably Micaiah ben-Imlah whose presence is as a nonparticipating observer and consequent reporter. With words that are similar to Ahab's question to his servants, YHWH asks his court, "Who will entice Ahab so that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?" The manner in which YHWH poses his question, and the report of the deliberations of the council upon it, would seem to indicate that the question and the deliberations are to be taken at face value and are not to be treated as merely rhetorical. That is to say, the use of the council imagery does not appear to be simply an

[183] A significant function of the divine council is the removal of kingship in the Mesopotamian and Ugaritic sources. Cf. Mullen, *DCCEHL*, 87, 140-41 and Fleming, DCTS, 78.

anthropomorphism or metaphor, but is presented in the narrative as a true depiction of events in the heavenly court as witnessed by Micaiah. It suggests a perspective on YHWH's rule from the heavens in which others participate actively as significant contributors. This understanding does not diminish YHWH's deity or his capacity as God any more than Ahab's rule is diminished by the presence of courtly officials, servants and prophets in his court. What it does indicate, however, is that YHWH's rule is not perceived of as being monistic in Micaiah's vision. There are others who participate in his court in a meaningful way.

Deliberation in the council does not immediately produce an acceptable solution and disagreement among the members of the assembly as to what is the best way to lead Ahab into war with the Arameans is reported. This report preserves the anonymity of the members of the court by simply relating that one member has suggested one course of action and another suggested a different one. The question that YHWH has entrusted to his court has stumped them and they are unable to agree among themselves as to a course of action. Since the nature of the individual solutions is not important to the narrative they are not recorded nor are the reasons for their rejection. Finally, a course of action is proposed by "the spirit" (הרוח) which is accepted and the spirit, after explaining his plan, is sent out to effect it.

The "spirit" who submitted the ruse is the only member of the council, apart from YHWH, that is individuated, and yet who or what it is remains allusive. John Gray understands "the spirit" as "the supernatural, divinely inspired power of

prophecy" and treats him as "an emanation, or extension, of the divine personality, and so may be personified."[184] Gray, it seems, is unable or unwilling to admit that "the spirit" might be an independent personality, and yet the engagement of the council with YHWH and the commissioning of the spirit indicate that he is more than simply the "supernatural, divinely inspired power of prophecy." The הרוח engages with YHWH in an independent discussion in the midst of the council. In this interaction, the הרוח is given every characteristic of individuality that one would expect an earthly court official to have in relation to his king. He voluntarily presents himself to entice Ahab. When questioned further by YHWH as to the means that he would use, he describe his plan in detail. Finally, YHWH commissions him with declaration of success for his plan. An approved instrument and course of action has been established.

For Mullen, the spirit is simply a volunteer from among the members of the council about whom he remarks that הרוח is a common designation for the messenger in YHWH's assembly, citing Psalms 18:11 [= 2 Sam 22:11]; 104:4; 148:8; and Job 30:22 for support.[185] These citations do not, however, unequivocally support Mullen's claim. In Psalm 18:11 [ET 10] YHWH speeds on the wings of the wind (רוח) to bring assistance to the psalmist during a time of impending destruction. The "spirit" in this context is not a messenger, but the

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[184] John Gray, *I & II Kings: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970), 452-3.
[185] Mullen, *DCCEHL,* 206.

instrument of YHWH's transport. In Psalm 104:4 the language of theophany is invoked with the references to wind and fire along with cloud and light. Cross[186] and Allen[187] understand the elements of wind and fire to be deities in the entourage of YHWH. P. W. Miller reinforces this by indicating that these elements are treated as deities in the Ugaritic pantheon.[188] Mullen, Allen and Miller, drawing on parallels from the Canaanite religious milieu, are imposing these ideas onto the text. They have not, however, demonstrated that these parallels actually existed as part of the religious culture of Israel or even if they are vestiges of the Canaanite religion. They assume that the close relationship between Canaanite and Israelite culture and religion allows for a kind of one-to-one correlation, that what is taking place in one almost certainly had to be in the other. The personification of the elements in the statement that YHWH has made the "winds his messengers and flames his ministers" is insufficient to substantiate that they are to be accorded the status of deity in the Psalm. And even if such is granted, though we are unwilling to do so, it does not prove that in Psalm 104 the הרוח is a common designation for the messengers of YHWH or the council in the Old Testament. This involves a leap well beyond the evidence of the text.

[186] Cross, *CMHE,* 168 n.95
[187] Leslie C. Allen, *Psalms 101-150* (WBC 21; Waco, TX: Word Publishers, 1983), 26 n. 4a; 33.
[188] P. W. Miller, "Fire in the Mythology of Canaan and Israel," *CBQ* 27 (1965): 256-261.

In Psalm 148:8 it may be gratuitous to regard הרוח as a deity as Mullen seems to be doing. The assertion of the Psalm is simply that the sea monster, the deeps, fire and hail, snow and cloud and the stormy wind are under the control of YHWH. Finally, in Job 30:22 the wind in concert with the storm are the perceived tools of YHWH, used poetically to bring destruction upon Job. There are no indicators in the text that they are deified elements. Mullen's assertion that the term הרוח is the common designation of YHWH's messengers cannot be substantiated. If the הרוח is a messenger of the council he is not called by this title. If a messenger of the council must be identified, Micaiah would make a better candidate. While he is not a non-active participant in the council, his presence enables him to report the events of the council to Ahab and his court. The הרוח does not report the events, but establishes his approved plan.

We have demonstrated that the הרוח is not the messenger of the council, but this tells us little about his identity or his relationship to YHWH and the council. Mullen describes him as a volunteer from within the council who steps forward with the conclusion of the council. His appointment to fulfill the decision of the council, accepted and declared by YHWH, renders him the council messenger in Mullen's eyes. Mullen understands the council to have reached a consensus decision and the הרוח as its volunteer spokesperson.[189] Fleming, in contrast to

[189] Mullen, *DCCEHL*, 206.

this, describes him as one who interrupts the council bringing a solution that the council has not arrived at through its deliberations.[190] Mullen is driven by his concern to show that the council is nothing other than an extension of YHWH and that "it serves only to reemphasize and execute his decision."[191] The sense one arrives at from him is that he is trying to protect the absolute authority of YHWH in the council.

Whether Fleming treats the הרוח as one from among the צבאות (hosts) is not clear. It seems clear to us that he is not simply reporting the council's conclusion, but that he is volunteering himself for the mission to entice Ahab up to Ramoth-gilead. He does not speak in plurals as if on behalf of the council, but singularly of his own preparedness to serve the call. His subsequent discussion with YHWH is also decidedly individual in tone and does not indicate a desire on the part of YHWH to know what the council has decided, but what the הרוח intends to do.

If הרוח is not one of the host of heaven, then his abrupt appearance is left unresolved. It would, however, complicate the scene considerably, since his actions would imply that the council was incompetent or inept in its handling of this matter. Micaiah recounts the vision of the council scene in order to reveal the source of his own prophetic authority—his participation in the council itself. If

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[190] Fleming, DCTS, 76.
[191] Mullen, *DCCEHL*, 207.

the council proves to be unreliable it would diminish his authority as its messenger.

The הרוח is, then, one of the host of heaven. As such, he is more than an extension of the divine personality and his function in the council would very likely involve some kind of administrative capacity. His plot to become a lying spirit (רוח שקר) in the mouth of Ahab's prophets suggests to us that this specific administrative domain belonged to him, that is the spirit of false prophecy.

The Revised Standard Version, the New American Standard Bible, the New International Version all translate הרוח as "a spirit" ignoring the article. Rivkah Schärf Kluger treats the term הרוח with the definite article as a *nomen appelativum*, which she understands as a sufficient way of showing that he is a being who stands out in the multiplicity of the others.[192] We part company with Kluger when she speaks of the spirit as appearing "like a personification of an evil thought of God."[193] This reflection is brought on by her belief that there exists some sort of a conflict in God himself. Preferring to treat the council metaphorically and as extensions of the divine personality, she understands it psychologically, treating the various members of the council as extensions of

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[192] Rivkah Schärf Kluger, *Satan in the Old Testament* (trans. Hildegard Nagel; Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1967), 109. In a supporting footnote she quotes J. Benzinger at length: "Since it is clear beyond all question that here *haruaḥ* has a certain individuality and personality and commissioned by Yahweh to perform, not a general and routine service, such as winds might normally be expected to perform, but a very specific and realistic task, it undoubtedly brings out the full implication of the passage to render *haruaḥ* here 'the,' or better 'a certain' spirit." 109 n. 63.

[193] Kluger, *Satan*, 110.

divine personality rather than as independent beings. We have already established that this is not necessary and that it is better to understand the various members of the council, particularly the הרוח, as having some measure of individuality.

It is not necessary that this vision of Micaiah's be understood as a depiction of reality, though it likely carried that sentiment for the prophet and the first audience of Micaiah's words. What we should take note from this is that the author and writer of 1 Kings 22 (and 2 Chronicles 18) believed there to be a council in the heavens over which YHWH presided and which made determinations affecting the cosmos and that access to this council was possible for those who were his prophets. For ancient Israelites this was a real event involving a real council of real heavenly beings of some kind. It conveys accurately the ethos of myth that was part of the ancient world shared by Israel at the time and provides Micaiah with the grounds necessary to validate his own personal commission as prophet as well as, in this case, allowing Micaiah to reveal his authority over against the other prophets of the court. Its purpose is not intended to give a definitive description of the divine, but to provide a dynamic and comprehensible explanation of Micaiah's prophetic insight.

The vision, it must be noted, is presented by Micaiah after he is accused of only prophesying evil about Ahab and not good. It appears as an explanation as to how it is that Micaiah could first approve of the kings' plans, prophesying an assurance of success, and then immediately prophesy his demise when

reprimanded by the king for not speaking truthfully. The vision validates Micaiah's status as a true prophet of YHWH and an authentication of his message over against that of the court prophets who are unanimous in their support of the king.

Micaiah promised in v. 14, even under the duress of the messenger who pled with him to make his words comport with that of the other prophets, that he would speak only "what YHWH says to me." It may be of interest to note that he does not promise to speak truthfully, but to speak what he receives, indicating that the message whether true or false will be from YHWH. His first prophetic word is, in fact, a lie. But we are to understand this word as one given by the deceiving spirit sent out from the council. The second question of the king is more pointed. He does not simply ask whether he should go up to Ramoth-gilead in battle, but asks for a truthful word in the name of YHWH. Micaiah cannot prophesy a lie in the name of YHWH; he prophesies Ahab's doom.

As the king laments to Jehoshaphat that Micaiah only prophesies evil concerning him, Micaiah recounts his vision of the heavens explaining how the decision was made to deceive the king into going to Ramoth-gilead where he will fall. At this juncture Micaiah makes it clear that YHWH's intention is to end his kingship and that he has poisoned the mouths of his prophets to do it. But in recounting this vision, Micaiah asserts for himself a unique understanding of the events surrounding the king's prophets. He does not deny for these other prophets a supernatural experience, as if to suggest that they were merely

pretending to be true prophets, but that the deception lies further back, even in YHWH himself.[194] The prophets are treated as genuine prophets who have been given a message of deceit for the king that the purposes of God might be fulfilled. God works the means to accomplish his ends.

The assertion by Micaiah that the court prophets are deceived is met with great disapproval by Zedekiah ben-Chenaanan who lashes out against Micaiah both physically and verbally. Micaiah indicates that the authentication of his claims will be in the fulfillment of his prophecy, indicated by yet a fourth prophetic word that Zedekiah will himself face the consequences of Israel's loss of king Ahab and will run to the inner chambers to hide himself.

Ahab has Micaiah imprisoned until his safe return. Clearly the imprisonment is not a punishment, but a mechanism, along with his agreement to disguise himself with Jehoshaphat to confuse the enemy. It apparently serves to limit the effective word of Micaiah and is perhaps fueled by the belief that by confining Micaiah he can limit the spirit speaking through Micaiah, preventing his prophecy from being realized.[195] The attempt is, however, futile, as the narrative continues to explain that even though Ahab has disguised himself YHWH is able to achieve his purposes through the random act of an enemy archer. Micaiah, languishing in prison, is vindicated, though we never hear from or about him again!

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[194] Gray, *1 & 2 Kings*, 453.

[195] DeVries, *1 Kings*, 268-9, "It is not so much that the king is punishing the prophet as guarding his spirit from reaching out and performing what he has said."

The earthly council scene in 1 Kings 22:5-9 is subject to the decisions of the heavenly council scene in verses 19-23. The divine council supersedes the earthly one of Ahab and Jehoshaphat and both kings are seduced by lies even after hearing the truth from Micaiah ben-Imlah.[196] There is an inherent irony in the passage focused around the importance of truth. Jehoshaphat desires a true word from YHWH and seeks yet another prophet aside from the 400 who have already prophesied (v. 4). Yet, when Micaiah ben-Imlah delivers a message of judgement, Jehoshaphat goes up to battle with Ahab at Ramoth-gilead any way. Ahab demands the truth from Micaiah (v. 18) and then proceeds to ignore it when it is given, considering it to be out-weighed by his own prophets who prophesy favourably towards him. In the council scene, deception is the agenda, and a spirit of deception is commissioned to deceive the King's prophets. Both the king and the lead prophet, Zedekiah ben-Chenaanan, reject Micaiah's vision. Prophecy itself proves to be a tenuous source of truth, since the prophet can be made to tell the truth or to lie depending upon the dictates of the council. Ultimately whether a prophecy is true or false rests not in the prophet, but in the council itself. Such a situation renders untested prophecy an unreliable source of truth.[197]

[196] Fleming, DCTS, 88.
[197] Fleming, DCTS, 87.

4.2. Isaiah 6:1-13

The presentation of God in Isaiah 6 draws heavily upon the motif of the divine council that is key for understanding the vision and its purpose.[198] Isaiah of Jerusalem begins this account of his experience in the divine council with the statement "I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty." W. L. Holladay points out that the Hebrew word ראה "does not make a distinction between inner 'seeing' and outer seeing; both kinds of objects are 'seen,' both are perceived."[199] Christopher Seitz does not consider the account a pure vision, but an experience that takes place in the temple and that "explodes the limitations of the sacred space."[200] Clearly a visionary type of event is involved, though the precise type of experience is illusive. In verse 5 the prophet laments that "my eyes have seen the king, Yahweh of Hosts," indicating that what is taking place is both vision and an experience in which the prophet has direct participation. He reports on specific events that involve his immediate participation, including the cultic catharisation of his tongue by the Seraphim and the consequent volunteering of himself for prophetic service in response to the call of holiness. All these things indicate that he was not a passive observer of a dream experience.[201]

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[198] Cross, " Council of Yahweh," 274-7; Fleming (DCTS, 89) writes, "A coherent reading of Isaiah 6 is gained when it is recognized that the divine council motif is a constituent element in the text's repertoire."
[199] William L. Holladay, *Isaiah: Scroll of a Prophetic Heritage* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1978), 26
[200] Christopher R. Seitz, *Isaiah 1-39* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1993), 54.
[201] Hans Wildeberger, *Isaiah 1-12: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 260-1.

There are a number of elements in Isaiah 6 that parallel the 1 Kings 22/2 Chronicles 18 vision of Micaiah, suggesting that these events are drawn from a common pool of ideas. In particular we might note six items of similarity: (1) both Isaiah and Micaiah describe their experience as "seeing" (ראה) YHWH and (2) in both visions YHWH is seated on a throne (כסא) which is (3) surrounded by heavenly beings called hosts (צבאות) to whom (4) YHWH makes address seeking a volunteer to carry out a particular task and (5) a volunteer presents himself for this task and (6) the volunteer is subsequently commissioned to go and carry out that task.[202] We might note that both of these accounts are concerned with the death of the king. In 1 Kings the council provides a theological and political explanation for the death of Ahab whereas Uzziah's death sets the stage for Isaiah's vision announcing this event as a crucial moment for the people of Israel.[203] Uzziah's death created the conditions for crisis in Judah in the same way that the death of Ahab and the destruction of the Omride dynasty did for Israel. The reign of Uzziah marked the height of prosperity in Judah. This prosperity, fostered both by Uzziah's military campaigns as well his economic and agricultural development, has led John

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[202] Edwin C Kingsbury, "The Prophets and the Council of Yahweh," *JBL* 83 (1964): 279-286 notes the following five elements that are recurring in a number of council scenes in the Old Testament: 1) YHWH as King is seated on his throne, 2) some heavenly creatures surround YHWH, 3) the scene is observed through a visionary experience, 4) the resultant oracle is a recounting of the heavenly scene, 5) the scene is associated with an agricultural feast or set date.
[203] Fleming, DCTS, 98, esp. n. 99.

Bright to describe this time as a time of prosperity "such as no living Israelite could remember."[204]

By the time of King Ahaz and the campaigns of Pekah and Rezin (2 Kings 15 and 16) the independence of Judah was severely compromised. Ahaz appealed for aid to Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria (2 Kings 16:7f), but Isaiah called him to faith in YHWH rather than in political alliance (Isaiah 7-8). Ahaz was incapable of this kind of faith. Subsequently, Israel to the north fell and though Judah escaped from the calamity, it was no longer a free state. In his political alliance, Ahaz had signed away his liberty, making Judah a vassal state of the Assyrian empire (2 Kings 16:7-8). The proximate moment at which Judah's fortunes underwent a change coincides with the death of Uzziah. The council scene is presented against the backdrop of this event as a theological explanation for Judah's present judgement by the Lord.

Isaiah declares that he has seen the Lord (אדני), a title that emphasizes YHWH's kingship and rule. His description of his vision emphasizes those elements that indicate YHWH's nature as King. He is described as the Lord (אדני) sitting on a throne (כסא) flanked by the divine retinue and clothed with a magnificent royal robe.[205] His posture and position, sitting on his throne, underscores his capacity to rule. The further description of the throne as being "high and lifted up" underscores that this rule was heavenly in nature, perhaps

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[204] John Bright, *A History of Israel* (3rd edn.; Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1981), 259.
[205] Seitz, *Isaiah 1-39*, 54.

even cosmic in scope. Two characteristics that served to distinguish deities from humanity in the ancient Near East are their immense size and their holiness.[206] Both of these are present in the text. The humongous size of YHWH magnifies his glory as the King of all the earth (כל־הארץ) and his holiness magnifies his righteousness and calls for social justice.[207]

The vision is set in the temple. Whether Isaiah is present in the temple physically or only in the context of his vision makes little difference to the interpretation of the narrative. The temple, situated on Mount Zion, was the point of contact between this world and the heavenly one.[208] To cross over the threshold of the earthly temple into the holy of holies was to step out of this world into the heavens.[209] Isaiah's presence in the temple *ipso facto* indicates that he

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[206] Cf., Smith, *OBM*, 55-56; 83-86; 97-102. He writes "Deities were generally marked for holiness (*qdš*), as can be inferred from the general designation of deities as 'holy ones'," 93.

[207] John G. Gammie, *Holiness In Israel* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1989), 71-101.

[208] Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longman III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 69, remark that the inner most layer of curtains that comprised the wilderness tabernacle were designed and coloured such that "its sky-like color and the presence of the heavenly creatures [the cherubim woven into the fabric] demonstrate that the tabernacle was considered to be heaven on earth." In like manner, the temple, which was a permanent replacement of the tabernacle shrine would have carried similar significance.

[209] An interesting diagram mapping the sacred is provided by Gammie (*Holiness*, 19 n.18) in which he charts a correspondence of specific details of the priestly conception of the Israelite cult with cosmological spatial categories. In this map he indicates the curtain separating the holy place from the holy of holies as the final limit of this world. We might also note that Mount Zion was a Cosmic Mountain in Israel's theology. We have discussed the cosmic mountain in chapter three when we considered the meeting place of the council in the Ugaritic literature. We might summarize here that a cosmic mountain is an axial location in which the three realms of the heavens, the earth and the underworld are connected. Cosmic mountains have their roots in the underworld and their tops in the heavens. Often shrines were built on them. In Israelite imagery, Mount Zion in Jerusalem is elevated to the highest place in the earth. All nations go up to it to meet YHWH there, since all have come under his rule and his temple/palace is located on its peak. The image is theological and not actual. Mount Zion is not the highest peak, dwarfed even by the ranges that surround it. And yet it takes on this cosmic centrality as the center of the

was in the heavenly palace of the Lord and whether his presence in the temple is actual or visionary is a moot point.[210]

YHWH is surrounded by seraphim attendants, creatures that only appear in this passage of Scripture. Taking cues from the root *śrp*, which is related to "burning" or to "serpents," the seraphim have been understood in various combinations to be either fiery beings or winged serpent-like beings.[211] Uses of the term *śrp* in the Old Testament occur in Numbers 21:6, Deuteronomy 8:15 and Isaiah 14:29 and 30:6. In each of these it refers to a poisonous reptile of some kind. The sense of "burning" is found in passages like Exodus 32:20, Leviticus 13:55 and 1 Kings 13:2, a gloss that may have been derived from the burning sensation of the venomous snake bite or from the resulting inflammation.[212] It has been suggested that the seraphim are mythic, serpentine creatures of some kind, perhaps of mixed form.[213] Such imagery is consistent with the use of

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world, the place where God himself is situated and from out of which the rivers of life flow. It a mountain where the judgements of YHWH are declared and at which the divine banquets take place (Isa 2:2-4; 25:6-10; cf., Exod 17:6; Rev 21:10).

[210] Cf., Otto Kaiser, *Isaiah 1-12: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), 75, for further discussion on these options. Also, G. Ernest Wright (*The Book of Isaiah* [Richmond: John Knox Press, 1964], 35) remarks, "the prophet says nothing about where he was or under what circumstances the vision came. It is certain, however, that his vision concerns God in his heavenly court, and no the earthly Temple, as verse 8 makes clear."

[211] For a more detailed discussion see Alomia, LGANE, 463-471.

[212] Alomia,LGANE, 467.

[213] Francis Brown, S. R. Driver and Charles A Briggs, eds., *The New Brown–Driver–Briggs–Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson,1979), 977, refers to the seraphim as beings originally mythically conceived with serpent's bodies, or as "serpent-deities".

serpent symbols and heavenly guardians in royal courts of the ancient Near East.[214]

In Isaiah's description the seraphim appear to resemble humans with three pairs of wings of which one pair is used for flying while the other two pairs are used to conceal the face (פנה) and the feet (רגל).[215] Their covering of their faces and their bodies is possibly a means of increasing the potency of God's glory — even as human beings are unable to gaze upon the Lord, so too the hosts of heaven cannot simply bear his glory unshielded. They are described as flying and as speaking to one another in an antiphonal manner of the holiness of YHWH whose glory fills the whole earth (כל־הארץ).

The function of the seraphim in Isaiah's vision is manifold: they serve to heighten the majesty of YHWH as members of his retinue and as those who sing in the heavenly choir the antiphonal anthems celebrating and giving expression to his holiness. They are able to communicate rationally with the prophet and presumably do so on behalf of YHWH. There is no definitive evidence that they participated in any deliberations of the council nor that they served as messengers for the council, though presumably it is to them that YHWH speaks when he asks for a volunteer. One of the seraphim, acting in a priestly capacity,

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[214] H. Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods, A Study of Ancient Near Eastern Religions as the Integration or Society and Nature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 107; cited in Handy, *AHH*, 155.

[215] The reference to "feet" may be a euphemism for genitals which could not be exposed in the divine presence. Kaiser (*Isaiah 1-12*, 76) suggests that the reference to their covering of their genitals expresses an immensely ancient experience of a connection between sex and the feeling of guilt. One has to wonder, however, what it is that the seraphim are feeling guilty about.

interacts with the prophet in a liturgically symbolic act of cleansing and declares expiation for iniquity and atonement for sin (v. 7). These actions give increasing emphasis to the idea of holiness in the divine court that was celebrated by the seraphic choir.

The language of theophany pervades the council scene and includes the shaking of the pillars, the voice that calls out, and the smoke that fills the temple. This language is reminiscent of the theophanic experience at Sinai in which the mountains shook, smoke covered the mountain and YHWH called to Moses (Exo 19:16-20). At Sinai, the theophany constituted a covenant ceremony in which the people of Israel were formally drawn into fellowship with God. In Isaiah's vision, breaches of that covenant will be addressed; infidelities will be avenged. Isaiah becomes a second Moses.

Isaiah's response is in keeping with the emphasis upon the holiness of YHWH as manifest in the original theophanic vision to Israel at Sinai. His preoccupation with his mouth is of interest inasmuch as he is a prophet whose calling specifically concerns this instrument of communication. William J. Dumbrell contemplates that Isaiah's confession that he is a man of unclean lips living in the midst of a people of unclean lips is elicited by the recognition that neither he nor Judah have worshipped YHWH as they ought to have or as he has just observed the seraphic choir doing. Consequently, for Dumbrell, Isaiah confesses a wrong

attitude to YHWH's leadership expressed in the current Judean foreign policy. Isaiah's concern is not primarily personal, but representative.[216]

The theophanic vision recorded in Exodus 19 is set in the context of Israel's release from Egyptian slavery and the establishment of her national identity. In the course of the book of Isaiah, a remnant people of God is established in Judah. The theophany of Isaiah 6 may indicate that Isaiah has a role parallel to that of Moses in identifying and speaking to that people. Watts treats the vision of Isaiah as part of a proclamation that a new era under God has begun (new creation). This was marked by the Assyrian and Babylonian conquests which destroyed the old order and served as a judgement. The later rise of the Persian Empire is what makes the new possible, giving centrality to Zion, the city of God. The old tribal confederacy and the kingdoms of the old order must give way to make room for the nations that will join Israel at Zion where YHWH rules all the earth.[217] The theophanic vision of YHWH of Hosts as King centered in the Jerusalem temple is an assertion of the sovereign rule of YHWH.

Isaiah's cleansing prepares him to lead the people in a proper response to the rule of YHWH. Those who would accept Isaiah's message are those who are fit to participate in the new era God has inaugurated. That he is promised an audience composed of imperceptive people who lack understanding and who have hard hearts, dull ears and dim eyes indicates that the people are not yet

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[216] William J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: A Theology of the Old Testament Covenants* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1984), 157.
[217] John D. Watts, *Isaiah 1-33* (WBC 24; Waco: Word Publishing, 1985), xxxi.

prepared to give up the old way for the new (6:9-10). That he is called to make the people such, indicates that God does not desire their repentance. The time has come for an avenging of the covenant infidelities and YHWH does not wish the repentance of this people to interfere with his plan.

Verse 8 marks an important event in the vision for our interest. In this verse the voice of the Lord is heard to call for mission volunteers. The plural form of address "whom shall I send and who will go for us?" is indicative of addresses to the divine council and parallels similar occurrences of first person plural address in Genesis 1:26, 3:22, and 11:7.[218] אדני seeks a messenger to send and commissions Isaiah the volunteer to go with a message that was calculated to bring about the hardening in the hearts of the people he was sent to address. Isaiah's commission is not only to declare but in some measure, to effect the decision of the council.

John T. Greene denies that any truly historical prophet can be confidently called a messenger based upon categories evident in the ancient Near East for messengers and messages. Greene's synchronic approach does not permit the development of an independent trajectory in the Israelite context that is informed by the ancient Near East concept but not completely determined by it. He summarizes what he calls the axiomatic and integral parts of the chain of communication in the ancient Near East in an eight step process that is clearly paralleled in prophetic ministry: (1) authorization or commissioning, (2)

[218] Cross, "The Council of Yahweh," 275 n.4.

stratification, the authorization is by an individual of a higher rank, (3) mnemonization, the messenger memorizes the message and gestures of the sender, (4) sectionalization, there is distance that separates the sender from the intended recipient, (5) legitimation/authentication, the message is preceded by legitimating formula, such as "Thus says XX," (6) rejection, often the message is unwelcome from the point of view of the recipient(s), (7) identification, the messenger is often identified with the contents of the message and maltreated or killed, and (8) specialization/diversification, different kinds of messengers are utilized to deliver different types of messages or perform numerous tasks or services.[219] It may be stretching things to suggest that Isaiah (and by extension the prophetic role in Israel) satisfies each of these integral parts all the time. However, a polythetic treatment of the subject would clearly indicate that all or most of these parts are present in the prophetic office of Israel even if not all at once. A definition of messenger that comports with the concept in the ancient Near East does not require an absolute compliance to every component, but that a number of essential and integral components be present in each case and in such a way as to clearly indicate a conceptual agreement. This is most certainly the case with Isaiah and with the prophetic office in a general way.[220]

In contrast to Micaiah ben-Imlah in 1 Kings 22, Isaiah is not merely a passive observer of council activity. He is summoned by the call of holiness to volunteer

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[219] John T. Green, *The Role of the Messenger and Message in the Ancient Near East* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1989), xviii-xix.
[220] For further discussion see the section on "The Messenger of the Council and the Prophet" in Mullen, *DCCEHL*, 209-226.

himself. The deliberations of the council may be overheard in Isaiah 1-5 in which summons are made to the heavens and the earth (1:2, 24) and warnings of YHWH's lawsuit (3:13ff) are heard. Isaiah may have been present to see these things, as we are told that he saw the word concerning Judah and Jerusalem (2:1). Now, after hearing the judgement of the court and beholding the holiness of YHWH in his temple, Isaiah is purged and made ready and then volunteers as the envoy of the council.

As envoy he goes as one sent on behalf of the council and he is given specifically what he is to say, do and expect (vv. 9-13). In this regard Isaiah functions as a messenger of the council. From the Ugaritic literature messengers of the great gods, Yamm, Baal and El are visible to us (Yamm's to the Council [El] CAT 2.I.11-48; Baal's to Yamm 1.2.I.3-10; to Anat 1.3.III.8-47; El's to Anat 1.2.V; to Kothar wa-Hasis 1.2.III.7-11; to Athtar 1.2.III.15-18). In these contexts the messengers are instructed by their master, and then travel to where the intended recipient is located and repeat the message verbatim. Isaiah shares in these characteristics; he has been charged by YHWH with a message and sent (שׁלח) to Israel to deliver it.

The use of the council scene in Isaiah seems to serve three purposes. First, it would appear to function as a validation of Isaiah of Jerusalem's ministry. If this is not a validation for his audience, it would at least serve to validate to Isaiah his call since he indeed is one who participates in the council. The council scene

serves as part of the prophet's consciousness of his call.[221] The second purpose is to indicate to the audience that what is about to happen is going to be a break with the past. Old kingdoms and systems have run their course, new avenues, a new kingdom is coming. Isaiah is given a role parallel to that of Moses, and the perceptive audience will hear and understand this and accept the new thing that God is about to do. Third, it allows Isaiah to declare the judgement of God for the violations of the covenant. As a second Moses he brings charges against the violations of the covenant ratified under the first Moses and establishes a new community in a remnant from Judah to fulfill the call of YHWH.

4.4. Isaiah 40:1-8

If Isaiah of Jerusalem was commissioned to bring a message predominately of judgment, Deutero-Isaiah sounds forth a new hope and a new era for Israel. Fleming treats Isaiah 40:1-11 as the prologue to Deutero-Isaiah and argues that it draws on the divine council as a type scene setting to introduce important themes. He admits that the reader of Isaiah must work harder to construct the divine council narrative world than the reader of Micaiah ben-Imlah (1 Kings 22) or the Isaiah 6 passages, but stresses that sufficient elements are present to

[221] The claim to have been in the council of YHWH is not one that is objectively verifiable. It is a subjective experience and as such false claims could be made by competing prophets. It would seem then that Isaiah's report of having stood in the council is not for the purposes of validating his ministry to others, but serves as part of his own consciousness of his call. The reliability of his claim to have stood in the council, as with Micaiah ben-Imlah in 1 Kings 22, is that what he prophesies has come true. Since prophets often carried out their ministry under very dangerous conditions, this experience likely served as way of increasing their confidence. We might compare this idea with Paul's vision in 2 Corinthians 12:1-4.

construct it.[222] In this passage the council scene meets with the agenda of comfort for the people.[223] In this scene a plethora of anonymous voices is heard deliberating this agenda.[224]

The council is already in session when we hear the agenda announced in verses 1-2.[225] It is a mediated word, as is indicated by the herald's declaration that these are the words "your God" (אלהיכם) speaks. The agenda is a command to "comfort his people" with declarations of deliverance, forgiveness, and the fulfillment of punishment (v. 2). In verses 3-5 a voice different from the herald of verses 1-2 is heard. This voice excitedly proposes a course of fulfillment for the agenda announced in verses 1-2. A third and dissenting voice is heard to question this proposal in verses 6-7. Watts call this voice "skeptical," since it questions the ability of humanity to persevere in loyalty.[226] Humans are like grass and flowers, withering and fading under the breath of God. Verse 8

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[222] Fleming, DCTS, 130-131.
[223] Fleming, DCTS, 109.
[224] Robinson ("The Council of Yahweh," 155) calls this a "colloquy of angelic voices"; John D. W. Watts (*Isaiah 34-66* [WBC 25; Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987], 80) treats these imperative plurals as a call upon a group of people whom he identifies as Jacob/Israel and who are exiles in Mesopotamia. F. M. Cross ("The Council of Yahweh in Second Isaiah," *JNES* 12 [1953]: 275) has persuasively argued that this "unusual series of active imperatives, plural" are consistent with the divine address to his heavenly council in other contexts. He later refers to these as "the telltale plural imperatives, which characteristically introduce Yahweh's commands to his heralds" (p. 277). Following a brief survey of similar scenes in the literature from Ugarit, he concludes "The repetition of identical imperative forms also is frequently a mark of the style of these council directives and, indeed, is found together with other characteristic types of repetition as stylistic features of a variety of archaic Hebrew and Canaanite verse-forms (p. 276 n.8). These, he argues, only make sense in the context of a divine council scene and consequently establish Isaiah 40:1-8 as having a divine council setting.
[225] Kingsbury, "The Prophets," 283-284.
[226] Watts, *Isaiah 34-66*, 81-82.

forms the climax. In this verse the voice, which may be the proclamation of YHWH or his herald, first agrees with the dissenting voice regarding human frailty, and then declares an affirmation of the surety of YHWH's word. The dissenting voice is answered; God will uphold his own agenda. Verses 9-11 form an epilogue and report the sending of the messenger. An anonymous voice proclaims to Zion/Jerusalem to announce YHWH's return.

Isaiah 40:1-8 marks a turning point in the fortunes of God's people. Exiled and under judgement for their sin, they are languishing in their captivity. The voices of the council echo the thoughts of the people, who upon hearing the news of YHWH's return are skeptical about its lasting effects. The open dialogue silences the dissenting voices and affirms God's universal sovereignty. The imagery presents YHWH as a king and creates a context in which the change in God's dealings with the people can be affirmed while still asserting the rule of lord YHWH (אדני יהוה, 10) in the heavens. God is still king, even if he has changed his agenda.[227]

The unique feature of this council scene is that the contents of the council deliberations are reported in some detail. In 1 Kings 22:20 the deliberations are observed from a distance beyond hearing; in Isaiah 40:1-8 we can hear the words. These words announce the return of YHWH and the exiled and subjugated peoples are summoned to "Behold your God! (v. 9). An agenda is announced, deliberated and affirmed. A messenger is sent to proclaim it. God is

[227] Fleming, DCTS, 125.

about to perform a new act and in the words of the prophet the new event, the release of the exiles in a new Exodus takes place.[228] The use of the divine council affirms to the dispossessed that YHWH and the heavenly host have participated together in this plan of God. There is none to oppose it.[229]

The sending of the messenger forms an important conclusion to the scene. It parallels the sending of הרוח in Micaiah ben-Imlah's vision (1 Kings 22) and Isaiah in Isaiah 6 and signals to the reader that what has been decided has been implemented. Commissioned by an anonymous speaker, possibly YHWH or his herald, the messenger called "Zion" and "Jerusalem" (v. 9), goes out to effect the council's decision with his message of deliverance: Lord YHWH comes with might, ruling, rewarding and recompensing; shepherding tenderly his flock (vv. 10-11).

4.5. Psalm 82

Fleming describes Psalm 82 as a poetic account of the divine council in session.[230] Unlike the scene of the council as presented in 1 Kings 22/2 Chronicles 18, Isaiah 6 and Isaiah 40, the council scene in Psalm 82 presents

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[228] Claus Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66* (trans. David M. G. Stalker; Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1969), 33. Exodus typology is recognized by Watts, *Isaiah 34-66*, 80-81. He underscores that Isaiah 40:1-11 does not concern itself narrowly with the Exodus itself, but rather draws on the promises to the patriarchs, the escape to freedom from Egypt, the wilderness journey, and the entry into Canaan. Fleming does not deny the exodus motif, but clarifies it by pointing out that in Isaiah 40:1-11 it is not the departure of the people that is announced but the return of YHWH. The return of God, will result in the return of the exiles, and it is this that permits the exile theme to be seen here.

[229] Paul D. Hanson, *Isaiah 40-66* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1995), 15-18.

[230] Fleming, DCTS, 132.

Elohim as acting unilaterally and without the cooperation of the council. In fact, in contrast to the cooperation depicted in other council scenes, this council scene reports a conflict between Elohim and the other members of the council.

The name Elohim is used consistently throughout, though most scholars implicitly understand it to be YHWH.[231] The council is called "the council of El" (בעדת־אל) in verse 1, variously translated "great assembly" (NIV), "his own congregation" (NAS), and "divine council" (RSV/NRSV). Mullen considers it to be a frozen formula borrowed from Canaanite literature referring to the divine council. If אל is to be understood as a divine name, then he treats it merely as an epithet for YHWH.[232]

The concern of the text is to communicate the judgement of God over the members of the council arising out of a gross negligence with respect to justice on the part of the other gods. God is the dominant character, whose role as king is subsumed into that of judge. The character of the psalm is suggestive of a prophetic oracle and has strong affinities with prophecy. While it is not reported as a vision, the language suggests a visionary report.[233] The tribunal nature of the setting gives the psalm a definite lawsuit texture.

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[231] Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 51-100* (WBC 20; Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1990), 334; Fleming, DCTS, 135

[232] Mullen, *DCCEHL*, 230.

[233] Verse 1 gives the setting of the psalm and verse 8 closes the psalm with a prayer for God to take up the rule. These two verses frame the contents of the psalm which comprise the speech that reports on the judgement of God. Tate (*Psalms 51-100*, 334) argues that verses 1 and 8, are spoken by an anonymous member(s) of the council and not by the prophet observing the vision.

The descriptive title of the psalm, "A Psalm of Asaph," does not enable us to determine the origin or original purpose of the psalm. Unlike the Micaiah and Isaiah passages, there is no identifiable human narrator or mediator of the "vision." It is very likely, however, that the psalm represents an eighth century B.C.E. prophetic social critique on the ruling powers through a mythic lens. The use of mythical imagery and language is a powerful communicative tool in cultures and communities where the imagery is still living. To call the psalm and other divine council imagery "mythical" is not to suggest that it is "fairy tale" or "fanciful" since myth is a way of speaking truthfully about realities that are not part of our empirical experience. Mythic imagery draws upon a system of symbols that are operative in the life experience of a community and comprise an integral part of its cultural fabric and communicative lexicon. In this way, the imagery conveys truth through analogy and constitutes an essential tool for the communication of cosmic and social order.[234]

The psalm, while mytho-poetic, exhibits a solid narrative structure in which God (אלהים) is presiding (נצב) over the assembly of God (בעדת־אל) and rules as judge in the midst of the gods (אלהים).[235] The charges leveled in vv. 2-5 give

[234] Cf., Joseph Campbell, *Thou Art That: Transforming Religious Metaphor* (ed. Eugene Kennedy; Novato, CA: New World Library, 2001), 1-9.

[235] Isaiah 3:13 also reports a scene in which YHWH arises (נצב) to make a judgement. The accusations of the judgement appear in many ways to parallel those of Psalm 82, in that the elders are charged with a breach of social justice: vv. 13-15 read "The LORD arises to contend, And stands to judge the people. The LORD enters into judgment with the elders and princes of His people, 'It is you who have devoured the vineyard; The plunder of the poor is in your houses.

rise to the judgement in v. 6. The Psalm concludes with a prayerful affirmation of God's universal sovereignty among the nations (v. 7).

That the scene is a divine assembly scene is clear. The players in the scene are God (אלהים) and the gods (אלהים) who are also called the sons of the most high (בני עליון, v. 6). This title, "sons of the Most High," and the description of their meeting as an assembly of God (עדת־אל) constitute fixed formulas of divine council language and are part of the common stock of descriptions for divine beings in the ancient Near East. There can be little confusion that the setting is the council and that the members of it are divine beings.[236]

What appears to begin as a typical council scene quickly proves to be a judicial tribunal. The gods are accused of failing in basic justice (v. 2) with a brief outline of God's expectations of justice given (vv. 3-4). They are condemned in v. 5 as evil and a sentence of death is pronounced (v. 6): the gods are condemned to die like Adam (אדם).[237] The pronouncement is a singular

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What do you mean by crushing My people, And grinding the face of the poor?' Declares the Lord God of hosts" (NAS).

[236] Morgenstern ("Mythological Background," 32-34) challenges what was an older position that the references in vv. 6-7 to the *elohim* are references to human rulers or judges. He agrees that in vv. 2-4 human rulers are in view and not divine beings, but he affirms without equivocation that such cannot be true of vv. 6-7. His argument is basically two pronged. First the terminology will only allow for them to be treated as divine beings, and the judgement that they would die like *adam* (Adam/man) only makes sense if they were not mortals, but divine beings; Fleming, DCTS, 133, remarks that a divine council interpretation has been responsible for a greater consensus among scholars.

[237] It would appear that the judgement of the gods is parallel to the judgement of Adam in Eden (Gen 2:16-17; 3:1-24). Though the word *adam* has also been translated "humanity" in most translations, this is a derivative understanding, since in the biblical text, humanity is mortal as a consequence of Adam's judgement.

declaration from God. First person plural address, characteristic of the divine council address in other council passages, is conspicuously absent. In this scene a radical departure from the traditional council understanding appears to be established. God no longer speaks from out of a council, but the council having been judged inadequate by virtue of its failure to conform to his covenant requirements has been disbanded and the gods dethroned.[238]

Willem A. VanGemeren treats the council scene as a sham or mock trial that takes place for rhetorical effect.[239] He speaks this way because he does not believe that the gods have real existence; they are merely a literary or prophetic device used for rhetorical effect in the appeal against idolatry. Verses 2-5 form something of a didactic poem reminding Israel of God's covenant expectations for his people.[240] Such a reading does not do justice to the historical setting and the mythical ethos in which these gods would have been perceived as real. The demotion of these other gods is not a denial of their existence, but a theological explanation of their impotence. They no longer possess divine authority and so are not to be feared, obeyed or worshipped.

Mullen treats judgement as the *raison d'être* of the council; it existed to pass judgements.[241] Mullen cites the speech of Eliphaz from Job 4:17-18 to

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[238] Handy, *AHH*, 89
[239] Willem A. VanGemeren, "Psalms" in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (ed. Frank E. Gæbelein; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 5:533.
[240] VanGemeren, "Psalms," 535.
[241] Mullen, *DCCEHL*, 226.

demonstrate that even as YHWH judges humans, so he also judges the members of his council. Eliphaz says:

> Is man without God (אלוה) righteous;
> apart from his maker is a man pure?
> Even in his servants he does not trust
> and in his messengers he appoints error.

In the words "servants" and "messengers" Mullen sees a reference to the divine council and he concludes from this that YHWH possesses "complete control over the divine beings. He may find them faithless and even accuse them of error."[242] This "complete control" is an administrative control that is the sole property of YHWH. He does not share power with the council. YHWH charges the gods with an abuse of power resulting in social injustice. This injustice is a threat to the very foundations of the earth (v. 5). The judgement of the gods removes them from their administrative positions and then, under the rule of God, the foundations are restored.

The council scene in Psalm 82, while definitely a council of gods and not merely human rulers, will have an impact upon the human realm. Deuteronomy 32:8-9 indicates the distribution of national administration to the gods, which is reported to have been accomplished "according to the number of the sons of god" (LXX, κατὰ ἀριθμὸν ἀγγέλων θεοῦ; 4QDt^{q} בני אלוהים).[243] Their judgement indicates a loss of their kingship which is taken over by God. The injustice

[242] Mullen, *DCCEHL*, 232.
[243] We will discuss Deut 32:8-9 in greater detail in section 4.7.2.

perpetrated under their watch will be reversed now that God has taken over and restored justice to the earth. Earthly kings, who would be seen as the counterpart of the divine king, would lose the legitimacy of rule with the demotion of their god. The judgement of the gods in the heavenly realm by God is a *de facto* judgement upon the earthly rulers whom those gods are thought to have appointed.

The council scene in Psalm 82 serves to establish theologically the universality of YHWH's rule. This is not primarily an assertion of monotheism, but a narrowing of justice among all the nations through the neutralization of the gods of the nations and a subsuming of their function under YHWH. The existence of other gods is not denied, since other gods must exist if they are to be demoted. Their demotion does not deny their existence, but eliminates them as viable powers in the cosmos. Their elimination means that the varieties of social order that have been constructed under their dominion have been rendered obsolete. There remains but one social order and that is the one which God established in Israel. Not only Israel, but all nations are now implicitly called to acknowledge this one social order. The proclamation is not, however, directed to the nations, but to Israel. It serves as a centering exercise, drawing Israel's gaze away from alternate social constructions found among the other nations and that are rooted in idolatry and fixing it on the Law given by God.

4.6. Psalm 89:6-9 (ET 5-8)

Psalm 89 is regarded by most scholars to be a lament psalm.[244] The largest section of the psalm, verses 39-52 (ET 38-51), which conveys the main point of the psalm, falls neatly into this classification and would seem to be the key to the interpretation of the psalm. In this lament, the psalmist bemoans what appears to be YHWH's failure to uphold the covenant given to David, and that the house, which was to be forever established, is beaten down by its enemies.

The section 6-19 (ET 5-18) is peculiar in relation to other parts of the psalm. Whereas the other portions of the psalm are specifically related to the covenant that God made with David (2 Sam 7:11-16) and which is outlined in the prophetic section of the psalm, especially verses 24-37 (ET 23-36), verses 6-19 (ET 5-18) are decidedly mythopoeic and lack any interest in the Exodus tradition, the creation of a people, and any so-called salvation history (*Heilsgeschichte*).[245] The section is packed with exalted imagery including references to the divine habitations or cosmic mountains in Zaphon, Amanus, Tabor and Hermon (13[12])

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[244] Cf., Bernhard W. Anderson, *Out of the Depths: The Psalms Speak for us Today* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), 185; Erhard S. Gerstenberger, *Psalms Part 2 and Lamentations* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2001), 147; Tate, *Psalms 51-100,* 416. Mitchell Dahood (*Psalms II 51-100* [Garden City: Doubleday and Company, 1968], 311) and Hans-Joachim Kraus (*Psalms 60-150: A Commentary* [Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989], 202) classify it as a "royal psalm." It certainly contains Royal motifs, and could probably be more specifically classified as a Royal Lament Psalm. Richard J. Clifford ("Psalm 89 as Communal Lament," *HTR* 73 [1980]: 37) summarizes the psalm as "a communal lament over royal (thus national) defeat."

[245] Bernhard W. Anderson, *From Creation to New Creation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 83.

and reports on the anthems of the heavenly choirs who sing the incomparability of YHWH.

In verses 6-15 (ET 5-14) YHWH is extolled as a cosmic ruler without equal whose incomparability is applauded liturgically in song. YHWH's incomparability and exalted status is introduced by the question "Who is like YHWH?" (v. 6 [ET 5]). Such language echoes with sounds familiar from the prophet Isaiah, who asks: "To whom then will you liken God, or what likeness compare with him?" (Isaiah 40:18). It is YHWH who has performed wonders without compare and it is YHWH whose faithfulness is unmatched (v. 5[ET 6]). To answer the question of how it is that the covenant appears to have failed, the heavenly choirs proclaim the faithfulness of YHWH in all the earth. He maintains the world and keeps rule over the sea (8-9[ET 9-10]).

Mythical language pervades this passage. References to the sea may in fact be references to Yamm, the god of the sea familiar from the myths from Ugarit. The sea is continually viewed as an enemy in the Old Testament that YHWH keeps in check (Prov 8:29). The use of mythical language and imagery in the Old Testament did not dissolve or negate history, but elevated the historical by giving to it a cosmic dimension and transcendent meaning.[246] The mythical recitation of Yahweh's triumph over his enemies and the subsequent foundation of the heavens and the earth become the foundation for the covenant to David that occupies the psalm. These promises are certain because they are fixed in

[246] Cross, *CMHE*, 90.

God who created and sustains the cosmic order and against whom no enemy can stand.

The meeting place of the divine assembly is in the heavens. This is indicated by the use of metonymy, in which the heavens are substituted for those that inhabit them and are called into service to praise YHWH. In the ancient Near East the heavens are the place where the gods dwell. And it is there that the gods convene their meetings in divine assemblies.

Those who participate in the assembly are variously described. "The heavens" (שמים) we have noted function as metonymy for those who would participate in the council. This includes "the assembly of the holy ones" (קהל קדשים), the one "in the clouds" (בשחק), "the sons of god" (בני אלים), "the council of the holy ones" (סוד־קדשים), those "all around him" (כל־סביביו), or the "hosts" (צבאות) and "the faithful around you" (אמונתך סביבותיך). A number of these titles are set in parallel to each other, indicating that they are different ways of designating the same things.

> The heavens will praise your wonder, O YHWH;
> Your faithfulness in the assembly of the holy ones.
> Who in the skies is comparable with YHWH?
> Who among the sons of God is like YHWH?
> A God greatly feared in the council of the holy ones,
> Awesome above all those who are around him?
> (6-9 [ET 6-8]).

The heavens are set in parallel to the assembly of the holy ones, the skies with the sons of God, and the council of holy ones with those who surround him.

Each of these terms reflect something of the nature of the council's membership. They are, as we have indicated, dwellers of the heavens; earthlings are not, as a rule, admitted. They are called holiness, which Mark Smith indicates is a common designation for deities in the ancient Near East. He writes that "deities were generally marked for holiness, as can be inferred from the general designation of deities as 'holy ones'."[247] Shrines for the gods were marked and demarcated for holiness because of their association with the gods. The gods were thought to partake fully of holiness and their shrines in a derivative way.[248] The holy ones are identified also as the sons of God (בני האלהים) a phrase we will consider in depth when we consider its appearance in Job 1:6–12 and 2:1–6. They are, as we shall show, divine beings, who in this context are described as surrounding YHWH.

The function of the council in this context is limited solely to that of extolling and praising YHWH who alone is described as having active power. Their songs are songs that exalt YHWH in their midst and serve to reveal to the earthly observer that YHWH stands supreme among the gods. Confidence in YHWH is legitimated, since he has no rival. None is able measure up to him in majesty and might.

Not only is YHWH the object of praise, he is the one who strikes fear in the council and sits enthroned above them. His majesty is demonstrated in his

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[247] Smith, *OBM*, 93.
[248] Smith, *OBM*, 93.

exaltedness. He is the victor who rules the sea and who has vanquished his foe, Rahab. He reflects the role of El in the Canaanite assemblies of the gods as articulated in the Baal cycle and elsewhere (CAT 1.2.I.13-17; 1.5.VI.3).[249] El is pictured as the supreme God in these stories, perhaps the last of the theogonic gods who has won the victory and now rules over the council comprised of the lesser cosmogonic gods.[250] The theogonic gods are those who stand behind the pantheon and who are responsible for its origin. Thus El is conceived of as the father of the gods, and his offspring called the sons of God. Cosmogonic deities are those that stand behind the universe and serve to explain its origins and operations. The cosmogonic deities are the offspring of the theogonic deities, and usually one theogonic god in particular. Cross outlines this history and conceives of El, who he understands to be identical with YHWH in the Old Testament, represents the transitional figure. He is the last of the theogonic gods from whom the cosmogonic deities are derived. In this regard he retains a kingship over the other deities in the same way that a patriarchal father held authority over his house.[251]

YHWH's victory over Rahab and his rule over the sea parallels the kingship of Baal and not El. These are vestiges of cosmogonic battles not theogonic ones.

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[249] Mullen (*DCCEHL*, 4) writes: "The most striking similarity between the council in Ugaritic and in early Hebrew Literature is the role played by the high god— 'El in the Ugaritic texts and Yahweh in the Old Testament. Both are depicted as creator, king, and absolute ruler of the gods." Frank Moore Cross (*CMHE*, 44) says that "*'El* is rarely if ever used in the Bible as the proper name of a non-Israelite, Canaanite deity in the full consciousness of a distinction between 'El and Yahweh, god of Israel. This is a most extraordinary datum."

[250] Cross, *CMHE*, 39-43.

[251] For detailed discussion, cf., Cross, *CMHE*, 39-43.

YHWH who sits enthroned over the council in the position of El also claims the victories of Baal the Canaanite storm god. He rules not only over the gods in the heavens but over the cosmic forces of the universe as well. In the El-YHWH conflation of the Old Testament the El-Baal Canaanite conceptions of deity merge. After demonstrating the continuities between YHWH of Israel and El of Canaan, Cross is able to say that:

> In the earliest poetic sources the language depicting Yahweh as divine warrior manifest is borrowed almost directly from Canaanite descriptions of the theophany of Ba'l as storm god.[252]

Cross draws from this the conclusion that the council scene in Psalm 89 presents a call to worship the divine king who is pictured as marching to set up kingship.[253] YHWH comes as king to establish his rule in the earth! He is both king of the gods and the earth and is without comparison.

It is the extolling of Yahweh as cosmic ruler enthroned in the heavens that fuels the confidence of the psalm. The last several verses question how long the current state of affairs must continue and record a plead to YHWH to remember his promises. The assumption that YHWH is still ruling is what makes the plea pertinent. If YHWH still rules the council then YHWH can change the situation. He needs but issue his decree and the fortunes of his people will be changed.

The divine council scene signals a change. The change is one anticipated by the psalmist who interprets the current state of affairs as inconsistent with

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[252] Cross, *CMHE*, 147.
[253] Cross, *CMHE*, 160-162.

promises of God made to David. He asserts that this was a promise without condition, that even though the sons of David should prove to be unfaithful, though they would be punished, YHWH would never forsake his covenant. It is inviolable and unalterable. David's descendants shall endure forever and his throne as long as sun and moon remain (vv. 31–38 [ET 30–37]).

The divine council scene is presented as harmonious. There are no antagonists among the assembly. YHWH is universally proclaimed and recognized. There is no opposition. The invoking of the council in such magnificent terms establishes the certainty of YHWH's promises. He has made them; he will accomplish them. Who is there that can oppose them?

The certainty of YHWH's rule and the permanence of his promise leads to a disjunction between experience and theology. The revelation of council and decree do not mesh with what the people are experiencing in exile. The Davidic throne is vacant. How long will YHWH spurn his own covenant and permit himself to be a reproach and hide his face from his people. A plea is made to see YHWH renew his covenant loyalty (חסד) as he swore to David (v. 49).

The events of the psalm are recorded to embarrass YHWH to action; to remind him of his promises and to instill confidence among the people in YHWH's ability to act. It is assumed that YHWH cannot long deny his covenant. He can visit the nation with the rod for their iniquity, but he cannot destroy it. The fear is that they are dangerously close to destruction, and that the time for YHWH to act is now, not later.

4.7. Job 1:6-12; 2:1-7

In the prose prologue to Job, there are two scenes set in the heavenly council. The content and structure of both of these scenes is virtually identical with repetitions of form and phrase. Differences are explicable as advancement in the narrative and have no bearing on the nature of the council as envisioned.

The book of Job is a dramatic tale. As such, the important elements for comprehending its meaning and purpose are primarily literary rather than historical. Questions of authorship and dating are vexing, with no consensus emerging.[254] We will treat the story as a literary fabrication with the characters having no historical referents.[255] Nevertheless, we are confident from the agreement of the images conveyed in Job with other biblical portrayals of the divine council and with the broader conception of the council in the ancient Near East, that those in Job reflect a living tradition at the time of writing and may be

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[254] Francis I. Anderson (*Job* [Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1976], 61) writes: "We do not know who wrote the book of Job or when he lived. Nor do we know where. If several persons were involved, we still know nothing about them. ... A wide range of dates has been proposed, extending from the time of Moses to the Hellenistic period." He concludes by saying, "All we can say is the Job could have been written at any time between Moses and Ezra. Our own opinion, which we admit we cannot substantiate, is that the substance of the book took shape during the reign of Solomon and that its normative form was settled by the time of Josiah. An Israelite, rather than Judean, setting for its most definitive stage, together with its location in northern Gilead, suggests a date around 750 BC, before this community was decimated by the Assyrian conquests" (63-64).

[255] Norman Whybray, *Job* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 9. Job is a narrative tale. As narrative, it is arranged chronologically with a series of events following each other. It is a mixture of prose and poetry, with the main speeches which comprise the bulk of the book composed in poetry. It is, however, a fictional story, which is to say that it was composed not as an historical account, but as an imaginative tale. Such stories would be composed either for entertainment or for didactic purposes. Job could fill either of these purposes, though there appears to be some intention to engage conservative theologies of suffering by indicating Job's suffering is not occasioned by any fault to be found with him or his piety.

confidently drawn upon as expressions of the author's worldview and as consistent with that of his readers. The use of these images would not have distracted the first readers nor appeared to them as odd, enabling us to use them in our attempt to understand the nature and purpose of the divine council in the faith of Israel.

4.7.1. Summary of the Story of Job

The principal human character is Job and his story is set in a patriarchal society. He is introduced to us in the prologue as a blameless and pious man of wealth who is afflicted by economic loss, family tragedy and afflictions to his health through which his piety is tested. This testing results from events in two meetings of the divine council of which he is ignorant. The readers of Job's story are notified about the decisions of the divine council in advance of his tragedy, providing them with an essential bit of background information to evaluate the responses of Job and his friends to the tragedy.

Through a series of poetic dialogues with three interlocutors, Job asserts his righteousness and his piety and makes an impassioned plea for an advocate to appeal his case to the council. The speech cycles that comprise the main part of the book are occasioned by Job's soliloquy (3:2-26), in which Job curses the day of his birth. Then, each of his friends in turn makes a speech to which Job responds before the next friend's speech is made. There are three cycles of speeches that follow this pattern, though the third cycle is truncated, in that one

of the friends does not speak. Job in this cycle continues his rebuttal speech in an extended fashion (ch. 26) after which he makes a second speech in which the three friends as a group are addressed (ch. 27). A third speech by Job follows this, in which he continues uninterrupted to speak of his past and present situations along with a detailed declaration of his innocence.

A fourth interlocutor, Elihu, appears in the text without introduction and makes four speeches that anticipate the response of YHWH which is to come.[256] YHWH, who appears to Job in a whirlwind and who confronts Job and his three friends, follows him. Job is ultimately vindicated as having spoken rightly about YHWH, though no explanation is given to him for his suffering. His three interlocutors are charged with not speaking rightly about YHWH (42:7). The book concludes, in a fairytale fashion, with a restoration of Job's health and an increase to his wealth.

4.7.2. The Divine Council in Job

The Divine Council scenes are part of the prose prologue and serve the purpose of informing the reader (hearer) of the story about essential behind-the-scenes elements that become helpful in evaluating the speeches of each of the

[256] Whybray, *Job*, 22-23, has summarized the arguments for treating Elihu's speeches as a redactional interruption perceiving that these speeches represent an interruption in the flow of the book. Chapter 31 concludes with Job's impassioned declaration of innocence in which he swears an oath of innocence for every sin of which he could be accused. Elihu's speeches delay the denouement, in which YHWH appears to answer Job. It is believed that this delay is artificial. Whybray, however, treats Elihu as an important figure. The delay of the denouement is deliberate, slowing the pace of the narrative, but creating suspense. The nature of Elihu's lengthy speech is such that by the end, his concern for Job's suffering is almost completely eclipsed by his interest in the majesty of God using language that anticipates and echoes the language of the YHWH speeches considerably. Elihu is not an interruption, but a transitional figure. Like *śāṭān* in the prologue, he plays his role, and disappears, minimizing any distraction he might cause.

characters of the book. Asserted in the prologue is the impeccable righteousness of Job along with his almost obsessive piety. In the council scenes, the relationship of Job's suffering to his righteousness and piety is made clear: Job suffers as a result of his righteousness and piety and not because of some failure on his part in either righteousness or piety as is supposed by his friends. Armed with this knowledge, the reader is better able to evaluate the speeches of Job's friends and their correctness as interpreters of Job's plight.

This is, perhaps, the only council scene in the Old Testament that is not set in a prophetic context. In prophetic contexts, council scenes appear as a narrative event explaining heavenly activity, often as a defining characteristic of prophetic ministry. Mullen summarizes his findings by explaining that prophets in Israel were introduced as participants in the heavenly assembly who then served as the courtier of the judgments of YHWH.[257] The prophet's direct observation or participation in the council is what qualifies him for his unique ministry. Job, however, does not stand in the council. This is forcefully brought home though the words of Eliphaz, one of his friends and interlocutors, who asks Job directly, "Do you hear the secret counsel of God, and limit wisdom to yourself?" (Job 15:8). The question accuses Job of presumption, that Job cannot know what is going on in the divine realm.

[257]Mullen, *DCCEHL*, 209-226, 283.

The narrator of this tale does not detail how the council scene became known to him.[258] The scene is included as an explanation to the sufferings of Job and to set up the question answered by the book of Job as to whether or not there are any genuine worshippers of God. This question is the one which is posed by the השׂטן when he replies to YHWH in the council scene with the words "Does Job fear God (אלהים) for nothing?" (1:9) and "Skin for skin! Yes, all that man has he will give for his life" (2:4), thus setting up the contest to demonstrate that Job worships YHWH because he is God.

The author(s)/redactor(s) use and/or retention of the council scenes draws upon a motif that was recognized and current at the time of writing and provided a window into the heavenly realm, allowing for explanations to events that had no causal basis in this world. Because the motif was widespread and rooted in the cultural conception of deity, its use here is not surprising. Consequently, these scenes are useful in the inquiry into the nature and workings of the divine assembly as manifested in the religion of Israel in the late monarchy and early exilic periods.

We will structure our investigation of the council in these texts through the following questions: (1) Where did the council meet? (2) When did the council

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[258] For discussion on the way the fictional nature of Job impacts its purpose, cf., Peggy Day, *An Adversary in Heaven*: śāṭān *in the Hebrew Bible* (HSM 43; Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1988), 69-106, esp. pp. 76-79.

meet? (3) What is the membership of the council? (4) What or who is השטן? (5) What is the function of the Council as revealed in this text?

(1) There is no indication of where the meeting of the council takes place. In other texts, the council scenes are set in the heavens. Psalm 89:5-7 through a series of synonymous parallels indicates that this was the place where the heavenly council resides. In vv. 5, 6, and 7 the assembly is set in parallel with the heavens, allowing for a poetic use of metonymy in which the place of the assembly is used in place of the assembly itself. In Isaiah 66:1 heaven is declared to be the throne of God and the earth his footstool. Isaiah, standing in the council in Isaiah 6, declares that he saw YHWH sitting on a throne with the hem of his robe filling the temple (v. 1). Each of these indicates a heavenly locale for the council. The narrative of Job indicates that the sons of God (בני האלהים) came to the place where YHWH was in order to report to him. Drawing from the larger biblical picture, it seems clear that this place would be heavenly. God and other divine beings belong in heaven. Earth is properly the habitation of humans, not gods.

Specific mountain tops were also recognized in the ancient Near East as the venue of divine activity. This has led some to suggest the possibility of a mountain top meeting place.[259] This kind of imagery is present in the Old Testament also, particularly in Isaiah, in which the city of Jerusalem is extolled

[259] Andersen, *Job*, 82.

under the name of Zion and called "the mountain of the house of YHWH" (2:2) and "my holy mountain" (11:9; 56:7; cf., Ezek 20:40; Joel 2:1; 3:17) indicating that it is a divine possession. Joel 3:17 specifically speaks of it as the place where YHWH dwells. Exodus 15:17 speaks of a future day in Israel will be established on the mountain of God's inheritance, the very place that YHWH has made his own dwelling place and with his own hands established the sanctuary. This indicates for us that mountains and temple shrines are regularly equated, and these as a dwelling place for YHWH. It is not unreasonable to assume from this that the meeting of the council, if it were at the place of YHWH's dwelling, would then have been on a mountain.

To make a distinction between a heavenly venue or a mountain top venue is not necessary, as the tops of the mountains were generally believed to reach into the heavens. Several mountains in the ancient Near East were accorded a kind of cosmic status as places where the gods dwelt and heaven and earth made contact. Zion in Jerusalem is accorded this kind of status in some streams of biblical theology. When a mountain is understood in this way, its top is treated as in the heavens and no longer part of the earth. The response of the השׂטן that he was "roaming about on the earth and walking around on it" (Job 1:7; 2:2) when asked where he had come from indicates that the venue, whether on a mountain or in the heavens, was not considered to be on the earth.

Thirty times in Job YHWH is referred to by the name שַׁדַּי, often in direct parallel with the names אלוה (5:17; 6:4; 11:7; 22:26; 27:10; 31:2; 40:2) and אל (8:3, 5; 13:3; 15:25; 27:2, 11, 13; 33:4; 34:10, 12; 35:13). Frank Moore Cross has discussed שַׁדַּי at length and concludes that it means "the One of the Mountain."[260] The names אלוה and אל are generally regarded as synonymous.[261] The attestation of *'il* in the Ugaritic texts as a personal name for the high god El and not simply as an appellative for deity and the strong parallels between the character of El in the Ugaritic texts with God (אלוה, אל, and אלהים) in the Old Testament has led many to see YHWH as the Israelite version of El.[262] One of the characteristics of El in Ugaritic texts is that he is a mountain dwelling god. This association lends support to the idea that the council met on a mountain. In the Ugaritic texts, the gods (*'ilm*) are reported to have met on a mountain designated *Ll* (CAT 1.2.II.13-15, 19-20) and El is said to dwell on Mount *Ks* (1.1.IV.22). It is impossible to state definitively that the meeting place of the council in Job was on a mountain since there is not a connection made in Job. Of the eight references to mountains in Job, all of them refer to earthly

[260]Cross, *CMHE*, 52-60. This reading has been accepted by Day, *Yahweh and the Gods,* 32-34.
[261] Pope, *El in the Ugaritic Texts*, 11.
[262] Cross, *CMHE*, 1-60, argues extensively for shared epithets between the Canaanite El and YHWH in the Old Testament. Day, *Yahweh and the Gods,* 13-41, likewise argues for an influence of the Canaanite El on YHWH. Both of these scholars are careful to note that it is not a wholesale identification, but nonetheless, the affinities are undoubted. In particular, the lack of antagonistic rhetoric against El is particularly telling in light of the overwhelming attacks made against the Canaanite storm god Baal. It is probably safe to say that El of Canaan has been accepted in the Old Testament as YHWH with minimal reservation.

settings. We must conclude that we cannot know from Job where the council is thought to have met except to say that it appears not to have been on the earth. Though parallels with other Old Testament images and ancient Near East council scenes associate divine activity and assemblies with mountains, this is not clear in Job.

(2) The council in Job met on היום (the day) when the sons of God presented themselves before YHWH. Kingsbury treats this as a reference to a specific date that can be located on the liturgical calendar, and that on this day the council met to determine destiny for the next period of time.[263] He argues that this date corresponds with the time of the New Year agricultural festival at which time YHWH is thought to have made his epiphany and ascended to his throne. To make this connection, Kingsbury relies heavily upon Babylonian rituals reported in the *Enuma Elish*. In these accounts, the god Marduk is given complete control over the council and consequently over destiny. This event is dated by Kingsbury as first taking place on 8 Nisan and included a determination of the fates of humanity. A second segment in the ritual was undertaken on 12 Nisan where again human fates are set.

The context of the Job tale does not give any reason to think that such a specific date is in mind. The use of the article to signal "the day" on which the council met does not necessitate that a particular ritual date be assigned. From a narrative standpoint it is necessary that the events happen at some time, and

[263] Kingsbury, "The Prophets," 284.

to introduce that time an nondescript reference to the day of meeting is made. It is the activity of the day that signals the day's importance for the narrative, not the date's cultic associations.

Clines, in speaking of this date, describes it indefinitely with such phrases as "the day of the heavenly dialogue," "a timeless day in which the same scene is perpetually reenacted," and "one particular day."[264] Such descriptions are helpful in that they do not fix a specific liturgical date. Though a liturgical date cannot be assigned, the events of these days only make sense if we understand them to be appointed times. The narrative suggests that the presentations were not haphazard, but had been scheduled in the divine day timer as those on which an accounting of the בני האלהים is to be given. Our disagreement with Kingsbury's suggestion that a specific cultic date must be behind these meetings does not preclude us from recognizing that some kind of regulation governed the activities of the heavenly court.

In the story "the day" has the literary function of highlighting this date as one on which decisions pertinent to the story are to be made. It signals the point in time that the fortunes of Job undergo a significant change. The record of the events on that day are confined to heaven, creating a distinction between what is apparent in the earthly realm for the causes for Job's suffering. The day is a heavenly one, though the impact of its proceedings reverberate into this world

[264] David J. A. Clines, *Job 1-20* (WBC 17; Waco, TX: Word Books, 1989), 18, 19.

and affect Job directly. The day permits a specific narrative moment outside of earthly time when Job's fate was decided.

(3) The membership of the council includes YHWH, the בני אלהים, and השׂטן. The two primary characters are YHWH and השׂטן. YHWH appears in the vision as the center of council activity, the one before whom the others present (להתיצב) themselves. The name "YHWH" is used for the Deity only in the prologue, epilogue and rubrics of the YHWH speeches. In the poetic sections, the Deity is called אל, אלהים, אלוה, and שׂדי and his identity as YHWH is clarified by the rubrics, prologue and epilogue.

The בני האלהים are easily recognizable from their appearance in other contexts. It is the presence of the בני האלהים that signals this as a divine council text.[265] The following permutations of this phrase appear in the Old Testament: בני האלהים (Gen 6:2, 4; Job 1:6, 2:1); בני אלהים (Job 38:7; Deut 32:8 4QDeut, LXX); בני אלים (Psalm 29:1; 89:7 [ET 6]); בני עליון (Psalm 82:6). This phrase can be correlated with similar expressions in the Canaanite religion in which El the high god is envisaged as having gathered around himself a council of gods who were known as "the sons of El." A text from Ugarit reads:

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[265] Day, *Adversary in Heaven*, 79.

'il bn 'il
dr bn 'il
mpḫrt bn 'il
ṯrmn w šnm
'il w 'aṯrt
(CAT 1.65.1-5)

El, the sons of El
The family of the sons of El
The assembly of the sons of El
Tuk!amuna-wa-Šunama[266]
El and Athirat

Line four cannot be translated since the meaning of the words is not clear. Line five makes it clear that *bn 'il* in the previous lines comprise the "family" and the "assembly" of El and are the children born of El and Athirat. Furthermore, the gods are called affectionately *bny* (my sons) by El (CAT 1.16.V.19-18) and El is called *'aby* (my father [CAT 1.2.III.19]) or *'il 'abk* (El your father [CAT 1.2.III16, 17]) by the gods suggesting the high-god's paternity over these gods.

In Genesis 6 the בני האלהים (divine sons) marry the בנות האדם (human daughters) and produce offspring known as the הגברים אשר מעולם אנשי השם (men of might who were long ago, men of renown/giant size). The divine sons are heavenly beings in contrast to the human daughters who are mortal humanity. The offspring are a strange hybrid creature that are neither truly human nor truly divine. Jubilees 5:1 parallels Genesis 6:4 and calls the divine

[266] Dennis Pardee, *Ritual and Cult at Ugarit* (ed. Theodore J. Lewis; SBL WAW; Leiden: Brill, 2002), 22, 24 emends the text from *ṯrmn* to *ṯk!mn*. His emendation has been used in this line along with his vocalization. The explanation mark does not appear in the "explanation of signs" (p. xiii) nor is it explained. It appears to mark the emending of the "*r*" to a "*k*."

sons, angels, and the offspring, giants.[267] The distinction made between the women and the divine sons and the designation of their offspring as "giants" or "heroes" indicates that a cross breeding between realms has taken place. It seems clear that the בני האלהים are divine beings.

Deuteronomy 32:8 in 4QDeut (supported by the LXX, Latin versions, Syrohexaplaris and Symmachus) underscores that humanity is separated into nations by God (עליון) with the boundaries of the peoples set according to "the sons of God." This differs from the reading in the MT which separates them according to "the sons of Israel".[268] Since in 32:9 Israel is marked out as the portion belonging to YHWH, it is generally agreed by scholars that the allotment of the nations is according to the number of the divine sons. In the Ugaritic there are references to the seventy sons of Athirat (1.4.VI.44-46), which corresponds to the number of nations listed in the table of nations in Genesis 10-11. This list does not include Israel, which Deut 32:8 tells us is YHWH's portion. This has led scholars to associate the nations with the בני האלהים and to treat them as

[267] As quoted in Morgenstern, "Mythological Background," 86-87.

[268] The textual evidence for בני האלהים is well attested. It is easy to explain the reading בני ישׂראל, which is attested in the MT, LXX version by Aquila (Codex X), Symmachus (Codex X) and Theodotian (Fridericus Field, ed., *Origenis Hexaplorum, Tomus I, Prolegomena, Genesis-Esther* [Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1964], 320, n.12) as a reference to Jacob. In Gen 46:27 and Exo 1:5 it is stated that 70 members of his family went down to Egypt. Yet this does not explain how that number correlates with the pagan nations, especially since neither Jacob nor the people of Israel existed in the time about which the text is concerned. John Day considers the MT to represent a deliberate alteration made by "a scribe who did not approve of the polytheistic overtones of the phrase 'sons of God'" (*Yahweh and the Gods*, 23).

under their guardianship.[269] In the Old Testament the "sons of God" are understood by many scholars to be a reference to angels or divine beings who serve as God's courtiers in heaven.[270]

There are a number of El epithets in the Old Testament indicating that a deity known by the name El held a place of prominence in the early religion of Israel: אל עולם (Gen 21:23); אל עליון (Gen 14:18ff), אל אלהי ישׂראל (Gen 33:20), אל ראי (Gen 16:13), אל בית־אל (Gen 35:7) and אל שׁדי (Gen 17:1). Even the name Israel is an El name and indicates that in the earliest stratification of tradition, the El name had prominence in Israel as the name for her deity.[271] To what degree this El and the El of Canaan can be equated is not readily evident, though one can reasonably assume that some correspondence between them may be legitimately asserted. The El of the patriarchs and early Israel is identified with and almost completely swallowed up in YHWH of the Monarchy,

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[269] Mullen, *DCCEHL*, 202-205; Michael S. Heiser, "Deuteronomy 32:8 and the Sons of God," *Bibliotheca Sacra* (January-March, 2001), n.p.; Day, *Yahweh and the Gods*, 22-24.

[270] Robert Gordis, *The Book of Job: Commentary, New Translation and Special Studies* (New York, NY: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1978), 14. Norman Whybray (*Job* [Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998], 30) recognizes a link between the notion of a heavenly court and the polytheistic belief in an assembly of gods. In the Old Testament, however, he denies that such polytheistic elements remain. He remarks that "the members of the court are no longer to be thought of as gods but are subordinate heavenly (or angelic) beings. In some passages, as here, they have retained the old title 'sons of God', but their activities are completely subject to Yahweh's orders." Andersen likewise lists a number of terms that parallel the 'sons of God', including those often translated as 'host', 'stars', 'messengers', 'angels', 'slaves', 'holy ones', 'gods' or 'spirits'. He recognizes that their assembling constituted a divine council, though he asserts the supremacy of YHWH in a way that almost denies the reality of such. He says "the angel courtiers are seen surrounding Him when a man is granted a glimpse of His splendour (1 Ki. 22:19; Is. 6:1; Gn. 28:12). The incomparable Lord has no colleagues; His attendants are shadows, scarcely persons" (p. 81-82).

[271] For more discussion on El as the original God of Israel and the connection with the divine element in the name Israel, see Smith, *OBM*, 142-145.

exilic and post exilic periods. In the book of Job we have noted that YHWH's name only appears in the prologue, epilogue and rubrics of the YHWH speeches. In the poetic speech cycles he is called by names and epithets containing the *'ēl element or which have identifiable parallels to the high-god of the Canaanite pantheon. Such an association would seem to suggest that demoting the "sons of God" in Job to the status of "angels," with the implication that these beings are less than deity, might not agree with the way in which they were understood by the author and original audience of the tale.[272]

The appearance of the בני האלהים in Job 1:6 and 2:1 draws immediate parallels to Genesis 6 and Deuteronomy 32:8. These parallels would permit an understanding of the council in Job that is consistent with, if not directly informed by, conceptions of the council in Canaanite religion as preserved in the texts from Ugarit. As the sons of God, these members may be identified as the patron

[272] The word "angel" is used in popular discussion to refer to heavenly beings that are neither gods nor humans. If they are spoken of as divine beings, it is usually with a conscious distinction between that which is god and that which is created by God and the existence of which is entirely dependent upon God; cf., Alomia, LGANE, 558. Scholars also will emphatically deny that they are gods because of a monotheism that allows YHWH alone to be conceived of as God; cf., Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967), 2.201; H Ringgren, *Israelite Religion* (trans. D. E. Green; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), 100. The biblical evidence supports the notion that these beings were originally conceived of as gods and the distinction between YHWH and these beings can be confused at times. Exod 3:2-4 begins by describing a visitation to Moses by a messenger (i.e., angel) of YHWH, and yet it is YHWH who is present to observe and God who speaks to him. (cf., Gen 18:2, 33-19:1). Handy refuses in his study to consider "angels" as "gods" distinguishing them from those other beings who are titled בני אלהים, בני אלים, בני עליון, and קדשים (*AHH*, 156-59 n. 30). Yet it would seem that the demotion of these beings can be explained historically as a redevelopment of the השטן of Job 1, 2 and Zech 3:1-7 into a personalized demon (1 Enoch 4:7; 2 Enoch 29:4-5). Other heavenly beings apparently underwent a similar shift, each being assigned an area of expertise and ranked according to their function (Jubilees 2:2). Their angelic status is either diminished or they are assigned the appellate name "angel" as a way of indicating their non-divine status. Cf., Mullen, *DCCEHL*, 274-278.

deities of the nations corresponding to the seventy sons of El and Asherah (CAT 1.4.VI.46). Taking our cue from Deuteronomy 32:8, the parceling out of the nations to the divine sons who were charged with their oversight leads to the presentation of those sons before YHWH in Job 1 and 2 to account for their administration. Psalm 82 indicates a situation in which they are judged incompetent and stripped of their administration. In light of these parallels, Job 1 and 2 makes the best sense if we understand the בני האלהים as divine beings and not merely as beings of the angelic class.

Consequently, the idea that the destinies of human affairs are set in this meeting, as expressed by Kingsbury, may not be all that far from the mark. The assembling of the council may have included setting the fates for the geo-political administrations of the nations or have included a consideration of prominent individuals under the jurisdiction of the בן־האלהים present. This cannot be stated with certainty, especially since these members are left somewhat undefined in the text and what we know of them we have derived from other places, yet it would seem to be consistent with the use of council imagery in other places and so not far fetched. The presence of the בני האלהים in Job establishes that the meeting is a meeting of the divine council and that the narrated interaction between YHWH and השׂטן must be understood to be taking place in this context.

(4) The השׂטן from this vantage point would appear to be one of the sons of god, particularly since in the second council scene he is explicitly said to have come among them to present himself before YHWH (בתכם להתיצב על־יהוה גם־השׂטן Job 2:1) in the same manner and using the same verb as the האלהים בני. That he is said to have come "among" the בני אלהים does not mean that he is an intruder among them.[273] This same word is used in other contexts that convey the idea that the one who is said to be among a particular group is recognized as a member of that group giving no indication of intrusion (Gen 23:10; 40:20; 2 Kings 4:13). In both council scenes השׂטן is presented as coming with the בני האלהים at the time that they came to present themselves before YHWH, indicating that he is a member of the בני האלהים and that he is not out of place among them.

The identification of השׂטן as one from among the בני האלהים leaves many questions about his identity and role. He is referred to as השׂטן (the accuser), though this use of the noun may be appellative and not personal. When he is asked by YHWH where he has been, he answers in a way that suggests that he does not have a particular geo-political allotment—he roams about the earth and walks on it (1:7, 2:2). His introduction as השׂטן without any explanation serves to

[273] Andersen, *Job*, 82.

differentiate him from the other בני אלהים and to identify him as one that the audience would likely have had some familiarity with from other contexts. This has led some commentators to treat him as Satan, the fallen angelic being who personifies evil.[274] Most commentators reject this idea and treat the use of noun with the article (the accuser) as a reference to a role or title. Peggy Day emphatically denies that there is any such person who is called "Satan" in the Hebrew Bible, either explicitly or implicitly.[275] The noun, שׂטן, is used as a reference to an unnamed member of the divine council and is not necessarily a reference to a particular individual celestial being.[276] Day is not suggesting by this that השׂטן in Job is not an individual, but that the title השׂטן is not a personal name referring always to the same individual person. She treats it as a description that might be applied to any of many different celestial beings who might take on the role of השׂטן.

The discussion and dialogue between השׂטן and YHWH in Job seems to indicate that in this instance the character bearing the title is both individuated and distinguished from YHWH. This contrasts sharply with Clines' understanding

[274] Robert S. Fyall, *Now My Eyes Have Seen You: Images of Creation and Evil in the Book of Job* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 2002), 36; Roy B. Zuck, "Job", in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck; Wheaton IL: Victor Books, 1985), 719.
[275] Day, *Adversary*, 5.
[276] Day, *Adversary*, 6, 15.

of השׂטן and the בני האלהים as manifestations of the divine personality.[277] Cline admits that such a statement is not demonstrable with the evidence available, but this does not stop him from understanding it in this way despite the appearance of השׂטן in the divine council and his decidedly independent and individual actions within it. He along with the other בני אלהים present themselves before YHWH where he is described as entering into dialogue with YHWH. In this dialogue he first reports his activities, then engages in a joint contemplation of the righteousness and piety of Job, and finally he challenges YHWH on his protection of Job. He departs to afflict Job within the boundaries established by YHWH, apparently with liberty respecting the details. The description of this interaction, including the disagreement and commissioning activities that take place between YHWH and השׂטן, argue strongly for the acknowledgment that השׂטן possesses significant individuality apart from YHWH and renders the explanation by Clines, that the heavenly beings are merely extensions of divine personality, to appear forced. The presentation is very concrete and involves spatial movement between realms as well as an identifiable royal court type of relationship. It is hard to fathom that in the mind of the ancient author or his reader these things would have been understood in anything other than a literal way. Whether that literal understanding translated into a belief that things actually existed in this way is another question. J. Gerald

[277] Clines, *Job 1-20*, 21-22.

Janzen answers this by seeing in this concrete portrayal of the divine governance of the world, an exploration into theological and anthropological issues of a profound nature. He treats the use of this imagery as an exploration into what he calls the existential life of God, in which a question which God shares with humanity is resolved through a shared experience in the Job character. The question seeks to determine whether humanity, represented in Job, has matured enough to recognize that God is intrinsically worthy of worship or whether he is only to be worshipped because of the benefit or disaster he might bring. Janzen thus treats the story of Job as a "coming of age" story, in which Job moves from being a child to a comprehending worshipper who is fit to take up responsibility for a shared inheritance of the earth.[278]

Janzen thus denies that this is a portrayal of reality. He refrains from speaking of השׂטן or the בני אלהים as extensions of divine personality, but his treatment of them is not much different. They have narrative purpose in setting up the events that follow, but do not represent anything more than incidentals, as is indicated by his almost complete lack of discussion about them. He does not treat the question as solely a divine matter, but a shared one; both humanity and the deity are concerned to know whether or not the responsibility is to be joint or singular. The experiment of Job is about determining humanity's readiness for responsible independence and Job's vindication indicates that it is ready. Janzen treats the question in this way because he sees the book of Job as a revisioning

[278] J. Gerald Janzen, *Job* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1985), 37–42.

of Israel's covenant with YHWH. It is a moving away from a reward and punishment relationship to one that is more dynamic and interpersonal.

The problem with Janzen's understanding is that it is incredible. How an ancient reader would have grasped this complex and nuanced metaphor is not spelled out. It appears to be driven more from the interests of contemporary theological speculation than from a careful reading of Job. It is a legitimate reader-response reading, but this does not mean that it is an intelligible reading in the historical context of the Old Testament. It fails even to address what the divine council imagery was intended to convey, since it is treated essentially as an internal psychological debate in God. Yet for the reader—ancient and modern—the council imagery is bound to have implications for how God and the heavenly realm are to be understood. We are treating the council as a common ancient Near East motif that would have been intelligible to the author and original readers, though it may also represent a corrective to expressions current in the contemporary milieu. In the absence of alternatives, we are compelled to accept the council in Job as representative of the author's understanding of administration in the heavens. The members of that council and, in particular, the השטן are presented as being active agents both in heaven and in the world.

The first council scene is followed simply by a description of the disasters that befell Job's family without direct reference to the activity of השטן. It is obvious from the context that there is a connection between what appear to be natural and humanly caused disasters and the activities of the divine council. The

disasters that השטן afflicts Job with are recorded as Job experiences them without a conscious sense of the manipulation of השטן. After the second council scene השטן is directly implicated with smiting Job with boils, making the implicit connections of the first round of disasters and heavenly activity explicit. After this השטן does not again appear in the book in any direct way.

This developed individuation of השטן would seem to imply that he is not merely an extension of YHWH's personality but that he exists as a person in his own right. His relationship with YHWH is deemed to have been close in that he is numbered among the בני האלהים. He is not an enemy of God nor is he the personal embodiment of evil that the figure of Satan comes to represent in Second Temple literature, the New Testament or in Christian theology. He plays the role of an adversary, but this does not necessitate that he exists as an adversary to YHWH. He is in this context the adversary of Job.

Day concludes that the meaning of the word שטן in the Old Testament has a general sense of "adversary" and a more particular or specialized use as "legal accuser." She comes to this conclusion, first, by assessing all Old Testament occurrences of the word in the secular human realm (1 Sam 29:4; 2 Sam 19:17-24; 1 Kings 5:16-20; 11:14, 23, 25; Psa 109:6). In these contexts it is applied mainly to a military adversary. Forensic elements are also detectable, particularly in Psalm 109, which records a tribunal setting. In 2 Sam 19:17-24

Abishai is called an accuser by David because he has called for the death of Shimei as a judgement for a curse made against the king. Day treats this too as an example of the court role of accuser.[279] She admits that the role of accuser may have been a normative function in the royal court but denies that there was any such person or office of accuser. The function, it seems, could be filled by any one of a number of persons. Thus, for Day the word שׂטן refers to function and not office, with its use in secular contexts suggesting a kind of *ad hoc* arrangement in which any person might take on the role depending upon the circumstances. There does not appear to be an appointed שׂטן in these contexts.

After considering occurrences with an earthly referent Day then attends to the two passages in which there is a heavenly referent: Job 1, 2 and Zechariah 3:1-7. She sees a possible functional parallel between the Akkadian term *bēl dabābi* which means "adversary, accuser." The Akkadian term is used in both earthly and heavenly contexts to refer to legal opponents and/or accusing deities.[280] These, she points out, were not names of any single person or deity, but functions that could be taken on by various persons/deities in a given context. Consequently, the article with the noun (השׂטן) in Job does not necessarily

[279] Day, *Adversary*, 26.
[280] Day, *Adversary*, 40.

express an office, but may simply mean "a certain one" and thus refer to an unspecified accuser.[281]

Psalm 109:6 is part of the appeal of the Psalmist who seeks to defend himself in a liturgical court. In this verse he reports on the activities of his enemies who have plotted together to appoint an accuser (שׂטן) who is also called a wicked man. The description as wicked is the description made by the Psalmist and not by his enemies. He puts these words in the mouth of enemies to illustrate their intentions are less than noble.

It is important to note that this wicked man is appointed to bring accusation. This is the role that he is to play in the tribunal and which he has apparently played. In vv. 4, 20 and 29 we see that he has a plurality of accusers, but one from among them is appointed to this task (v. 6). That he is appointed to stand at his right hand and bring charges against him tells us that the role he plays is a fixed one. It would be hard to imagine a tribunal scene in which an accuser is not present. In Psalm 82 YHWH himself brings the accusation as well as renders the judgement. To speak only in terms of role or function without recognizing the necessity of the accuser in the tribunal setting does not adequately account for the nature of the tribunal. It may not be an office in which a particular individual always functioned, but in any given context the one who fulfills the function becomes in that particular trial, the accuser.

[281] Day, *Adversary*, 43.

In 2 Samuel 19:17-24, Day treats the situation as having a tribunal like setting, even though it is not in a formal tribunal context. Abishai son of Zeruiah entreats David to have Shimei killed. David calls Abishai an accuser. Day understands him to be Shimei's adversary when in the narrative he is functioning as an adversary to David. This is a role that the sons of Zeruiah appear to occupy throughout the narrative, that is, as those who regularly disagree with the king and challenge his decisions. Abishai is challenging David's decision to let Shimei live, David is silencing him by asserting that he is the king and will make the decision himself, and in fact has made the decision. He pardons Shimei.

These instances indicate that the term is used not simply of a role or function, but of a description of behaviour. Abishai acted as an adversary to David in 2 Samuel 19:16-23 as did the Psalmist's enemies in Psalm 109. Their adversarial behaviour is focused in one individual who is appointed to be an adversary/accuser in a formal way for the tribunal. The use in the secular contexts does not simply refer to role, but to behaviour and function depending upon the circumstances. As a functionary role, it appears to be official, even if it is filled by individuals who are not appointed as representatives of the state. It is important that we do not invest the ideas of office with notions that are informed by modern usage. Describing the השׂטן as a prosecutor leads to the treatment of the accuser as an official office staffed by the government. Such is not the case inasmuch as these ancient societies are not ruled by law in the same way as are modern democracies. To conclude that since the accuser is not staffed by the

government no such title or official function existed, is not a necessary conclusion. In fact it appears that for a tribunal to work, there must be someone who will act as adversary and bring the charges against the accused. This role is functional and would be official for the kind of context in which it functions.

In Job, השׂטן is used in reference to a particular member of the בני האלהים. The presence of the article makes it unlikely that השׂטן is a personal name.[282] Parallels with 1 Kings 22, in which the individuated member of the צבאות is likewise referred to by means of a noun with the definite article (הרוח), may be helpful. If Peggy Day is correct in suggesting that השׂטן is not a reference to a particular office, but a function, then the "spirit" in the parallel context of 1 Kings 22 is likewise not to be understood as referring to a functional role. In that context, "spirit" (הרוח) should be taken as the designation for the particular member of the צבאות who becomes the focus of council activity in that text, even as השׂטן does in Job. The article would serve to make the role of "accuser" definite and makes the noun an appellative for those that fulfil the function of that role.[283] השׂטן appears before the council two times in the Job prologue. In both

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[282] Clines, *Job 1-20,* 20.

[283] Cf., Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 249. E. Kautzsch and A. E. Cowley (*Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar,* [Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1910], 405) indicate that the article in instances such as this may serve to restrict to a particular individual the characteristics of a whole class, and in such

instances he is distinguished from the others by this name. The context leads us to believe that it was the same individual who appears under this title in both instances. That he appears bearing this name argues against Day that it relates solely to function or role. This is the one particular member of the בני האלהים who is distinguishable from the others by the fact that he bears the name/title of השטן. Whether he acquires this title because of function or role is not delineated for us, but it becomes proper to this particular בן־האלהים in the same way that הרוח becomes a proper designation of the particular individual from among the צבאות in 1 Kings 22:21. These designations do not become personal names—"Satan" and "Spirit"—but descriptive signifiers that reveal the role each one is to play while simultaneously permitting a distinction between them and others sharing their classification as צבות or בני אלהים.

(5) The role of the בני האלהים is not defined for us and must be deduced from השטן who alone among them is given detailed attention. We have already dealt significantly with their function while identifying the בני אלהים in section 3 above. We will expand on what we have already said from the role played by השטן. The interaction of YHWH with השטן reveals him as one appointed to roamed throughout the land. He parallels the red horseman and his cavalry of

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cases can be used as a proper name. There is no evidence in the text of a class of accusers rendering such a conclusion unlikely in this case.

horses in Zechariah 1:7-11, who are sent by YHWH to patrol the earth. His designation as השׂטן and his activities as an "accuser" suggest that this was a function coordinate with his activity as a roamer in the land. The other האלהים בני may have had designations of a similar kind and also have had particular functions assigned to them. Unfortunately they are not outlined for us. In section 3 we referred to Deuteronomy 32:8 to demonstrate that the בני האלהים were divine guardians over the nations. Their role, deduced from Psalm 82, was to secure justice in the social sphere and thus maintain the stability of created (cosmic?) order. Their incompetence in Psalm 82 led to the foundations of the earth to rock precariously and threatened complete destruction. From this broader context it would appear that the role of the council was to ensure order in the world.

The challenge and investigation into Job would appear to be a test of the foundations. YHWH presents Job to השׂטן as a genuine God fearer who is impeccable in righteousness and piety, avoiding evil (1:8). Satan questions whether he is a genuine God fearer and accuses YHWH of making it easy for him. The challenge is to the structure YHWH has established, in which righteousness is rewarded and evil punished. If these foundations are removed, will Job continue to fear God? For a time, YHWH suspends his "covenant" and

permits השטן to afflict the righteous Job. The epilogue indicates that the foundations are reasserted and Job is vindicated.

4.7.3. The Purpose of the Divine Council in Job

The appearance of the divine council in the prologue of Job serves a didactic purpose. It functions to provide revelation reporting deliberations of the council which must be kept in mind when the sufferings of Job are interpreted. Job's friends were apparently aware of the council asking Job, perhaps sarcastically, whether he has observed the council (15:8). Ironically, neither did they observe the council, though the reader through the narrator has and knows that they interpret Job's plight incorrectly. Job's friends failed to remember the council when they formulated their explanations for Job's misfortunes and readers aware of their error are guided by their knowledge of the council not to make the same mistake. The reader (hearer) is guided, both in understanding Job's sufferings and, as a consequence, actual human sufferings, to recall the cause of Job's sufferings: a decision of the divine council. Such a recollection guards against overly simplistic explanations.

The divine council scene indicates that a change is about to take place and explains how that change has been decided. Job's piety and position are reported in Job 1:1–5 as an introduction to the prose prologue. The council scene functions as a type-scene that announces for us that a change in God's dealings with Job is about to take place. The satan challenges the boundaries

that YHWH has placed around Job, and following a negotiation, an agreement is made to change the boundaries. YHWH decrees that Job's property is now no longer protected. In a second council appearance, the satan complains that the boundary is still too far away (skin for skin, 2:4) and the boundary is adjusted a second time, this time protecting only Job's life. The divine council scenes explain to the reader that the order of Job's world is decreed by YHWH and that changes to his world do not indicate a failure on YHWH's part to protect or reward. Council scenes serve as a means of divine revelation parallel in some ways to that of theophany as is indicated by the restoration of Job's world through theophany and not through a third council scene. Through this mode of revelation the reader is informed that YHWH changes his dealings with Job because of a challenge by the satan.

The council scene also reveals that there are other powers alongside of YHWH. The בני האלהים are, in the words of Robert S. Fyall, "no mere decoration echoing a primitive mythology but the realization that there are powers in the universe other than God and that they exercise great influence on the course of events."[284] The divine council is a balance to a monistic understanding of God and his activities in the world. It is not a denial of YHWH's sovereignty in the heavens, but it does not allow that sovereignty to be conceived

[284] Robert S. Fyall, *Now My Eyes Have Seen You: Images of Creation and Evil in the Book of Job* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2002).

in narrow terms as an absolute dictatorship. YHWH works with the powers to accomplish his own will.

The members of the council appear to be able to act with independence in their realms. Boundaries are set by decrees in the council, but the members are free to act within the bounds of these decrees. Their description as בני האלהים reveals them to be a class of deity, even if that class must be understood as subservient to or inferior to the deity of YHWH. In Canaanite parallels, the divine offspring possessed a derivative authority, able to act under the aegis of their parents El and Athirat. The nature of this sonship was literal in Canaan in a way that does not appear to be manifested in the Old Testament. These are "divine beings" even if they are under the authority of YHWH, which is made evident by their coming to report to him their actions.

4.8. Jeremiah 23:16-22

The key verses in this oracle are verses 18 and 22 which ask who among the prophets of Jerusalem have stood (עמד) in the council of YHWH (בסוד יהוה). Those who have, YHWH says, would announce "my words to my people" rather than words fabricated in their own imagination. The context is one in which the prophets are accused of making up oracles in the name of YHWH in order to deceive the people of Israel into a false sense of peace and security.

The council of YHWH is mentioned as the place from which the true prophet of YHWH gets his message. As one who has participated in the council, the true

prophet has access to what the purposes of God are. In this respect, Jeremiah 23:16-22 presupposes a situation very similar to that reported by Micaiah ben-Imlah in 1 Kings 22:19-23. Micaiah received a revelation of God which enabled him to declare that the almost 400 prophets of the royal court have been misled by a deceiving spirit. Jeremiah presupposes that a council context exists in which the prophet participates either directly (as Isaiah of Jerusalem in Isaiah 6) or as an observer. This participation serves as a form of revelation to the prophet, who is then able to report on its deliberations and decrees.

The authenticity of the prophet appears to rest in his access to the divine council. Those who have stood in the council and have been sent by YHWH from out of the council are those who are authorized to speak in the name of YHWH.[285] For Jeremiah, it is an issue of prophetic reliability. Divine council scenes function as venues for the commissioning of messengers and the determining of fate in a judicial setting.[286] The relationship between the divine council scene and the prophetic ministry is that the recounting of the divine council scene, by revealing the words of YHWH and by showing the activities of the council, lends divine authority and heavenly sanction to the prophetic message and ministry.

By denying the Jerusalem prophets the opportunity of claiming access to the divine council, Jeremiah is denying their message has authority. He is implicitly

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[285] Joseph Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel* (rev. edn.; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 136-137.
[286] Fleming, DCTS, 213.

claiming for himself, by the claim that he speaks for YHWH, access to the divine council and the ability to accurately report the decisions of the council as one who has stood in its midst. The evidence that they have not stood in the council, is that they have not spoken the judgement of God correctly but have sought to console the wicked and sinful people through promises of peace and safety (v. 17).

The allusion to the divine council in Jeremiah serves on the one hand to authenticate Jeremiah as a true prophet and on the other to authenticate his message of exile and destruction for Jerusalem. It explains how a prophet might confuse his own words for those of YHWH. The prophets do not have access, and so must discern the word by other means. A true prophet, however, first stands in the council of YHWH to hear the word of YHWH. Then he proclaims that word so that others might hear it and turn from their wickedness.[287] The false prophets, however, have not stood in the council of YHWH and as a result have no word to give.[288]

Amos 3:7 parallels the ideas expressed in Jeremiah 23:16-22. The prophet is declared by Amos to be a trumpet that sounds to warn the people of the calamity that YHWH intends to bring as a judgement for iniquity. He remarks:

[287] Peter C. Craigie, Page H. Kelley and Joel F. Drinkard, Jr., *Jeremiah 1–25* (WBC 26; Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1991), 345.
[288] J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980), 499.

> Surely Lord YHWH (אדני יהוה) does nothing,
> Unless he reveal his secret counsel (סוד)
> to his servants the prophets (NAS).

The secret council is the divine council in which YHWH issues his decrees. The prophets who have access to this council are able to announce the impending judgements and offer warning to those who would heed them. Amos does not use this like YHWH to validate his message, but it does signify the origin of his message. As with Jeremiah, the divine council serves as a medium of revelation for the prophet who through it has access to the decrees of YHWH and is then able to declare what he has seen and heard to the people.

4.9. Zechariah 3:1-10

The divine council in Zechariah 3:1-10 introduces two unique features that do not appear in other scenes of the divine council. First, YHWH is not the one who presides over this council. Instead, a character who has not appeared in previous council scenes, the Messenger of YHWH (מלאך יהוה) fills this role. Secondly, a human participant, Joshua the high priest, who is not the prophet reporting the vision is observed as having direct access to the council.

The council scene also involves a greater number of individuals participating in its proceedings: (1) The Messenger of YHWH (מלאך יהוה), (2) Joshua the high priest, (3) the accuser (השׂטן), (4) YHWH, (5) those standing by, and (6) implicitly, Zechariah.

(1) The מלאך יהוה appears 58 times in the Old Testament.[289] Apart from three occurrences in two of the Psalms and 13 in postexilic writings, these all appear in texts that Brian Peckham assigns to the Dtr[2] redactor of the Deuteronomic history.[290] It appears in contexts, where apparently, YHWH is said to be communicating or showing himself. The concept of the מלאך יהוה (Messenger of YHWH, hereafter MY) appears to have been initiated to alleviate the tension of mere mortals standing in the presence of YHWH.

The MY appears in this text as the one who presides over the tribunal. The accused, Joshua the high priest, stands before him with the Accuser standing to his (Joshua's) immediate right. This position indicates that the MY is not functioning in the role of advocate, but is in the powerful position of presider over the tribunal council.[291] In keeping with the uniqueness of Joshua's presence in the council, it is very likely that MY presides because the high priest is present and he acts in this regard as a buffer between YHWH and the high priest.

The MY is very likely the subject of v. 4 and the antecedent to the pronoun. He issues the command to remedy the accusations of the Accuser. The command is for the other members in the council, possibly hosts (צבות) as

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289 The phrase מלאך האלהים appears nine times with the article and four times without. It is often treated by scholars to by synonymous with מלאך יהוה. Cf., René A. Lopez, "The identity of the מַלְאַךְ יְהוָה in the Book of Judges: A Model for the Usage of this Phrase Elsewhere," (Unpublished ETS paper, 2004), 5.

290 Cf., Brian Peckham, *The Composition of the Deuteronomistic History* (HSM 35; Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1985).

291 Petersen, Haggai, *Zechariah 1-8* (OTL; Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1984), 190, speaks of the MY as the "ultimate authority in the council."

indicated by the designation of YHWH as YHWH צבות in vv. 7, 9 and 10. The MY also interprets this activity as an expiation of Joshua's sin in v. 4 and then declares the word of YHWH to Joshua.

(2) Joshua the high priest is known, along with Zerubbabel, for his work in rebuilding the house of God in Jerusalem (Ezra 5:2). We are told in that passage that the prophets were present with them and supported them in their work. The statement that the prophets supported them may have been included as a rhetorical challenge to those that thought they acted apart from the support of the prophetic guild. Part of this conflict is reported in 4:1-5 when Zerubbabel and Joshua refused help from the Benjaminites and denied them any part with them. Joshua appears in the vision dressed in soiled clothes in an obvious state of uncleanness unbefitting a priest in the service of YHWH. His appearance is ritually significant, since he represents the reinstatement of the priesthood in the reconstructed temple. After a hiatus, the priests and people would have been unclean following their exile to a foreign land and the lack of an operative sacrificial cult and temple ministry means that some kind of unique purification ritual would be needed to consecrate the priest for his duties.[292]

Joshua appears before the MY who presides over the tribunal. He is accused by the Accuser, but of what we are not told. It may be surmised that the Accuser is pointing to his sin represented in the soiled garments. The MY has Joshua's garments removed and declares that his sins are forgiven. This declaration is

[292] Cf., Petersen, *Haggai and Zechariah 1-8*, 199.

probably the declaration of acceptability of Joshua and those who serve in his line, the Zadokite house. Boda considers his cleansing as a sign-act, and that through this sign-act, Joshua's investiture serves as a symbol of the installment the Zadokite priesthood.[293] This is made evident in large measure through the address of the MY to Joshua that began in v. 7 in which the MY admonishes Joshua with the words of YHWH of Hosts (צבות). The admonition continues in v. 8 with a call to both Joshua the high priest and his friends sitting in front of him. These friends are those who serve with him in the priestly ministry. Joshua is, then, representative of the priestly house and his cleansing and commissioning are reported as divine purification and appointment to the Second Temple's service.

(3) The accuser (השׂטן) is not the Satan of the New Testament or the personified evil one called the devil. He is one who is an adversary and is often called by scholars a prosecutor.[294] His role is judicial, he brings accusation against the high priest, Joshua. The concept or idea of the השׂטן is not a common one in the Old Testament. It appears as a simple human adversary in 1 Sam 29:4 in reference to David by the Philistines. Human adversaries are sometimes viewed as sent by YHWH, as in the case of Hadad the Edomite and Rezon of Eliada (1 Kings 11:14, 23) whom God sent to Solomon and Israel. In a

[293] Mark J. Boda, *Haggai, Zechariah* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 256.
[294] Petersen, *Haggai and Zechariah 1-8*, 186-187; 189-190; Boda, *Haggai, Zechariah*, 251

kind of strange twist, MY is called השטן in Numbers 22:22, when he appears on the road before Balaam the prophet to warn him against cursing the Israelites. These references do not include tribunal or forensic contexts.

In the forensic context of Psalm 109:6, the Psalmist makes a poetic plea for a wicked man to be appointed over his adversary and an accuser (השטן) to stand at his right hand. By calling this "Accuser" a "wicked man" the Psalmist indicates that he does not consider this Accuser to have a neutral role.[295] Petersen summarizes by saying that "he is, to use a contemporary idiom, 'out to get someone,' there is therefore a certain negative connotation to a satan and his duties."[296] Of course, we understand the role of the השטן to be negative towards the accused, though not necessarily understood negatively from the point of view held by the court. The השטן appears in 1 Chronicles 21:1 as the one who incited David to number Israel. This is a parallel to 2 Samuel 24:1 in which YHWH is said to have been angry against Israel and to have incited David against them by commanding him to number the people. It would seem that this command is carried out by the השטן, at least in the eyes of the Chronicler.

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[295] The word translated "wicked man" is רשע and is treated by G. Herbert Livingstone, in the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (2:863–864) to mean "wicked, criminal." It could be adequately translated "injurious." The translation of "wicked man," attested in the NAS and the RSV, would seem to convey a greater sense of deliberateness on the part of the accuser, whereas "injurious" allows for some ambiguity as to motive. The context clearly implies that a deliberate harm is intended by the appointment of the accuser. It is translated "evil man" in the NIV. In any case, from the standpoint of the Psalmist, the accuser is wicked and not simply one who causes harm.

[296] Petersen, *Haggai, Zechariah 1-8*, 189.

Petersen treats השטן as nothing more than a personification of YHWH's anger in this text, though it would appear that a better harmonization is as we have suggested, that the השטן has been sent by YHWH through the command "Go, and number Israel and Judah" (2 Sam 24:1).

Job 1:6-12 and 2:1-6 provide the clearest parallel to this passage. We have already dealt with him in that context and have determined that he is one of the sons of God (בני אלהים). In that context he presents himself before YHWH in much the same way as the rider on the red horse with the red, sorrel and white horses does in Zechariah 1:10-11. It may very well be that the השטן is one of these equestrian riders now bringing an accusation against the high priest.

He is rebuked by מלאך יהוה in the name of YHWH.[297] The rebuke indicates that his accusations contradict the purpose of God and not that they were untrue. If they are to be thought false, it is that they are false to YHWH's intentions which are declared in the description of YHWH as the one who had chosen Jerusalem. Satan's accusations are likely focused on the unworthiness of Joshua to serve as high priest and possibly, by extension, of Jerusalem and Judah to be recipients of YHWH's favour (1:12). Rather than contradicting or answering the charges, YHWH simply rebukes שטן and affirms his purpose to install Joshua and rescue Jerusalem.

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[297] Petersen, Haggai, *Zechariah 1-8*, 187 note b. The MT reads "YHWH," but it is more likely the מלאך יהוה as in the Syriac.

The השטן in his role as accuser against Joshua may be a mirror to the religio-political events in the human realm. The vision of the heavenly court allows for a hearing in which the dissenting voices that speak out against Zechariah and his support of Joshua might be silenced. The role of השטן is antagonistic to Joshua, but it is not an inherently evil role. He is rebuked and not answered, which would seem to indicate that he has attempted to oppose not only Joshua but YHWH. The rebuke against השטן would also function as a rebuke to those who would oppose Zechariah. If the people do not wish to oppose YHWH, then they will accept his prophet and priest.[298]

(4) YHWH appears in Zechariah 3:1-10, but not directly. We are not told that he is seen, which may be why this scene was not opened with the customary statement by Zechariah that he has "seen" or lifted up his eyes. YHWH's presence is manifested primarily in the ministry of the MY, who declares the words of YHWH to השטן (3:2), to the assembled host (3:4, 5), to Joshua (3:4, 6), and Joshua and his associates (3:8). Primarily, however, YHWH is present in his word. He is revealed as the one who disagrees with השטן and chooses Jerusalem and Joshua. He is also revealed as the one that establishes the conditions for blessing and access into the divine assembly (3:7). This access is

[298] Fleming, DCTS, 201, summarizes by saying: "The type-scene in 3:1-5 shows that in spite of objections, the divine council has legitimated and cleansed the person and office of the high priest. Cf., C. and E. Meyers, *Haggai, Zechariah 1–8* (Anchor Bible 25B; Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1987), 186, 216.

possibly what allows Malachi to speak ideally of the priest as a Messenger of YHWH of hosts (מלאך יהוה־צבאות, Malachi 2:7).

It is argued by some the YHWH makes his appearance in v. 2 and rebukes Satan directly.[299] Boda suggests that his rebuke and explanation to Joshua bolsters the MY in his endeavour to purify and commission the High Priest.[300] It would seem better to understand the MY as reciting all the speeches in the name of YHWH as his Messenger and not a separate speech by YHWH. Following Vanderkam, Boda argues that the promise of access to "these standing here" given to the High Priest is mistranslated and should be a promise to Joshua of a mediator to the council in the form of a restored prophetic ministry.[301] The effect is that Joshua is granted ongoing access to the council, but in a mediated way. He is kept, in the words of Vanderkam, "one step removed" from the council.[302]

Joshua is not in this text granted a special kind of access to the council, though we must acknowledge that the statement is made in a context in which Joshua is already standing in the council. If it is necessary to consider his access as somehow less than direct, in, as Vanderkam has suggested, a manner "one step removed," we would do well to note that the council is presided over by

[299] Heiser, DCSTJL, 126; Boda, *Haggai, Zechariah,* 249.
[300] Heiser, DCSTJL, 126.
[301] Mark J. Boda, "Oil, Crowns, Thrones: Prophet, Priest and King in Zechariah 1:7-6:15," *JHS* 3 (2001), article 10: §2.3.1.2-2.3.1.4. The argument for this perspective takes issue with the translation of the word rendered "access" in the English versions. In the Hebrew a plural participle from the *piel* stem of the root הלך is used. The verbal clause has the sense of "a go between" and thus YHWH gives to Joshua "those who move between those who stand." Cf., Rose, *Zemah*, 73–83.
[302] Quoted in Boda, "Oil, Crowns and Thrones," note, 23.

the MY and not by YHWH. This would have the effect of removing the priest, not from the council, but from direct access to YHWH.

(5) An illusive group of "standers by" (העמדים האלה) is also present in the text. They appear on three occasions. In verse 4 they are addressed by the MY who commands them to remove Joshua's filthy garments, which they do. In verse 5 they are commanded to place a turban on his head, which they also do. Finally, in verse 7 a "walker, mover" is given to Joshua to move between these "standers by."

Of those in the passage who are said to stand we can include Joshua, who is twice described as standing before the MY (vv. 1, 2). השׂטן is described as standing to Joshua's right hand, which places him also before the MY (v. 2). The MY is also described as standing by in v. 5 when the others who are referred in this way are placing a turban on Joshua's head. The command issued by the MY in v. 4 is a telltale plural imperative that marks divine council address in other places.[303] These standing ones are those who comprise the council.[304]

Their behaviour is representative of good servants; they are silent and obedient. They are the agents of the MY whose service results in Joshua's fitness for service. The promise of one who would go between them is deemed to be a benefit since it implies an access to the heavenly court of the assembly. These agents are described in language that conveys the image of individuals

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[303] Cf., Cross, *CMHE*, 187; (Judg 5:2; Isa 35:3–4; 40:1–8; 48:20–21; 57:14).
[304] Boda, "Oil, Crowns and Thrones," §2.3.1.2.

since it presupposes a structural parallel in an earthly court. The lack of detail describing them or their interactions in the council make it impossible to impart individuality to them. From parallels in the ancient Near East and other council texts, it would appear that these may be confidently identified with the "hosts of heaven," the "seraphim" and/or the "sons of God."

(6) Zechariah's presence in the council parallels that of Micaiah ben-Imlah in 1 Kings 22:19-23 more than that of Isaiah of Jerusalem in Isaiah 6, since he does not like Isaiah have any interaction with the council. There is in the MT a first person singular verb introducing direct speech in v. 5 that, if translated "I said," would seem to indicate that Zechariah has offered the suggestion that Joshua receive a priestly turban, which is promptly provided.[305] Petersen, however, has argued for a third person singular reading based on strong textual evidence.[306] Likewise, the LXX indicates a continuance of speaker from the previous verse, which is a continuation of MY's declaration to Joshua the high priest of the removal of sin enacted in the removal of his soiled clothes.

Zechariah's presence in the council, like that of Micaiah, Isaiah and Jeremiah, is likely a confirmation to him and to his audience of the validity of his message. It would as in other contexts represent a vehicle of revelation for prophetic ministry. Zechariah stands in the council and is enabled to declare the word of YHWH and report on the fateful decisions of the council. The narration of these

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[305] James H. Gailey, Jr., "The Book of Zechariah" in *The Layman's Bible Commentary*, vol. 15 (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1962), 107.
[306] Petersen, *Haggai, Zechariah 1-8*, 197.

events provides a recognized pattern by which Zechariah's prophecies are legitimated as authoritative and communicated for acceptance and implementation.

4.10. Summary

It is clear from the texts surveyed that the divine council motif is a prominent and active element in the religious conception of Israel's deity. The following features stand out as significant, including (1) a vision of YHWH seated on his throne surrounded by a host of heavenly beings; (2) an intervention by one of the participants of the council; (3) a fateful decree issued by YHWH. Not all of these features are prominent in every occurrence of the council, though they appear to be typical. In the next chapter we will bring our conclusions together into a summary presentation of the divine council in the Old Testament.

5.0. The Divine Council in the Old Testament

From the texts we have considered it is clear that the divine council is an elaborate and functioning element in the theological vocabulary of the Old Testament. In this chapter we will seek to organize our findings around the topics we considered for the Ugaritic council. This will include (1) the meeting place of the council, (2) its membership, (3) structure and, (4) operations.

5.1. Meeting Place

In none of the texts is a definitive meeting place given. Most seem to imply that the location is a heavenly one. Isaiah 6 provides the most detail since it situates the vision in the temple. Our discussion on that text was unable to clarify with certainty whether or not Isaiah intends us to conceive of the temple as the earthly temple in Jerusalem or its heavenly counterpart, the royal palace of YHWH.

1 Kings 22:19 and Isaiah 6:1 both refer to YHWH's throne. The vision of a throne implies that YHWH is seated in the council. Other members are described as standing. In Psalm 82:1 YHWH is described as standing in the midst of his council. Zechariah 3:5 indicates that MY who presides over the council, was standing for at least a portion of the council proceedings.

1 Kings 22, Isaiah 6 and Psalm 89 would seem to indicate that heaven is the location. Job reinforces this, since when asked where he has come from, Satan recounts his earthly wanderings (1:7; 2:2). Zechariah was accompanied by an

angel, which was a common feature among visions of the heavens, in which a heavenly tour guide is provided to explain what the prophet sees.

The most we can say with certainty is that the council appears to have met in the heavens in a palace or temple like setting. Our discussion on Isaiah 6 included a remark about the correspondence between the heavenly temple and the earthly one. If an earthly temple is in fact in view, it served as an access point to the heavenly realm. A distinction between the heavenly and the earthly is probably not possible in a vision setting.

5.2. Membership

The participants in the councils vary by names, though a number of these names may be identified with each other. In each of the councils God presides. He is usually identified by the name YHWH, though in Psalm 82 he is referred to as God and in Isaiah 6 he is first introduced as Adonai, "Lord." In Zechariah he is represented by the MY (*mala'k yhwh* or Messenger of YHWH). In some cases he is presented as sitting on a throne, indicating his exalted status. In others he is viewed as standing, perhaps when he is rendering a judgment, as in Psalm 82.

There is often an identified class of beings that surround the throne. In 1 Kings 22 it was the host of heaven who stand by the throne. Appearances of the phrase "host of heaven" are possible references to mythological astral deities (Deut 4:19; Dan 8:10). We also noted when considering the hosts that they are possibly a reference to a military host that once fought with the high God, YHWH,

and now surround his throne as those who have fought and achieved the victory with him. They represent his military might and would have the same impact that a military entourage surrounding an earthly potentate would have.

Isaiah refers to Seraphim, serpent-like beings with three pairs of wings that stood over the Lord (Adonai). They are described as covering their faces and feet with two pairs of their wings while flying with the third. They sing praises antiphonally to YHWH, celebrating his holiness, which is a way of speaking about his deity or transcendence. One of the Seraphim interacts with Isaiah, first cleansing him ritually and then declaring his purification.

Psalm 82 describes God (אלהים) as standing in the midst of his council which is described as composed of gods (אלהים) in verse 6. These are further described as "sons of the most high" in verse 6. The title Elyon, "most high," was an old epithet of El in the Hebrew Old Testament.[307] Its use here reflects El's role as father of the gods. In typical patriarchal fashion, he has authority of life and death over his children. In this Psalm he judges them inept and condemns them to die like mortal Adam.

Through a series of parallels, Psalm 89 identifies council members as "holy ones," "sons of God" and "sabaoth" (hosts) which enables us to see that many terms for the council members are deemed to be synonymous. The holy ones and the sons of God are represented in the Ugaritic texts as children of El (CAT

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[307] Smith, *EHG*, 56; Cross, *CMHE*, 50-52; Pope, *El in the Ugaritic Texts*, 55-57.

1.2.I.20-21; 1.65.2-3; 1.40.25). This identification, along with that in Psalm 82:6 as the sons of the most high, indicates that the divine council was composed, at least in part, of members who were considered to be part of the divine family. The divine council appears to serve as a mechanism for the divine family to collaborate and exercise their collective dominion. That the council is described in Psalm 82 as belonging to God, and in other texts in a way that signals YHWH's presidency, this collective dominion is carried out under the authority or auspices of YHWH. Job also indicates that those who came to present themselves before YHWH were the sons of God (Job 1:6; 2:1). The השׂטן was included among this group in the same way as the הרוח was from among the צבאות in Micaiah ben-Imlah's vision in 1 Kings 22.

Zechariah envisions a tribunal council scene in which השׂטן is present and carrying out his function as accuser and a plurality of beings who are described as "standing by" to fulfill the decrees of the MY. What we know of the השׂטן is meager, but it is enough to tell us that he carried out a function commensurate with his name. His name, like that of the הרוח in 1 Kings 22 is not to be treated as a personal name, though it does identify him as an individual member who is identifiable in this context because he is named. There is no way to tell if the same heavenly figure is in mind in both Job and Zechariah when the השׂטן is named, though we can be relatively certain that it is the same figure in both the

council scenes given in Job. The השטן is not the Satan figure of Second Temple Judaism, New Testament and early Christian theology, though this later development is most likely rooted in these early identifications of an accuser in the council.

What is striking about each of these descriptions of the members of the council is that they all have correspondence to beings that are considered to be fully endowed with deity in texts comparable to those found in the Old Testament. In particular, the Akkadian *ilu* and the Ugaritic *'ilm* correspond to the Hebrew *'ēlîm* and *'ĕlōhîm*. Phrases like "sons of God" echo similar statements in the Ugaritic literature as do references to the holy ones. Because these terms are part of a common stock of words for referring to deity, it is reasonable to conclude that the members of the divine council in the Old Testament are also divine beings.

Finally, a number of texts indicate the inclusion of human activity in the council. Sometimes this participation appears to be on the level of an observer (Micaiah ben-Imlah) and on other occasions there is interaction (Isa 6 and Zech 3). In several accounts there is no indicator of who observed the scene (Psalm 82; 89; and Job 1, 2). Prophetic contexts universally treat the council scenes as visions. In Job the narrator remains anonymous but fulfills the function of the prophet, as does the Psalmist in Psalms 82 and 89. The function of the prophet/narrator/psalmist is to declare the events of the council, including any significant decrees that have been issued in the council. It is not clear that the

prophet is thought in anyway to represent more than himself in the council. Even though Isaiah appeared to take on a corporate role in Isaiah 6 when he identified himself with a sinful people, his purification was purely individual and did not indicate a symbolic act on behalf of the nation.

Joshua the high priest is given access to the council in Zechariah 3. The access is as defendant in a tribunal setting, and following a purification and investiture he is promised access by means of a mediating agent. Joshua is acted upon in the council, but not in the same way that Isaiah is acted on in Isaiah 6. Isaiah reports his own visionary experience, whereas Joshua is part of Zechariah's visionary experience. Isaiah experiences directly and participates directly in the council through his visionary experience. Joshua's experience is narrated through the prophetic ministry of Zechariah. It is noteworthy that Joshua is not presented as active in the council in any way. He is passive and all activity is performed on him.

The membership of the council appears to be divine, though some participants are human. The human participants occasionally interact with the council and serve as emissaries or messengers of the council. Human participants are privileged to have access to the council for revelatory purposes. The divine beings have ongoing and apparently unlimited access. The divine beings assembled around YHWH comprise the council into which the human agents are granted privileged access.

5.3. Structure

In section 3.4 we noted that the pantheon in the Ugaritic texts was comprised of three discernable tiers: the high god El and his consort Athirat, the divine children and Baal, and a host of lesser deities that served the greater ones in a number of ways but particularly as messengers. This kind of structure is not as evident in the Old Testament council. Mark Smith has commented on this by noting that

> a paradigmatic shift away from a model of the divine couple in charge of the four-tiered pantheon to a single figure surrounded by minor powers, who are only expressions of that divinity's power....The paradigm of the pantheon went through a process of collapse and telescoping (aspects of a larger process of convergence in Israelite religion). There is no full-scale second tier represented in the extant biblical texts.[308]

The council in the Old Testament is headed by YHWH who is not presented as having a consort in the Old Testament.[309] Other divine beings in the council appear to share the same rank under YHWH's presidency. Smith considers the reason for the collapse of the tiers to be the elevation of YHWH to leadership in the council of El. YHWH, Smith says, was originally a second-tier deity who

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[308] Mark Smith, *OBM*, 47. Smith and others hold to a four-tied pantheon. We noted that a distinction between the third and fourth tiers is not attested well enough to warrant making a distinction. It would appear that those who make these distinctions do so through the use of parallels between the heavenly court and the sociology of the earthly one. Cf., Handy, *AHH*, for a detailed example of this model.

[309] There are some indicators in the Old Testament that YHWH did have a consort at one time. The goddess Asherah enjoyed some form of cult for a time, as is attested in 1 Kings 15 and 18, 2 Kings 21 and 23. Most scholars would agree with this, though some would contest it. To see the latest discussion on whether YHWH had a consort, see, Smith, *EHG*, xxx–xxxvi, 108-147.

emerged after a conflict to take up the leadership. Psalm 82 is mustered by Smith as support for this view. Here he understands God (Elohim) to represent YHWH, who stands in the council of El. The other gods, the sons of Elyon, are deposed of their kingship and YHWH in the person of Elohim is asked to take over the job of ruling all the nations. The collapse of the top two tiers is precipitated by the identification of El, the head of the pantheon, with YHWH a second-tier deity.[310]

With the collapse of the first and second tiers, there remain no other beings to share in the administrative responsibilities of the council. YHWH exists in a unique and exalted position over the council as a kind of summation of the council. Yet, our investigation of the Old Testament texts reveals that these other members still retain vestiges of their second-tier status as in indicated by their titles as "sons of God," “holy ones,” and “host of heaven." These vestigial remnants point to a time when they enjoyed much greater status than they are shown to possess in the Old Testament. These times of status are also hinted at in the activities in which these members are said to participate. The host of heaven in 1 Kings 22:19-22 engaged in a deliberative process that indicates a kind of power sharing under the authority of YHWH's leadership. YHWH pronounces the decrees and commissions the members, but the individuals apparently participated in a significant way. This is evident in the participation of the spirit, an individual from among the hosts, who contributes a solution and

[310] Smith, *OBM,* 48–49.

then is commissioned to bring it about. Likewise in Job, the sons of God are summoned to present themselves before YHWH. The context favours an understanding of this activity in which the individual sons of God, like the השטן, are entrusted with an administrative responsibility for which they appear before YHWH to give an accounting.

The structure of the council in the Old Testament appears to be more fluid than the picture of the council in the Ugaritic literature would permit. The structure always includes YHWH or one identifiable as YHWH as its head and a host of others that stand around the great God's throne. None of the members of the council is able to rival YHWH. The angel or messenger class of deity found in the Ugaritic literature does not appear in any of the primary council texts, except Zechariah 3:1-7. In that text an angel accompanies Zechariah in the vision and the one who presides over the council is called the Messenger/Angel of YHWH. In the Second Temple literature and the writings from Qumran, a more developed angelology appears. Mullen considers this and remarks that in the monarchial and exilic texts, the council is viewed only in its collectivity, with none of the members being assigned specific tasks or names. In the post-exilic period, the member השטן is singled out and then in the Second Temple period a number of functions are assigned to various angels.[311]

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[311] Mullen, *DCCEHL*, 277.

D. S. Russell gives four reasons for the development of this elaborate angelic class of beings: (1) they establish the image of the transcendence of God; (2) they provide a bridge between God and humanity; (3) they answer the problem of existence of human and cosmic evil; and (4) it allows for the division of spirits into Good and Evil.[312] This class of beings as developed in this period, however, is generally not considered by most scholars to have possessed deity status.[313]

5.4. Operations

The divine council in the Old Testament exists for two primary reasons: to exercise judgement and to provide revelation.[314] In carrying out its function as an agent of judgement, the divine council moves through three operational stages: (1) deliberation, (2) decision or decree, and (3) commission. In carrying out its function as a vehicle of revelation, the divine council makes decrees about fateful events for both individuals and groups in both the heavenly and earthly realms and commissions a messenger to report these decrees. Prophets are granted

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[312] D. S. Russell, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974), 237–240.

[313] Smith (OBM, 49) writes, "Certainly angels are not regarded in later tradition as gods. Instead they are powers that act only in the name of their patron god and only thanks to the power of that deity."

[314] Mullen (*DCCEHL*, 236) writes: "As the role of the messenger/prophet was to deliver the decree of the council, the role of the council leader was to pronounce that judgment. The very *raison d'être* of the council was to pass judgment, in both the heavenly and human spheres." Cross (*CMHE*) writes: "'El's word is, in effect, the judgement or decision of the divine council, and it may be announced by the messenger of the council or more directly to mankind in dream or visitation" (p. 177). He further remarks that, "the language of revelation in prophecy...originates ultimately in the judgments of 'El. Behind the revelation of the word of YHWH (that is, the divine decision or judgment) lies a basic picture of the Council of Yahweh" (p. 186).

access through vision experience to the divine council to permit them to proclaim the decrees of the council. A prophet who has not stood in the council is not a prophet of YHWH (Jer 23:16-22).

1 Kings 22 reports on the deliberation process, though it does not provide a detailed summation of what was discussed outside of the course of action that was decided. Isaiah 40 records two voices discussing the agenda of comfort, with one voice offering dissent. Job 1 and 2 report in detail the deliberations between YHWH and הַשָּׂטָן, resulting in an agreement to move the hedge of protection surrounding Job and allow affliction and suffering to come upon him. In Zecharaiah 3 the accusations of הַשָּׂטָן are silenced by a rebuke from the Messenger of YHWH and the council decision is declared.

Psalm 82 does not include a recounting of the deliberations, though the charges are presented and the judgement is rendered. The gods who have failed to maintain justice are rendered mortal.

In 1 Kings 22, Isaiah 6, 40 and Job 1 and 2, an agent is sent out to effect the council decision. The spirit in 1 Kings 22 becomes a deceiving spirit in the mouths of King Ahab's prophets; Isaiah is sent out in Isaiah 6 to render the people insensitive by proclaiming the judgement of the council. In Isaiah 40 a bearer of good news is sent to announce the return of God and comfort for the people. The שָׂטָן goes out from the council in Job 1 and 2 with the instructions to fulfill the council's decision.

Each of the decisions of the council is a fateful one. They involve changes in kingship or mark significant changes in administration, either signaling judgement or blessing. The council scene is summoned in each of these texts to signal that a decree from God has gone out that is important and silences resistance to the prophetic agenda by grounding it in the absolute authority of the council. To reject the prophetic message is to reject the decision of the council and to oppose YHWH.

5.5. Summary

The divine council in the Old Testament does share a common terminology with the council in the ancient Near East. However this language does not dominate. Other characteristic features signal the presence of the divine council. These might be summarized as three: (1) the high God, usually identified as YHWH, is seated on his throne surrounded by a host of heavenly beings; (2) a climactic moment in the deliberations is reached through the intervention of one of the members of the council; (3) a fateful decision is announced and an agent is commissioned.

These might be outlined in the following way:[315]

Feature	1 Kin 22	Isa 6	Isa 40	Psa 82	Psa 89	Job 1	Job 2	Zech 3
1	19	1-2				6	1	1
2	20-21	3-8	1-6			7-11	2-5	2-5
3	22	9-10	8			12	6	6-7

[315] Adapted from Mullen, *DCCEL*, 218, who borrows it from N. L. A. Tidwell, "*Wā'ōmar* (Zech. 3.5) and the Genre of Zechariah's Fourth Vision," *JBL* 94 (1975), 354.

Psalms 82 and 89 do not fit this pattern very well, but we have included them in the chart for comparison purposes.

Three other features are suggestive of the presence of the divine council in other parts of the Old Testament. These are: (1) the presence of first person plural divine speeches that indicate inner council dialogue: "Let us make" in Genesis 1:26 and "has become like us" in Genesis 3:22. In these cases the reader is privileged to hear the decision of the council and then to observe the effect of the decisions that have resulted from these decisions.

(2) The use of plural imperatives for addressing the council is also attested (Judg 5:2; Isa 35:3-4; 40:1-8; 48:20-21; 57:14). This form indicates an instruction given to the divine council by the leader of the council.

(3) The covenant lawsuit form or *rīb* which functions as a variant of the council address (2) and signals the function of the council as a court. This form is introduced through the following kind of address: "Hear, O mountains, the lawsuit of YHWH and give ear, O foundations of the earth" (Micah 6:2; cf., Jer 3:12).

The council meets in the heavens, is comprised of divine beings who are set under YHWH. None of the council members in the Old Testament divine council scenes is viewed as comparable to YHWH. The council is viewed as his council and serves him through the deliberation on his agenda or through the magnification of his person through praise. Members of the council are commissioned to effect the council decisions.

The council in the Old Testament functions to consolidate power around YHWH who exercises absolute authority over the powers. In one text, Psalm 82, some, if not all of the gods are demoted because of ineptitude. God takes over their administration resulting in an even greater consolidation of power.

6.0. Conclusion

The divine council texts in the Old Testament provide a window into the divine world of the gods and grant us an opportunity to see how the government of the cosmos functions. In the Old Testament the council is headed by YHWH, the God of Israel. In the texts we considered, YHWH is presented as being without comparison among the other members of the council. He is presented as setting its agenda, announcing its decisions and commissioning its agents.

Under the presidency of YHWH are a host of lesser deities, variously called "the hosts of heaven," "the sons of (the) God(s)," "seraphim," and "the sons of Elyon," Our investigation has revealed that these titles are all references to deity in the ancient Near East, and their presence in a council setting provides a significant argument for their being treated as such in the Old Testament.

Among this membership we also came across certain individuated members: הרוח, השׂטן, and מלאך יהוה. The הרוח and השׂטן cannot be distinguished from the members of the council, and so are able to represent them in their function. The מלאך יהוה is presented as presiding over the council in the place of YHWH. In this capacity he appears to share power with YHWH, and yet he definitely functions derivatively. He announces YHWH's words to the council.

The structure of the council is very close to that found in the literature from Ugarit. It provides a way to consolidate power while allowing for divine plurality. Such plurality permits YHWH to act indirectly, guarding holiness and transcendence, and yet be involved with his subjects providing immanence.

There are a number of areas that have not been dealt with significantly. The relationship of the prophet to the council is left largely undefined. The rise of an angelic class of beings has only be touched on in a cursory fashion. Future work is necessary to clarify the precise relationship of the angels other than the MY to the other council members.

The understanding of the divine council as a window into divine operations gives rise to a number of theological questions. How this model is to be understood in relation to the Christian doctrine of the Trinity is a case in point. Doctrines on the omnipresence, omniscience and omnipotence of God may also benefit from an investigation into how divine council imagery might be applied to these areas of doctrine.

The future will probably see more studies involving the use of varied methodologies from multiple disciplines. As Ugaritic studies mature, they may take on a life independent of their obvious contributions to biblical studies. This may allow for the rise of disinterested studies on the divine council that could shed light on the motif as it operated in the ancient Near East. Much is still to be determined on the nature of the relationships between the gods in the Ugaritic pantheon and how they might have application to biblical studies.

A continuing reassessment of presuppositions and ideological categories will make it possible to study the divine council without the pressure to conform it to a modern philosophical or theological agenda of monotheism. Even in an

increasingly secular society such as our own, monotheistic notions dominate our discussion about God. A Jewish-Christian form of ontological monotheism forms a tacit structure to our Western culture. Increasing interaction with other cultures may lead to a greater awareness of just how embedded this structure is in our mental processes and drive us to find ways of counteracting this tendency in biblical scholarship where it is especially prevalent. The feeling that the Old Testament is somehow governed by this viewpoint leads to an expectation that may prove to be more eisegetical than objective.

Finally, it seems that both Smith and Heiser have signaled that rhetoric will be a significant feature of future studies. Heiser's evaluation of the language of monotheism as a way of expressing the incomparability of Israel's God with the gods of the nations resonates with the rhetorical monotheism of Smith. Future studies will no doubt give considerable attention to just how significant the rhetoric is.

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