

THE CONCEPT OF GOD/THE GODS AS KING IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST AND THE BIBLE

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By its very nature, language about God must include analogical terms which try to communicate the idea of "God" in ways which man understands. Because man's experiences and cultures have varied so tremendously, it is difficult and dangerous to make generalizations about the ancient Near Eastern concept of god. Rudolph Otto in his study *The Idea of the Holy*¹ found a common *mysterium tremendum et facinoratum* in all religions. This represents a power within things which results in man's special treatment of them. An object might be considered sacred or taboo, but would receive reverence regardless, because of its power.

This power within nature, objects or people was perceived in different ways. In most cases it had control over aspects of nature, objects or persons to which it was related. This vital force, or god, was sometimes described in terms of the structure of the culture in which the people lived. These powers were thought to have personalities or wills which were related to one another in ways similar to the social relationships between men. Some powers were higher than others, as a master is above his slave, while others were offsprings of higher and more potent gods. Destructive forces like fire might be described as judges, or the earth as a mother who gives birth to vegetation. It seems natural then, that the chief gods or powers would be described in terms of the highest analogical power on earth: the king.²

The first section of this paper will survey some of the texts which archeologists have found in the ancient Near Eastern world to see how men describe their gods. Because the ancient world had so many gods, because of the large number of texts and because of the complexity of trying to reproduce an accurate conceptualization of a term like "god," there will be no attempt to present a total picture of each god, during each period, as it was seen by each different class group within the society. Instead, the main purpose will be to examine the concept of king as it relates to the gods of the ancient Near Eastern world. Are gods called king, lord, ruler or other terms which relate to

¹ Rudolph Otto, *The Idea of the Holy* (London: Oxford University Press, 1943) 12-41.

² T. Jacobsen, "Formative Tendencies in Sumerian Religion," *The Bible and the Ancient Near East: Essays in Honor of W. F. Albright*, ed. G. E. Wright (Garden City: Doubleday, 1965) 27.

the king (sitting on a throne, holding a scepter)? Do such references occur in all types of literature and art, and is kingship or rulership one of the central factors which characterize a god? In order to get a full picture of kingship, various roles which the earthly king has (judging, ruling, commander-in-chief) will be compared to the functions of the gods who are kings.

In the second section, various biblical references to the kingship of Yahweh are compared with ancient Near Eastern ideas in order to identify both similarities and differences. How does Israel's concept of the earthly king and God's kingship compare with the Egyptian, Canaanite, Hittite and Mesopotamian concepts? Is the kingship or rulership of God central to Old Testament thinking? The answers to these questions in past studies are very diverse. Some see a relationship between Mari social customs and the Abraham story but they deny any theological relationship between Israel and her neighbors. Others find a basic "pattern" in the many similarities of language, culture, ritual and theology: thus, Israelite religion is derived from and understood in light of other religions in the ancient Near East. One of the important issues in this debate is the concept of kingship, and in this area one must not ignore either the similarities or the differences between Israel and her neighbors' concept of God/god.

I. THE CONCEPT OF A GOD AS KING IN MESOPOTAMIA

There is much about the beliefs of the peoples of Mesopotamia which suggests a common culture throughout their history. But cultures and times changed throughout the Sumerian, Assyrian and Babylonian periods. New gods came to prominence and variations of detail are abundant. Although Jacobsen has reconstructed the religion of the fourth millennium B.C. around aspects of fertility, the religion of the third millennium B.C. around the metaphor of gods conceived as rulers, and the religion of the second millennium B.C. around the more personal concept of the gods as parents,³ all these aspects were present to some extent during each period. The metaphor of a god as ruler dates back to the protoliterate age and continued throughout Mesopotamian history. It would seem to be precarious to tie a people's concept of their gods solely to one aspect of their economic, political or personal experiences. One of these factors may be more influential in certain pieces of literature, but all three factors contributed varying degrees of emphasis at all times. A god of fertility can be a personal god who is prayed to for economic aid and still be the king or lord of fertility. The terminology of kingship and lordship which dominates the Mesopotamian literature suggests that the power and authority of the gods was an essential factor in their thinking.

The description of earthly kings found during the early period includes the conceptual terms of "lord," "one who exercises lordship," "kingship," "the leader of the military forces," "shepherd of the land" and "the dispenser of

³ T. Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976) 20-21.

righteous judgment."⁴ This concept and the power of kingship which the Mesopotamian kings enjoyed was "lowered from heaven"⁵ by the gods. The similarity between the gods and the kings was expressed in the proverb "the king is like the (very) image of god."⁶

The Mesopotamian tendency was to view the world as a state.⁷ Since everything in the world has a character, will and power, it is part of the total society of the ancient man. The political and social terminology is thus extended by analogy, beyond the relationship of men, to include all "powers." Although some "powers" were inferior gods in relationship to the chief gods of the pantheon, they were still considered the lord in their own areas of responsibility.

A. *The Kingship of An, Enlil and Enki*

An/Anu, the god of heaven, was regarded as the highest god and head of the pantheon of the gods. Anu is addressed as king in the story of Adapa,⁸ the myth of Enki and Sumer⁹ and the hymn to Ishtar.¹⁰ "Anu the Great, the father of the gods,"¹¹ is the father of Enlil who is called the king of the lands in the prologue to the Lipit-Ishtar law code.¹² The prologue and epilogue to Hammurabi's law code give first place to "lofty Anum, the king of the Anunnaki," and second to his chief executive, "Enlil, lord of heaven and earth, the determiner of destinies."¹³ In the lamentation over the destruction of Ur, a similar relationship is found between "Anu, the king of the gods" and "Enlil" the king of the lands.¹⁴ Enlil's kingship is proclaimed over and over again in, the myth of Enlil and Ninlil¹⁵ and he is said to have a throne and crown.¹⁶ Ringgren says, "He (Anu) is above all, the gods of kingship; it is from him that the office of kingship comes, and he is himself king of the gods.... Enlil was

⁴ J. B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts* (hereafter *ANET*) (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955) 496. Shu-sin is called "lord" nine times in this "love song to a king." For further examples see pp. 45-52 (Gilgamesh); 164-5, 177-80 (Hammurabi's law code), 265-6 (Sumerian king list), 480-81 (Ibbi-Sin) and T. Jacobsen, *Toward the Image; of Tammuz and other Essays on Mesopotamian History and Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press) 158; N. Postgate, *The Making of the Past: The First Empires* (Oxford: Elsevier Phaidon, 1977) 23-5; S. Smith, "The Practice of Kingship in Early Semitic Kingdoms," *Myth, Ritual and Kingship* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1958) 22-73.

⁵ *ANET* 114 line 14; 159-61; 164; 265; 481 line 18. H. Frankfort (*Kingship and the Gods* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948]) deals with the function of the king (249-74) and the question of the deification of the kings (295-312).

⁶ *ANET* 426.

⁷ T. Jacobsen and others, *Before Philosophy: The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1959) 140.

⁸ *ANET* 101, B 17; 102, B 46.

⁹ S. N. Kramer, *Sumerian Mythology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press: 1972) 59.

¹⁰ *ANET* 383 line 34.

¹¹ *ANET* 390 line 12.

¹² *ANET* 159.

¹³ *ANET* 164; 179 line 42; 91.

¹⁴ *ANET* 462 lines 381-2.

¹⁵ Kramer, *Mythology* 45-6.

¹⁶ *ANET* 113.

the 'king of the lands' (i.e. of the earth), and like his father, Anu, could be 'called 'the father of the gods' and the 'king of the gods'.¹⁷

Enki, whose name literally means "the lord of the earth" is related to the earth, the water, wisdom and craftsmanship, but his status as a god in his own realm is that of a king. Jacobsen posits that Enki's office in the world state is that of "a great nobleman of the realm....a councilor....But he is not king, not a ruler in his own right. The position derives from Anu and Enlil; he is their minister."¹⁸ But in the myth of Enki and Ninhursag, Enki is called "the king" by Isimud his messenger,¹⁹ thus giving his position in his own realm. In Enki's power struggle with Enlil, he is called "the lord defiant, the prince defiant, the king defiant."²⁰ In the myth of Enki and Sumer, Enki is identified as the "king of the abyss."²¹ The myth of Enki and Eridu refers to "the lord of the abyss, the king Enki" and Enlil announces that "My son has built a house, the king Enki."²² Inanna is presented the "throne of kingship...the exalted scepter, staffs, the exalted shrine, shepherdship, kingship"²³ by Enki who is addressed as king by Isimud and Inanna in the myth of Inanna and Enki.²⁴ Ea, the Akkadian name of Enki, is called king in the story of Adapa,²⁵ the descent of Ishtar into the nether world,²⁶ and in a psalm to Marduk.²⁷ He is called lord on numerous occasions in the Atrahasis epic,²⁸ as well as "king of the Apsu."

B. *The Kingship of Other Gods*

Ninurta is king of the land in the myth of Kur²⁹ and in a similar manner Enkimdu, the farmer god, is twice called "the king of dike and ditch" in the dispute between the shepherd-god and the farmer-god.³⁰ Ereshkigal, the goddess of the nether world, is pictured as sitting on a throne³¹ and called queen of the nether world in the myth of Inanna's descent into the nether world.³² In the story of Kamma's vision of the nether world, Nergal who was granted "dominion over the wide nether world,"³³ is seated on a royal throne

¹⁷ ANET 54.

¹⁸ ANET 160.

¹⁹ ANET 39 lines 97, 117; 40 lines 200-215.

²⁰ Kramer, *Mythology X*.

²¹ Ibid. 60.

²² Ibid. 62-3.

²³ Ibid. 66.

²⁴ Ibid. 67.

²⁵ ANET 102 c 8-10.

²⁶ ANET 107 lines 27-8; 108 line 4.

²⁷ ANET 390 line 18.

²⁸ ANET 105-106; W. G. Lambert and A. R. Millard, *Atrahasis: The Babylonian Story of the Flood* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969) 49, 67, 89.

²⁹ Kramer, *Mythology* 81.

³⁰ ANET 42 lines 37, 71.

³¹ ANET 55 line 162; 104 line 78.

³² ANET 54-5 lines 91-5. The same title is given to Ishtar (107 line 23; 110 line 18; \ 87, VI iv 50).

³³ ANET 104 line 83.

wearing a crown of royalty and holding a scepter.³⁴ He is bowed to, his feet are kissed, and he is called ruler. The myth of Zu describes the gods' loss of their rulership when the tablets of destiny are stolen.³⁵ The Assyrian version of the myth identifies the exercise of "Enlilship" (rulership) with "the crown of his sovereignty, the robe of his godhead."³⁶ Rulership is the essence of the gods which Zu took in order that he might rule and set himself on a throne. In the lamentation over the destruction of Ur, Ningal the wife of Nanna is referred to as a shepherd and the queen of Ur.³⁷ A Kassite inscription has eight references to the gods as kings³⁸ and in a hymn to Shamesh, the sun god, the people would sing, "prince of the gods, righteous judge...king of heaven and earth, lord of destinies...[you] govern mankind; you rule over the heavenly beings."³⁹

In the *Enuma Elish*, Marduk is described in extraordinary terms, being far above the other gods at the time of his birth.⁴⁰ But it is Kingu who is elevated as chief of the assembly, commander-in-chief, supreme controller of destinies and the one elevated to the rank of Anu.⁴¹ In contrast to the power of Tiamat whom none can destroy and Kingu who was made supreme by Tiamat, is Marduk who is given a throne, complete authority, the most honored position and kingship of the universe.⁴² After he is given a scepter and a throne, he is proclaimed to be king and lord repeatedly.⁴³ Hammurabi, in the prologue and epilogue to his law code, refers to Marduk as the supreme one whose kingship was established in Babylon.⁴⁴ Nebuchadnezzar II at a later period also calls Marduk lord and king.⁴⁵ Nabonidus and Cyrus call Marduk "king of the gods and lord of lords,"⁴⁶ but sometime in the reign of Nabonidus his attention was turned to the god Sin whom he calls the king of the gods.⁴⁷ The historical texts from Assyria repeatedly refer to the god Ashur as lord⁴⁸ and twice he is called king.⁴⁹

Descriptions of the gods in terms of kingship are found in ritual texts, hymns and prayers. Two of the many praises given to Ishtar are "queen of women" and the "goddess of goddesses who wears the crown of dominion."⁵⁰

³⁴ ANET 110 lines 11, 15-16.

³⁵ ANET 111 lines 14, 16.

³⁶ ANET 112 ii5-6.

³⁷ ANET 461 lines 305, 315, 331, 369, 373, 383-4.

³⁸ ANET 58-59, fragment A vii; c iv, vi; D V.

³⁹ H. Ringgren, *Religions of the Ancient Near East* (London: SPCK, 1973) 59.

⁴⁰ ANET 62 lines 80-104.

⁴¹ ANET 62-63 I 146-160; II 34-6; III 38-49, 95-107.

⁴² ANET 66 IV 1-15.

⁴³ ANET 66-69 IV 28; VI 20, 39, 142-3; VII 91, 95, 101.

⁴⁴ ANET 164; 10-20; ii 9; 178 xxv 20-59.

⁴⁵ ANET 307.

⁴⁶ ANET 309 i; 310 ix; 315.

⁴⁷ ANET 311-12.

⁴⁸ ANET 275-301. The title "lord" is found over twenty-five times in these pages.

⁴⁹ ANET 281 in the Inscription by Adad-Nirari III and page 289 in prism B by Esarhaddon.

⁵⁰ ANET 383-5.

The moon-god, Nanna or Sin, is called "lord of the shining crown of dominion, of hero of the gods, Father Nanna, who is grandly perfected in kingship."⁵¹ The New Year's festival at Babylon describes Bel as "excellent king, lord of the country" which parallels the title given to Marduk who is "the great lord," the "the lord of the world, king of the gods...who holds kingship, grasps In lordship."⁵²

The seemingly contradictory proclamations, that a multitude of deities are king, can be understood only if one realizes that different gods ascended to the kingship at different times and that the kingships described often pertain to different areas of rulership. Thus An, Enlil and Enki who were supreme among the Sumerians, gave way in later history to the increased importance of Marduk and Ashur as well as Shamesh, Ishtar and Sin. Whoever the chief god may be, it far appears from the literary evidence that he was described in terms of kingship or lordship from the Sumerian through the Babylonian periods.

II. THE CONCEPT OF A GOD AS KING IN UGARITIC LITERATURE

In the northwest Semitic culture at Ugarit, the title "king" and its related conceptual terms are found in the epic literature as well as in later Greek authors who describe their religion.⁵³ The description of the Ugaritic earthly kings provides a criterion for identifying kingship terminology that was applied to their gods. Although there is a limited amount of information on kings outside the "mythological" literature, the image of the king in the epics appears to be a realistic representation of the ruling earthly kings.

The Keret epic describes several disasters which threaten Keret's role as king. The king, who is the "son of El,"⁵⁴ is the one who leads the army, judges righteously, and sits enthroned ruling with authority.⁵⁵ In the initial section, after Keret loses his family and has his authority undermined, El asks him, "Is it kingship like Bull his father's he desires, or authority like the Father of Man's?"⁵⁶ In the final paragraphs Keret is returned "to his former estate; he sits upon the throne of his kingship; upon the dais, the seat of his authority."⁵⁷ The plot of this epic is clearly put in terms of kingship and specifically relates to Keret's ability to maintain his kingship in spite of sickness, death, plagues and other disasters. Yassib, Keret's son, attempts to usurp Keret's position and declares, "Descend from thine kingship-I'll reign, from thine authority-I'll sit enthroned."⁵⁸ The epic of Keret explicitly com-

⁵¹ ANET 385.

⁵² ANET 331-2.

⁵³ Ringgren, *Religions* 124-7. These include the important works of Lucian On the Syrian Goddess and Philo of Byblos who is quoted in *Eusebius' Praeparatio Evangelica* 1.10.15-29.

⁵⁴ ANET 147, KRT C i 10,20,25.

⁵⁵ Ringgren, *Religions* 169-73; J. Gray, "Canaanite Kingship in Theory and Practice," VT 2 (1952) 193-220; J. Gray, *The KRT Text in the Literature of Ras Shamra* (Leiden: Brill, 1964)², 5-8; R. deLanghe, "Myth, Ritual, and Kingship in the Ras Shamra Tablets," *Myth, Ritual and Kingship* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1958) 142-8.

⁵⁶ ANET 143, KRT A i 41.

⁵⁷ ANET 149, KRT C vi 23-25.

⁵⁸ ANET 149, KRT C vi 37-38; 53-54.

compares the kingship of El with that of Keret and gives a basis for understanding kingship as an essential concept in ANE thought about the gods.

The Aqhat epic describes the struggles of a righteous king⁵⁹ or a righteous village elder⁶⁰ who "sits at the gate...judging the fatherless."⁶¹ Most of the epic deals with the desire for, birth and death of, and the search for Aqhat. The position of El is identified when Anath enters "the pavilion of the king, Father Shunem,"⁶² the abode of El, to gain his approval for the death of Aqhat. El the king is bowed to and revered but later mistreated and threatened during the temper tantrum of Anath. Pope and others interpret El's reaction as a sign of weakness which demonstrates that El's kingship was more nominal than real.⁶³

A. *El the King*

The attributes and epithets of El have been outlined by M. Pope, and include: (a) "father," with its more specific identification of "father of years," "father of mankind," "father of the gods," and "father of eternity" which point to El's position in the family of the gods and his advanced age;⁶⁴ (b) "Bull," which symbolizes his procreative powers;⁶⁵ (c) "wise, beneficent, holy, and kind;"⁶⁶ (d) "creator of creatures" and "creator of earth;"⁶⁷ and (e) "king."⁶⁸

The significance and status of El in relationship to his kingship is perceived differently. Dussaud gives El a very high position and identifies him with the solar Aton, the god of the Egyptian Empire (because of the solar disc above El on a stela). This near monotheistic position was later eroded by the ascendance of Baal who supplanted El and reigned in his stead.⁶⁹

Nielsen sees El as the chief Semitic god who was connected to the moon. Roggia and Eissfeldt interpret El worship to be nearly monotheistic, with Eissfeldt giving El the monarchial position of being the king and highest god

⁵⁹ Ringgren, *Religions* 172; G. R. Driver, *Canaanite Myths and Legends* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956) 8; J. Gray, *Near Eastern Mythology* (London: Hamlyn, 1969) 91, 99.

⁶⁰ J. C. L. Gibson, "Myth, Legend and Folk-lore in the Ugaritic Keret and Aqhat: Texts," *VTS* 28 (1975) 60-68 and H. H. P. Dressler, "The Identification of the Ugaritic, DNIL with the Daniel of Ezekiel," *VT* 29 (1979) 152-3.

⁶¹ *ANET* 151, AQHT A v 5-8; 153, AQHT C i 22-5.

⁶² *ANET* 152, AQHT A vi 49.

⁶³ M. Pope, *El in the Ugaritic Texts* (Leiden: Brill, 1955) 25-9. A similar view is held: by A. Kapelrud, *Baal in the Ras Shamra Texts* (Copenhagen: G. Gad, 1952); U. Cassuto, *The Goddess Anat* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1971) 53-7.

⁶⁴ Pope, *EL* 32-4. Pope connects *snm* with the Arabic root meaning "to shine, be, high, exalted in rank" while U. Oldenburg, *The Conflict Between El and Baal in Canaanite: Religion* (Leiden: Brill, 1969) 17-19 translates *snm* as "luminaries" since El was the father of *shr* the morning star and *slm* the evening star.

⁶⁵ Pope, *EL* 35-42.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 42-5.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* 47-54.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* 25-32.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* 82-4. for Pope's criticism of R. Dussaudi, *Les découvertes de Ras Shamra* (Ugarit) et l' Ancien Testament (parts: Geuthner, 1941) 91-7.

(the other gods are emanations of his power) and Roggia finding a gradual take-over by Baal of El's position of power and authority.⁷⁰ Ringgren calls El the "supreme authority among the gods, where he reigns as king."⁷¹ Pope discovers in El only a nominal head of the pantheon and a nominal king of the gods because Anath forced El's hand when she requested a house for Baal and when she demanded Aqhat's bow, because the messengers of Prince Yamm refused to bow to El, and because Yamm and Baal are also called "king" and "lord" in their successful struggle for dominion.⁷² Lokkegaard interprets El's so-called weakness as a virtue in a ruler. El's action is based on moderation, tolerance, self-reliance and a true sense of security in one's position.⁷³ Oldenburg's analysis of El in Sanchuniathon's *Phoenician History* reveals an "omnipotent monarch ruling from Phoenicia over the whole world,"⁷⁴ whose kingship is usurped by Baal in the Ugaritic mythology.⁷⁵

Albrecht Alt's identification of the patriarchal God as "the God of the Fathers"⁷⁶ is expanded by F. Cross who compares the Ugaritic god El to "the God of the Fathers."⁷⁷ Cross concludes that "the exercise of authority by El over his council suggests that his role is more that of a patriarch, or that of a judge in the council of a league of tribes, than the role of a divine king."⁷⁸ Certainly El is the aged divine father, and it is true that the office of a judge over a league and a king are quite similar, but the titles and functions of El go much beyond that of a judge or patriarch. Cross believes that El was not an absolute ruler⁷⁹ but this recent trend to diminish El's power does not go as far as what the text demands.⁸⁰ The power of a king is not destroyed if he gives authority to others or is influenced by wives, friends, and threats. Cross has properly drawn attention to the distinctive character of El's rule and concedes that El reflects "the organized institution of kingship"⁸¹ as well as the patriarchal society.

In the Baal epic, as in many mythological texts, a description of the gods'

⁷⁰ Ibid. 83-90 for Pope's fuller description and criticism of D. Nielsen, *Ras Shamra Mythologie und Biblische Theologie* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1936) 9-26 and R. G. Roggia, "Alcune osservazioni sul culto di El a Ras-Samra," *Aevum* (1941) 559-75.

⁷¹ Ringgren, *Religions* 129.

⁷² Pope, *EL* 90-91.

⁷³ F. Lokkegaard, "A Plea for EL the Bull, and other Ugaritic Miscellanies," *Studia Orientalia Ioanni Pedersen septuagenario dicta* (Copenhagen: Einar Munksgaard, 1953) 233.

⁷⁴ Oldenburg, *Conflict* 12-22. See Cross, *Canaanite Myth* 21 n. 51 for a criticism of Oldenburg.

⁷⁵ Oldenburg, *Conflict* 12, 104, 183.

⁷⁶ A. Alt, *Essays in Old Testament History and Religion* (New York: Anchor Books, 1966) 3-86.

⁷⁷ Cross, *Canaanite Myth* 12.

⁷⁸ Ibid. 39.

⁷⁹ Ibid. 40.

⁸⁰ W. Kaiser, "The Ugaritic Pantheon" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation at Brandeis University, 1973) 26-7 and C. E. L'Heureux, *Rank Among the Canaanite Gods* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1979) 3-28 for a full discussion of the objections raised by Pope.

⁸¹ Cross, *Canaanite Myth* 41.

struggle for power is expressed in terms of kingship. After permission for building a house for Yammis granted from "the pavilion of king, Father Shunem"⁸² who has power to grant and "overturn the throne of thy kingship! Yea, break the scepter of thy dominion,"⁸³ Baal goes "to El the king his begetter"⁸⁴ to get permission to have a house built for himself. This is followed by Asherah's trip to "the pavilion of king, Father Shunem."⁸⁵ In their dialogue, El wonders if "El the king's love stirs"⁸⁶ her, to which Asherah asks "the king"⁸⁷ to build a house for Baal. Later in the epic both Anath and Mot refer to "the pavilion of king, Father Shunem"⁸⁸ and Shapsh tells Mot that El has the power to "overturn thy throne of kingship, break thy staff of dominion."⁸⁹ "Eternal king" is another epithet used of El⁹⁰ who is enthroned and sits as judge.⁹¹ These references to concepts relating to kingship demonstrate the importance of the conceptual analogy of the king in the Ugaritic concept of the chief god El.

The graphic representation of El on a limestone stela as a majestic figure on an ornate throne, wearing a crown, supports the kingly view of the god El.⁹² A bronze statuette of El with an Egyptian crown was also found at Ugarit.⁹³

B. Kingship of other gods

The struggle for power and kingship of other gods is illustrated in the Baal epic. The fertility cults' nature cycles are conceived in terms of the dominance of various gods as king of the earth for a limited period of time.

Prince Yamm desires a house or palace like El and authority over Baal.⁹⁴ Yamm has a throne but Kothar wa-Khasis tells Baal "thou'lt take thine eternal kingdom, thine everlasting dominion...chase Yamm from his throne, Nahar from the seat of his dominion."⁹⁵ Baal also requests a house like the gods with a gorgeous throne. Once Baal's throne is built and Baal dwells in his house, Baal declares his dominion over the earth and the gods,⁹⁶ and is called Lord of the earth.⁹⁷ But soon Baal is "chas'd from his throne of kingship, from the dais,

⁸² ANET 129, B III AB C 7. See L. Fisher, ed., *Ras Shamra Parallels* vol. I (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1972) 111, 233-4.

⁸³ ANET 129, B III AB C 16-17.

⁸⁴ ANET 131, B II AB 7.

⁸⁵ ANET 133, B II AB iv 24.

⁸⁶ ANET 133, B II AB iv 38.

⁸⁷ ANET 133, B II AB iv 42-47.

⁸⁸ ANET 137, BV AB E 17; 139 B I* AB vi 2.

⁸⁹ ANET 141, BIAB vi 28-29.

⁹⁰ Cross, *Canaanite Myth* 16, 20; L. Fisher, *Ras Shamra* 266.

⁹¹ Cross, *Canaanite Myth* 21.

⁹² Gray, *Mythology* 71 for a picture of this stela. See Pope's discussion, *EL* 45-6.

⁹³ C. Virolleavd, *Comptes Rendus de l'Academie des Inscriptions et Belles Letters* (Paris: Geuthner, 1960) 340-41.

⁹⁴ ANET 129, Bill AB C 8-9. i

⁹⁵ ANET 131, Bill AB A 10-13,20.

⁹⁶ ANET 135, B II AB vii 41-2, 50. "Have sway" is the root *mlk* "be king." See also L. Bonner, *The Stories of Elijah and Elisha* (Leiden: Brill, 1968) 90.

⁹⁷ ANET 135, B V AB A 8; L. Fisher, *Ras Shamra* 262-3.

the seat of his dominion"⁹⁸ and "Puissant Baal is dead, the Prince, Lord of the Earth is perished."⁹⁹ Consequently, EI suggests to Asherah, "one of thy sons, I'll make king,"¹⁰⁰ to which Asherah first replies "why, let's make Yadi Yalhan king,"¹⁰¹ and secondly, "let Ashtar the Tyrant be king."¹⁰² Ashtar does not fit on Baal's throne and thus his reign is ended. When Baal returns to life he is repeatedly called "Lord of the Earth"; and it is said of him, "Baal mounts his throne of kingship, Dagon's son his seat of dominion."¹⁰³ Other unspecified lesser gods are pictured as dwelling on "thrones of princesship."¹⁰⁴

These examples give us insight into the conceptual framework of the ancient Near Eastern mind. Kingship was the significant factor in the struggle of the gods for power.¹⁰⁵ There is no fight to steal the essence of what Baal, Mot, or Yamm represent. The conflict is for a particular god to have dominion and kingship over all other powers. The king was the figure of power which provided the most ideal analogy to symbolize a dominant force in nature. A god by definition was not necessarily a king, but when a god held dominion, he sat on the throne of his kingship and ruled the world. The frequent Ugaritic use of such notions as king, lord, dominion, to sit enthroned, and authority reflects the dominant commonality in gods in Ugaritic literature.

III. THE CONCEPT OF A GOD AS KING AMONG THE HITTITES

Although the early Hittite kings may have been elected,¹⁰⁶ the Hittite society was essentially feudal with the "Great King" at the top. The king was the "supreme commander of the army, supreme judicial authority, and chief priest."¹⁰⁷ The preamble to the Hittite suzerainty treaties indicates the high status of the king who was the head of the religion as well as the state.

The relationship between the gods and men was "that of a servant to his master or that of a subject to his king."¹⁰⁸ This attitude was especially prevalent in the Hittite prayers where the term "my lord" occurs with great frequency after the name of a god. In the plague prayer of Mursilis, the son of

⁹⁸ ANET 137, B V AB D 45-6.

⁹⁹ ANET 139, B I* AB vi 9-10; 140, B I AB i 41-2.

¹⁰⁰ ANET 140, B I AB i 46

¹⁰¹ ANET 140, B I AB i 48.

¹⁰² ANET 140, B I AB i 54; L. Fisher, *Ras Shamra* 7.

¹⁰³ ANET 141, B I AB v 5-6; vi 33. For an extensive study of Baal see A. S. Kapelrud, *Baal in the Ras Shamra Texts* (Copenhagen: G. Gad, 1952).

¹⁰⁴ ANET 130, B III AB B 20-30.

¹⁰⁵ Gray, *Mythology* 115. Gray calls this struggle for kingship the central theme of the Canaanite New Year's festival.

¹⁰⁶ O. R. Gurney, *The Hittites* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1952) 63.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. 65. See also H. A. Hoffner, "The Hittites and Hurrians," *Peoples of Old Testament Times* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1973) 208-10; O. R. Gurney, "Hittite Kingship," *Myth, Ritual and Kingship*, ed. S. Hooke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958) 105-21; C. W. Ceram, *The Secrets of the Hittites* (New York: Knopf, 1956) 119-31.

¹⁰⁸ O. R. Gurney, *Some Aspects of Hittite Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, also 1977) 1-20; H. G. Guterbock, "Hittites Religion," *Ancient Religions* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1950) 99; P. H. Houwink Ten Cate, "Hittite Royal Prayers," *Numen* 16 (1969) 82.

Suppiluliumas, "my lord" is used over twenty five times.¹⁰⁹ Furlani considers this relationship to be the most basic aspect of the Hittite religion.¹¹⁰ He bases this hypothesis on the instructions for temple officials¹¹¹ and other sacred laws.

A. *The Kingship of Alalu, Anu and Kumarbi*

Hittite mythology describes how "Alalus was king in heaven"¹¹² for nine years. After Anu vanquished Alalu, Anu sat upon his throne and ruled as king in heaven for nine years. The cycle continued when Anu was defeated by Kumarbi, who in turn was defeated by Tesub, the storm-god, the king of Kummiya, appears to have taken Kumarbi's place, for Tasmisus, the storm-god's attendant, says that if Tesub moves from his place "there will be no king in heaven."¹¹³ In the "Song of Ullikummis," Kummarbi, who has been connected with the Sumerian god Enlil,¹¹⁴ the Ugaritic god El¹¹⁵ and even Dagan,¹¹⁶ attempts to gain victory over the storm-god so that Ullikumis may "ascend to heaven for kingship."¹¹⁷ The desire of each of the gods is to rule as king and their struggle for authority is described in their literature in terms of kingship.

B. *The Kingship of the sun and storm gods*

The Hittite sun-goddess of Arinna is twice proclaimed to be the one who "regulates kingship and queenship" in the treaty between Suppiluliumas and Mattiwaza.¹¹⁸ In Pudu-hepa's prayer to the sun-goddess, she is called the "Queen of heaven and earth, O Sun-goddess of Arinna, queen of all the countries."¹¹⁹ At Arinna, the sun-goddess who was called Wurusemu, was the principal deity.¹²⁰ Although she was "the supreme patroness of the Hittite state and monarchy"¹²¹ it was the sun-god who was the King of the gods.¹²² Thus, his name appears before the sun-goddess of Arinna on some Hittite treaties.¹²³

Tesub, the Hurrian storm or weather-god is called king in the song of

¹⁰⁹ ANET 394-6.

¹¹⁰ G. Furlani, "Basic Aspects of Hittite Religion," *Harvard Theological Review* 31 (1938) 251-62.

¹¹¹ ANET 207-10.

¹¹² ANET 120.

¹¹³ ANET 124.

¹¹⁴ Gurney, "Hittite Religion," *Ancient Religions* 103.

¹¹⁵ Pope, *EL* 32; M. C. Astour, "Semitic Elements in the Kumarbi Myth: An Onomastic Inquiry," *JNES* 27 (1968) 172.

¹¹⁶ E. Laroche, *Ugaritica* V (Paris: Librairie Orientaliste P. Geuthner, 1968) 523-5.

¹¹⁷ ANET 122, 125.

¹¹⁸ ANET 205.

¹¹⁹ ANET 393.

¹²⁰ O. R. Gurney, *The Hittites* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1961) 136.

¹²¹ *Ibid.* 139. The text is found in Pritchard, *ANET* 398.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ ANET 205.

Ullikimus and is considered by some to be the "supreme king. ..the real king and owner of the land of Hatti."¹²⁴ In Mursilis' prayers, the storm-god is addressed as "my lord" and "the king of heaven."¹²⁵ In a treaty he is called the "lord of heaven and earth."¹²⁶ Among the other gods, Ea is once referred to as "the king of wisdom";¹²⁷ and Telepinus is told, "There is no other deity more noble and mighty than thou...thou watchest over kingship in heaven and earth."¹²⁸

In the oath formula which invokes the gods, one finds kingship terms used of. "Ishara, queen of the oath, Hebat, .queen of heaven"¹²⁹ and in other writings the Luwian god Santas is called king.¹³⁰

These examples illustrate how the Hittites used the kingship analogy to describe their chief gods. A great deal remains unknown about the relationships between the Hittite gods but the struggle for power and dominant position is consistently stated in kingship terminology.

IV. THE CONCEPT OF A GOD AS KING IN EGYPT

An integrated description of Egyptian religion is partially hidden behind the vast array of religious images found in Egyptian literature and art. A fundamental part of Egyptian thinking concerning their Pharaohs was that the king was divine. In art, the white crown and vulture of Upper Egypt and the red crown and cobra of Lower Egypt symbolized kingship. Titles such as "King of Upper and Lower Egypt," "Lord of the Two Lands" and "Son of Re" identified kings. Since the Pharaoh was divine, "kingship in Egypt remained the channel through which the powers of nature flowed into the body politic to bring human endeavor to fruition."¹³¹ Thus the maintenance of nature and civilization were dependent on the king.

The rule of the king was absolute in Egypt. He was normally expected to maintain justice and order over the land, to serve as an intermediary with the gods, to be commander-in-chief of the army and the highest judicial official in the land.¹³² An impressive synthesis of the meaning of "king" in Egypt can be found in Frankfort's book *Kingship and the Gods*. Frankfort finds four themes running throughout the long history of Egyptian cultic tradition which explain how the Egyptians saw the divine at work in the world. These themes are: creation, fertility, resurrection and kingship.¹³³ The motif of kingship penetrates into the very fiber of all of history, for the earthly kings, and the gods who were kings, were the participants which made creation, fertility and

¹²⁴ Guterbock, "Hittite Religion," 88.

¹²⁵ ANET 394-5,398.

¹²⁶ ANET 206.

¹²⁷ ANET 356.

¹²⁸ ANET 397.

¹²⁹ ANET 205.

¹³⁰ Gurney, *The Hittites* 138.

¹³¹ H. Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948)

34.

¹³² S. Morenz, *Egyptian Religion* (London: Methuen, 1973) 11-13; A. Erman, *Life in Ancient Egypt* (New York: Dover Publications, 1971) 53-78; Frankfort, *Kingship* 51-60.

¹³³ Frankfort, *Kingship* 146.

resurrection possible. Each was a demonstration of the kingship of the Pharaoh and the chief gods.

The close association of certain gods with the Pharaoh resulted in the identification of the two. "The monarchy was conceived as a reality in the world of the gods as well as the world of men."¹³⁴ "The forms of the state began to pass over into the world of the gods, and an important god would be called a 'king.'"¹³⁵ "In the cult the gods were treated as if they were kings on earth."¹³⁶ The Egyptians believed that the king and his authority were derived from and patterned after the gods. Thus the sun-god, Atum-Re, established order and justice and the Pharaoh who was a replica of the god-king-judge, Re, was the supreme judge in Egypt.¹³⁷ The importance of the earthly king in Egypt mirrors the importance of the kingship ideas among the gods.¹³⁸

A. *The Kingship of Re*

The Turin Papyrus and Manetho list Re, the sun-god, as the first king in Egypt. The kingship of Re, who is also known as Khepri, Atum and various dual names, goes back to the time of creation. "Monarchical rule, then, was coeval with the universe; the Creator had assumed kingship over his creation from the first."¹³⁹ The early sun-god of Heliopolis who is said to be the begetter of the Ennead proclaims, "I am Re in his (first) appearances, when he began to rule that which he had made. Who is he? This...means that Re began to appear as a king."¹⁴⁰

The kingship of Re is frequently expressed in the formula "king of the gods." The booty from the capture of Joppa is to be given to the house of "Amon-Re, King of the Gods"¹⁴¹ and on Wen-Amon's journey to Phoenicia to obtain wood, he refers to Amon-Re as "King of the Gods" ten different times.¹⁴² Amon-Re is called "King of the Gods" in a Twentieth Dynasty legal document,¹⁴³ in two texts which relate to the Hyksos period,¹⁴⁴ and by Thut-mose III who introduces himself as one who is "Enduring in Kingship, like Re in heaven,"¹⁴⁵ who serves "Amon-Re, Lord of the Thrones of the Two Lands."¹⁴⁶ The title "Amon-Re, King of the Gods" is found in a document about a runaway slave,¹⁴⁷ a list of the properties which belonged to the

¹³⁴ Ibid.33.

¹³⁵ J. H. Breasted, *The Dawn of Conscience* (New York: Scribner's, 1934) 19.

¹³⁶ V. Ions, *Egyptian Mythology* (Middlesex: Harnlyn, 1968) 14.

¹³⁷ Frankfort, *Kingship* 157.

¹³⁸ ANET 446-47. Thut-mose III sits upon the throne of Re.

¹³⁹ Frankfort, *Kingship* 15.

¹⁴⁰ ANET 3-4.

¹⁴¹ ANET 23.

¹⁴² ANET 25-8.

¹⁴³ ANET 214.

¹⁴⁴ ANET 231-2.

¹⁴⁵ ANET 234.

¹⁴⁶ ANET 236. See also the title by Amen-hotep II (246), the tomb of a visier under(Thut-mose III (248), Seti I(255), Thutmose III (373), and Amen-hotep III (375).

¹⁴⁷ ANET 259.

temple of Amon,¹⁴⁸ and in ritual texts.¹⁴⁹

Of special importance are a number of hymns to Amon-Re. In one hymn Amon-Re is the

chief of all gods. ..Lord of the Thrones of the Two Lands...
 father of the gods, who made mankind and created the beasts...
 the king of Upper and Lower Egypt...beautiful of diadem, and
 lofty of White Crown...Lord of the Double Crown...lord of
 the gods...who gave commands, and the gods came into being
 ...the chief of the Great Ennead...the sole king...maker of all
 mankind, Creator and maker of all that is....¹⁵⁰

B. *The Kingship of other gods*

The theology which developed at Memphis proclaimed Ptah as creator of the gods and of all creation.¹⁵¹ At first, the god Seth was made the king of Upper Egypt and the god Horus the king of Lower Egypt, but Geb later gave Horus the kingship over all Egypt in order to end discord. Subsequently, Ptah created the world by his word and took on the kingly title of "Lord of the Two Lands."¹⁵² In the final paragraph the god Horus, the son of Osiris, appears as the king of Upper and Lower Egypt, thus setting forth the identification of the dead Pharaoh with Osiris and his successor with Horus.¹⁵³

The position of Horus as the new king explains why the Egyptian Pharaohs Re were identified with Horus. The earthly king sits upon the throne of Horus¹⁵⁴ who is called "the good king of Egypt" and "the ruler" in the contest of Horus and Seth.¹⁵⁵ In celebration of the ascension of Mer-ne-Ptah to the throne, he is said to be "great of kingship like Horus,"¹⁵⁶ and at the ascension of Ramses IV, Horus is proclaimed to be "upon the throne of his father Amon-Re."¹⁵⁷ "Pharaoh, then, is an incarnation of Horus, the Great(est) God, Lord of Heaven."¹⁵⁸

Beliefs about the god Osiris primarily relate to fertility and resurrection. His identification with burial rites and especially the dead Pharaoh ultimately lead to the place where Osiris is "considered the supreme god of Egypt."¹⁵⁹ In mythology, Osiris was a king after Geb his father, until he was murdered and went to the world of the dead where he was known as the "King of the Dead."¹⁶⁰ The fertility aspect of Osiris related his death land resurrection to

¹⁴⁸ ANET 261.

¹⁴⁹ ANET 325. This text also includes the title "Lord of the thrones of the Two Lands."

¹⁵⁰ ANET 365-7.

¹⁵¹ Frankfort, *Kingship* 24.

¹⁵² ANET 4-5.

¹⁵³ Frankfort, *Kingship* 32.

¹⁵⁴ Morenz, *Egyptian Religion* 34.

¹⁵⁵ ANET 17.

¹⁵⁶ ANET 378.

¹⁵⁷ ANET 379.

¹⁵⁸ Frankfort, *Kingship* 40.

¹⁵⁹ Ions, *Egyptian Mythology* 50.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid. 55; Frankfort, *Kingship* 197, 207-10.

the seasonal agriculture cycle, the seasonal rise and fall of the Nile and the daily rebirth of the sun.¹⁶¹ Osiris is called "King Wen-nofer"¹⁶² and the dead King Unis is said to sit on the "throne of Osiris."¹⁶³ Although the popular Osiris cult challenged the solar cult of Re, the merger did not remove Re from his position as king of the living. At times both Re and Osiris appear to be supreme kings but the kingship of Osiris is exclusively in the realm of the dead.¹⁶⁴

These examples illustrate the centrality of the kingship of the gods to Egyptian thinking. These gods are called kings, they sit on thrones, rule, judge and wear the crown and hold the scepter of a king. As representatives of elements of the universe "they establish a bond between nature and man, and that in the only manner in which Egyptians could conceive such a bond-through kingship."¹⁶⁵

IV. THE CONCEPT OF GOD AS KING IN ISRAEL

The truth within C. T. Gadd's observation in his 1945 Schweich Lectures, that "God and king are two conceptions so nearly coupled in the oriental mind that the distinction is constantly blurred,"¹⁶⁶ has been illustrated in the cultures around Israel. The nature and the extent of the association between these two ideas in Israelite beliefs varies considerably according to the hermeneutical approach being used.

S. H. Hooke and his followers in the Myth-Ritual School, drawing heavily from the earlier works of Frazer,¹⁶⁷ developed a standard pattern of myth and ritual which was allegedly present in all the Near Eastern religions. The king, who functions as the chief god, is at the center of this pattern in the great New Year's festival. In the myth and ritual, the god (i.e. the king) goes through humiliation, death, resurrection, and a sacred marriage to bring fertility to the land for the coming year. S. Mowinckel, one of the Scandinavian scholars who accepts a common ritual pattern, admits that this coherent "pattern" has been misused by some and that it is really an "artificial schematization."¹⁶⁸ This tendency toward over-identification is also found in I. Engnell's¹⁶⁹ study of "royal ideology." Frankfort repeatedly criticizes Engnell's hermeneutical tendency to generalize and overemphasize the unity between the concept of the king in Israel, Egypt and Mesopotamia.¹⁷⁰ Mowinckel carried out an extensive

¹⁶¹ Frankfort, *Kingship* 181-95.

¹⁶² *ANET* 14.

¹⁶³ *ANET* 32.

¹⁶⁴ Breasted, *Dawn of Conscience* 113.

¹⁶⁵ Frankfort, *Kingship* 182.

¹⁶⁶ C. T. Gadd, *Ideas of Divine Rule in the Ancient East* (London: Oxford University Press, 1948) 33.

¹⁶⁷ J. G. Frazer, *Lectures on the Early History of Kingship* (London: Macmillan, 1905).

¹⁶⁸ S. Mowinckel, *He That Cometh* (New York: Abingdon, 1954) 24-5; J. Gray, *Biblical Doctrine of the Reign of God* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1979) 7-38 summarize, some of this debate.

¹⁶⁹ I. Engnell, *Studies in Divine Kingship in the Ancient Near East* (Uppsala: Almqvist and Wiksells, 1943). See also the careful analysis of the myth-ritual school in J. W. Rogerson, *Myth in Old Testament Interpretation* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1974) 66-84.

¹⁷⁰ Frankfort, *Kingship* 337-44, 355 n.13; 382 n.5; 405 n.1; 408 nn.66-9.

study of the "Ideal of Kingship in Ancient Israel" and concludes that Israel did borrow aspects of Canaanite kingship, but this did not amount to a takeover of Canaanite religion and its view of sacred kingship in an unaltered form.¹⁷¹ Nevertheless, Mowinckel does find a considerable interrelationship, especially in his study of royal psalms.¹⁷²

Israelite kings ruled, shepherded and governed their people, sat upon a throne in a palace, judged important court cases, and were the commanders-in-chief of the army just like the kings in other neighboring nations.¹⁷³ But the Israelites did not believe the human king was a mediator between God and men, or the one who integrated and harmonized man with the natural world, as was the case in Egypt and Mesopotamia. The Israelite king was not deified and did not serve in the cultic drama which re-enacted a divine battle in the New Year's festival. Human kingship in Israel was introduced well after the formation of the nation, so this institution appears less significant than kingship in cultures around Israel.

These factors draw the focus of attention to the unique character of Israel's true king, Yahweh. This uniqueness does not deny certain conceptual or functional similarities with the ancient Near Eastern ideas about the kingship of the gods. Three primary components which unite themselves in the Israelite metaphor of God as king are similar to those used in other religions: (a) Yahweh (as other gods) is Lord and king of the world; (b) Yahweh (as other gods) is a mighty warrior who destroys his enemies; and (c) Yahweh (as other gods) is a judge over his kingdom.¹⁷⁴

A. *The Metaphor of Yahweh the king*

L. Köhler maintains that "God is the ruling Lord: that is the one fundamental statement in the theology of the Old Testament....Everything else derives from it. Everything else leans upon it. Everything else can be understood with reference to it and only it."¹⁷⁵ Seeing a similar emphasis, J. Gray and S. Mowinckel conclude that the kingship of Yahweh is the central theme of the Old Testament.¹⁷⁶ Martin Buber defines the Israelite religion as the

¹⁷¹ Mowinckel, *He That Cometh* 21-95, esp. 56-9. Compare this with the view of W. H. Schmidt, *Königtums Gottes in Ugarit und Israel* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1966) 80-82.

¹⁷² S. Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israelite Worship* (New York: Abingdon, 1962). In contrast to Mowinckel is the view of Weiser who believes that the enthronement Psalms were used at the covenant renewal ceremony: A. Weiser, *The Psalms* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1957) 30.

¹⁷³ A. R. Johnson, "The Role of the King in the Jerusalem Cult," *The Labyrinth*, ed. S. H. Hooke (London: Macmillan, 1935) 71-111; J. H. Eaton, *Kingship and the Psalms* (London: SCM, 1976); C. R. North, "The Religious Aspect of Hebrew Kingship," *ZA* W 9 105 (1932) 8-38, T. Ishida, *The Royal Dynasties in Ancient Israel* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1977) 38-40, 99-117; K. W. Whitelam, *The Just King* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1979) 17-38, 207-18.

¹⁷⁴ J. L. McKenzie, *Myth and Realities: Studies in Biblical Theology* (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1963) 114-16.

¹⁷⁵ L. Köhler, *Old Testament Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1957) 30.

¹⁷⁶ Mowinckel, *The Psalms*. I. 106-92; J. Gray, "The Kingship of God in the Psalms and Prophets," *VT* 11 (1961) 1.

belief in the kingship of God,¹⁷⁷ while W. Eichrodt claims that the idea which binds the Old and New Testament together "is the irruption of the Kingship of God into this world and its establishment here."¹⁷⁸

The word "lord" is often used of God. Lordship implies rulership (Gen 45:8; Ps 105:21), but some question the extent to which this emphasis is present in this title of honor.¹⁷⁹ Certainly formulas like "Lord of all the earth" (Josh 3:11, 13; Ps 97:5; Mic 4:13; Zech 4:14; 6:5) and "God of gods and lord of lords" (Deut 10:17; Ps 136:3; Dan 10:47) contain this element. The frequent reference to earthly kings as "my lord, the King" in the Joseph story¹⁸⁰ and throughout the historical books support the position that the epithet was not without meaning. In Isaiah's vision, he identifies God the King, with Yahweh of hosts (6:5) and the Lord who was sitting on a throne (6: 1). The frequent use of "lord" in prayers, parallel to the usage in other religions, suggests a relationship of a servant to a master. The term does not require kingship imagery (only a higher power who has authority), but when lordship terminology like "my Lord God" or "the Lord God of hosts"¹⁸¹ are integrated with other epithets, an emphasis on the dominion of God results.¹⁸²

Although "lord" is used more frequently, kingship terminology more precisely identifies the Israelite metaphor which describes God. Psalms contains the praise of God who is "King of all the earth. ..[who] sits on his holy throne" (Ps 47:2, 8), the King of Zion (Ps 48:2). He is worshipped as "my God, my King" (Ps 68:24; 84:3; 145:1) and Zion rejoices in her King (Ps 149:2) for "the Lord has established his throne in the heavens, and his sovereignty rules over all" (Ps 103: 19).

The kingship of Yahweh relates to all the earth, for the Hebrews like the other nations connected kingship to creation.¹⁸³

God is my King from of old, who works deeds of deliverance in the midst of the earth. Thou didst divide the sea by thy strength, thou didst break the heads of the sea-monsters in the waters....thine is the day, thine is the night, thou has prepared the light and the sun, thou hast established all the boundaries of the earth (Ps 74: 12-17). He is "King at the flood, yes, the Lord sits as King forever," (Ps 29:10), for just as "the world is firmly established...thy throne is established from of old" (Ps 93:2). These all point to the fact that "the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods, in whose hands are the depths of the earth...for it was he who made it" (Ps 95:3-5), for "The earth is the Lord's and all" contains" (Ps 24:1).

The kingship of Yahweh is established in the present because "He rules over the nations" (Ps 22:28), "is the King of all the earth, ...God reigns over the

¹⁷⁷ M. Buber, *Kingship of God* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967).

¹⁷⁸ W. Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961) 26.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid. 203.

¹⁸⁰ Gen 40:1,7; 42:10, 30, 33; 44:5,7,8,9,16,18,19,20,22,24,33,45:9; 47:25

¹⁸¹ A designation which is related to the concept that God is a warrior.

¹⁸² *ANET* 3-4.

¹⁸³ G. von Rad, "melek und malkut im Alten Testament," *TWNT* 1 (1933) 563-5.

nations" (Ps 47:2, 7-8). Mowinckel translates the enthronement Psalms, "Yahweh has become King" (Ps 93:1; 96:10; 97:1; 99:1),¹⁸⁴ but Maag denies' Mowinckel's emphasis and interpretation and suggests the translation "Yahweh (and none other) is King."¹⁸⁵ Either way, these Psalms relate the kingship of God to his just rule (Ps 96:10;97:1-2;99:4).

Both Yahweh and earthly kings attempt to establish justice; and being a judge was part of the function of a king. The Psalmist in trouble cried out for help to "my King and my God...thou dost hate all who do iniquity. Hold them guilty, O God" (Ps 5:2, 5, 10). Yahweh, who is pictured as a king, "dost sit on the throne judging righteously...hast rebuked the nations...destroyed the wicked" (Ps 9:4), for "he has established his throne for judgment, and he will judge the world in righteousness" (Ps 9:7). In parallelism to "The Lord reigns" in Ps 96:10 is God's judgment of the peoples with equity which is further emphasized in v 13. A parallel concept is found in Ps 98:6 and 9.

Because Yahweh rules and carries out his judgments against his enemies, God is the Divine Warrior who functions as the King of the earth (Psalm 2), for "the Lord is King forever and ever, nations have perished from his land" (Ps 10:16). The "King of Glory" in Ps 24:7-10 is "the Lord mighty in battle... the Lord of hosts, he is the King of Glory,"¹⁸⁶ and the Psalmist prays: because "Thou art my King, O God; command victories for Jacob" (Ps 44:4). "He is a great King over all the earth, he subdues peoples under us, and nations under our feet" (Ps 47:2-3).

B. Similarities and Comparisons

The metaphor of Yahweh as King, found in the Psalms, correlates kingship with component ideas which show harmony as well as contrast when they are compared to statements concerning the kingship of the gods in Egypt, Mesopotamia, Ugarit and the Hittite Empire. Harmony of terminology and function appear in varying degrees from country to country. These technical similarities relate to a common feeling of inferiority before the powerful chief gods/God and a common anthropomorphic way of describing the gods/God with socio-political metaphors.¹⁸⁷ The functional similarities derive from common expectations and responsibilities which are placed on chief rulers (i.e. defence, settling disputes, governing justly). These similarities are human responses which do not require a theory of borrowing, for these factors are represented and understood differently in different cultures.

The contrast between ideas of kingship in the ancient Near Eastern cultures around Israel, which use expressions and statements which resemble one another, can only be obtained by defining the precise content given to kingship ideas in each nation. The identification of kingship and the gods is total in Egypt, for the Pharaoh is a real god who has absolute power over life, justice,

¹⁸⁴ Mowinckel, *Psalms*.1.107.

¹⁸⁵ Maag, "Malkut Jhwh," *SVT* 4 (1960) 129-53.

¹⁸⁶ P. C. Craigie, *The Problem of War in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978) 43; Gray, "Kingship," *VT* 12 (1962) 2-12.

¹⁸⁷ Cross, *Canaanite Myth* 91-111.

fertility and life after death. In Mesopotamia, the major relationship between the king and the gods was understood in terms of adoption; this maintained a distinction between the human king and the gods who were kings. The human king was elected or chosen by the gods according to their wise plans in Mesopotamia.¹⁸⁸ Thus the gods who are kings have the real powers in Mesopotamia; the human kings are servants of the gods. The cultic worship became the vehicle by which the Mesopotamian king maintained his close relationship to the gods in order to bring prosperity and harmony between the nation and the forces of nature. Because of these differences the focus of kingship is directed toward the Pharaoh in Egypt, but to the gods who were kings in Mesopotamia.

Not enough is known about the conceptual framework of the Hittites to differentiate their way of thinking. Phraseology similar to both Egypt and Mesopotamia is found.¹⁸⁹ The Ugaritic material appears to be more like Mesopotamian thinking but there is only minimal information on the exact interrelationship between the king and the gods.¹⁹⁰

The biblical concepts relate more closely to Mesopotamian ideas where the gods are the true sovereigns of the world. Both include the adoption of the human king as the son of the gods/God (1 Sam 7: 14), both make the human king the servant of the gods/God and both recognize that the real power of the universe rests in the hands of the god-kings, not the human kings. But the contrast between the two cultures is possibly more striking than the similarities.

C. Distinctive Aspects of the Kingship of Yahweh

The biblical concept of God, the relationship of man to God, and the relationship of the king to God are unique in Israel. This peculiar way of thinking was due to Israel's alteration of Mesopotamian ideas inherited from the environment of Abram's youth. Mesopotamian polytheism identified the gods with the innumerable powers within nature. These were organized into socio-political and family structures which sometimes destroyed other gods to gain dominance. The biblical concept of God, especially that found in the Psalms which relate to the kingship of Yahweh, distinguish clearly between the Creator and the forces of nature. Nature has no power except Yahweh's for "The Lord of all the earth" established the sea and earth and regulates their boundaries (Ps 74: 15-17). When the power of a thousand nature gods is centralized in the power of one God, he becomes the king in a way which was foreign to Mesopotamian thinking.

A second major contrast between Israelite and Mesopotamian thinking was the distinctive relationship which existed between man and this one true God. Israel's relationship was defined by the word of God and the acts of God on behalf of Israel. Religion was not the means by which one integrated oneself with the forces of nature, but the integration of man's will with the will of God

¹⁸⁸ G. E. Wright, *The Old Testament Against its Environment* (London: SCM, 63-4).

¹⁸⁹ Prankfort, *Kingship* 238-9.

¹⁹⁰ Mowinckel, *He That Cometh* 51-2.

who elected and redeemed him.¹⁹¹ Yahweh, as King, is the sovereign ruler of all history; and his decisive intervention as the Divine Warrior at the time of the exodus (Exod 15:3; Ps 74: 12-14) demonstrated both his election of his people and his own redemptive power. Through his victory over the Egyptians and their gods, his rulership over all the earth was established (Exod 15:18), and through the covenant with the Israelite kingdom, Yahweh was established as the "great Suzerain." The revelation "You are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the families who are on the face of the earth" (Deut 7:6), summarizes the unique relationship between Israel and her God. The covenant gave Yahweh an exclusive position because of his grace, and required total devotion and obedience to the Suzerain. G. E. Wright believes "the all-pervading sense of election and covenant, therefore, is the chief clue for the understanding of Israel's sense of destiny....In other countries of the day, as far as we have knowledge, there was no comparable conception."¹⁹²

A third contrast involves the relationship of the king and God. In Israel, the king was not the high priest and it was not through the king that God revealed his will to Israel. Israelite kings were condemned and criticized by the priests and especially by the prophets, for they were primarily servants of Yahweh, the real King of Israel. The covenant carefully defined the king's limitation and demanded obedience to the will of God, the Suzerain (Deut 17:14-20). God governed and ruled the nation with his laws, defeated the king's enemies, set up the standards for justice, and received all worship. The sanctity of human kingship never developed because the covenant with God, the Great Suzerain, cemented God and the people together long before the monarchy was accepted as normative. This depreciation of human kingship parallels a counterbalancing emphasis on the sovereignty and kingship of Yahweh. The centrality of the covenant relationship to the unique position of Yahweh as king supports the premonarchal belief in the kingship of Yahweh.

When human kingship was introduced during the time of the judges, it was seen as a partial rejection of the kingship of Yahweh (1 Kgs 8:7; 12: 12-15). An earlier attempt to raise up Gideon to be king was unacceptable because it was Yahweh who ruled over the people (Judg 8:22-23). Pentateuchal references to the kingship of God are found in Deuteronomy 33:5, where God's kingship is connected to the establishment of the covenant of Sinai, Num 23:21-22; 24: 7-8, which associate kingship with God's victories over the military enemies of Israel, and Exod 15: 18, which proclaims the eternal reign of Yahweh.¹⁹³

V. CONCLUSION

The evidence which has been gathered indicates that the ancient Near Eastern people described their chief gods by using the metaphor of the king. The use of the same metaphor in Israel indicates a similarity between the ways

¹⁹¹ Engnell (*Divine Kingship*) makes too much of the Ugaritic material as Noth maintains: "God, King, and Nation in the Old Testament," *The Laws in the Pentateuch* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967) 157-60.

¹⁹² Wright, *Old Testament Against its Environment* 62-3.

¹⁹³ See Cross (*Canaanite Myth* 121-44) for extensive bibliographic notations.

in which Israel and her neighbors explained the power of God/the gods and pictured the relationship between man and God/the gods. Although Israel's terminology was the same as the terms used in other ancient Near Eastern cultures, the conceptual images which these terms represent were not always identical. In all these nations, God/the gods who are kings represented the highest power, the authority which had the greatest control; but the character, number and function of God/the gods were quite different. When compared to other gods, the distinctive authority of Yahweh, the King of Israel, goes far beyond the dominion of Re who shared his power with the Pharaoh, or Anu who was one of several gods who were called king. Both these factors have an effect on our theology of God and raise several questions.

Could the centrality of kingship terminology in the religions of the ancient Near Eastern world be an aid which enables the modern mind, which generally looks negatively on absolute monarchs, to enter the ancient Near Eastern world view? Could the ancient Near Eastern literature which unites the ruling, judging and warrior concepts around the central ideology of the kingship of the gods, be a conceptual framework which will unite the biblical functions of God into an overarching framework? The present survey suggests that a careful comparative methodology can alert the modern mind to connect and interrelate conceptual ideas which are distinct in our thinking. This restructuring should lead to a clearer view of Israel's concept of Yahweh because it provides a contextual background and thus highlights some of the similarities and differences among these religions. It also broadens one's focus and argues against theological systems which emphasize only one function of God or only one unique Israelite idea. For example, the idea of the covenant is of prime importance to Israelite theology, but it is not inclusive enough a theme to encompass the universal activity of God. If God is only a national covenant God, the full picture of God is blurred, limited and actually distorted. The study of the ancient Near Eastern literature puts the concept of Yahweh into perspective, and the biblical literature suggests that the kingship or sovereign rule of Yahweh is of central importance in developing a biblical theology of the Old Testament.

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