THE SUPREMACY OF BA'AL OVER MOT IN UGARITIC CYCLE OF COSMOGONIC MYTHS AND ITS INFLUENCE ON THE OLD TESTAMENT

Abstract

The supremacy of Ba'al over Mot in Ugaritic Cycle of Cosmogonic Myths was a prominent tradition within the world of the ancient Near East. This custom projects Ba'al as the god of fertility and rain, but Mot as that of death and underworld. Since the world of the time was agrarian, most of the peoples involved in the worship of Ba'al for bumper harvests but cast aspersion on Mot. The paper, therefore, claims that the incessant drifting away by ancient Israel from Yahweh for the worship of Ba'al was on account of this cultural influence from the surrounding nations. The paper employed the canonical approach which interprets the biblical text in its canonical context, to analyse the influence of this type in the OT setting. In this direction, the writer examined ancient Ugarit from the perspective of archaeology. The paper also considered lexical analyses of the concepts of "Ba'al" and "Mot" from the general worldview of the ancient world, especially within the cultural understanding of the people of Israel. The basis of this analysis was to identify possible supremacy of Ba'al over Mot, the god of the dead. The writer finally investigated the possible areas of influence and the paper identified the following elements, namely, naming off some towns and cities after Ba'al within the geographical locations of ancient Israel, worship of Ba'al beginning from Israel's contact with the Moabites in the wilderness and throughout the Judges and prevalence of Ba'al worship during the United Kingdom and the time of Monarchy.

Keywords: supremacy, Ba'al, Mot, Ugaritic Cycle of Cosmogonic Myths, influence

INTRODUCTION

One fundamental construct that essentially marks most creation narratives or cosmogonic myths in many ancient cultures is leadership. The two Jewish Elohist and Yahwehist creation narratives of the Old Testament in Genesis 1:1-2:3 and 2:4-25, respectively, and the Canaanite Ugaritic cycle myths are examples. In the OT, the purpose of the superiority given to humankind over other created beings like animals and plants is for man to exercise leadership role over the created order as mandated by God. Similarly, the supremacy of Ba'al over Mot and others in the Canaanite Pantheon as narrated in the Ba'al Cycle myths of the Ugarit is a reflection of leadership among the gods. According to Elmer B. Smick, Ba'al is the Canaanite god of fertility and rain[1] while Mot is that of Death and the Netherworld, a land of slime and filth.[2] Again, Richard J. Clifford advances that Ba'al is specifically the storm-god of the Ugarit.[3] The Ugaritic traditions about this god dated to the 18th century B.C.E., the circulation of which covered the entire ancient Near East.[4]

The thrust of this paper is the inconsistency of the religious life of the people of the OT under the leadership of Yahweh, notwithstanding an existing covenant relationship between the two parties as enshrined in the Law. Many biblical writers like Hosea and Ezekiel depict this situation as a life of infidelity which persisted until Yahweh handed them over to their enemies. In 722 B.C., Assyrian army deported Israel with Samaria in the north to a strange land while their Babylonian counterparts carried Judah with Jerusalem in the south to Babylon in 586 B.C.[5]

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[1] Elmer B. Smick, "*muth*" *in Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament (TWOT),* eds. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1980), 496.

[2] Ibid, 497.

[3] Richard J. Clifford, "The Hebrew Scriptures and the Theology of Creation." *Theological Studies* 46 (1985): 509.

[4] Mark S. Smith, "Ugaritic and Biblical Literature." *Religion: Oxford Research Encyclopedia. httpreligion.oxfordre.comview10.1093acrefore*<Accessed on May10, 2016>, 4.

[5] Harold B. Hunting, *Hebrew Life and Times* (New York: Nashville, MCMXXI), 40.

The proposition of this paper, therefore, is that the common belief in the supremacy of Ba'al over Mot in the entire Canaanland negatively influenced the covenant people of God in the OT with a great alacrity leading to their periodic drifting away from Yahweh to the worship of Ba'al. The paper investigates ancient Ugarit in the light of archaeological findings, considers the tradition of the supremacy of Ba'al over Mot in the Ugaritic Ba'al Cycle Myths, and explores the negative influence these myths exerted over the OT people. The paper applies the canonical method, which interprets the biblical text in its canonical context, to analyse the influence of this type in the OT setting.[6]

ANCIENT UGARIT
In line with the focus of this paper, it is pertinent to investigate the ancient city of Ugarit. This effort would provide readers of this study a necessary basis to understand its first context. According to William M. Schniedewind and Joel H. Hunt, Ugarit was an ancient city located on the northern coast of the eastern part of the Mediterranean which was about a half-mile (one kilometre) from the Mediterranean Sea. The city was also about six miles to the northern part of the modern city of Latakia (an ancient Greek city called Laodikeia) and 150 miles to the north of Damascus. More so, its location is on the trade route from Mesopotamia up to the Euphrates River from Mari, Emar, and Ebla; these were three famous cities in the Late Bronze Age.[7]

Moreover, the city located at the modern-day Ras Shamra whose excavations began by Claude Schaeffer in 1929 as a result of the accidental discovery of a funerary vault at the small port of Minet el-Beida. Given this, Schaeffer and his successors shifted their attention to the large mound, Ras Shamra, one kilometre to the eastern part of the port. This enterprise persistent every year ever since except the period of

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[6] Walter McConnell, *Introduction to Old Testament Theology*, "Gale Reference Desk," *Singapore Bible College,* *http://waltmcc.webs.com/Intro%20to%20OT%20Theology.pdf*<accessed on 9th December 2013> 43.

[7] William M. Schniedewind and Joel H. Hunt, *A Primer on Ugaritic Language, Culture and Literature* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 5.

World War II (1939-1948).[8] Ugarit prospered in the 15th - 14th centuries BCE owing to the wealth and steadiness of the Egyptian Late Kingdom. Scholars often consider this period as the Ugaritic golden age. This time was also the era when Ugaritic language literature began to prosper during the reign of Niqmaddu II (ca. 1350 BCE).[9]

Excavations at Ras Shamra Tell brought certain revelations to the limelight. First, Ugaritic people inhabited the site in the eighth millennium B.C. initially, and the land became an important city in the Late Bronze Age.[10] Second, the global language of the period was Akkadian. According to Dennis Pardee, this language was the chief dialect of Mesopotamia whose usage lasted till the end of the era. Third, archaeologists also discovered a script belonging to the grand family of languages of Syria, Palestine, and Arabic called Ugaritic according to the name of the city. These family languages involve the following: Arabic, Aramaic, Hebrew, Old South Arabian, and Phoenician. Words in these languages dated to the second millennium BC.[11]

Ugaritic texts cover a wide literary series; namely, from legends to laundry registers, chants to letters, and treaties to medical texts. Archaeologists uncovered these texts in the palace, temple and homes of some important personalities of Ras Shamra. They also unearthed a small number of documents at Ras Ibn Hani, an ancient name for B'ir located three miles to the southern Ras Shamra. They also discovered a smaller portion of texts written in the Ugaritic alphabet in the western Mediterranean region: Cyprus (in Hala Sultan Tekke near Kition), Syria (in Tell Sukas, Kadesh; and Kumidi, near Damascus), Lebanon (in Sarepta), and in Israel (Mount Tabor, Taanach, and Beth-Shemesh).[12]

Furthermore, archaeologists also uncovered not less than 470 of these texts in the residential area of Ugarit; namely: 200 school texts (such as abecedaries, lexical lists, grammatical lists, and god lists), the Gilgamesh

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[8] Ibid, 8.

[9] Ibid, 13.

[10] Dennis Pardee, "Ugarit Ritual Texts," *The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago,* Ed. Ruth Welte No. 172 (Winter 2002):1.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Schniedewind and Hunt, 9.

Epic, and the Mesopotamian Flood Story. They also unearthed not less than 200 more tablets in recent excavations at the southeastern part of the city including an unusual abecedary (that is, an ABC tablet), a trilingual (Ugaritic, Akkadian, and Hurrian) lexicographic document, and a small portion of Gilgamesh Epic.[13] The material remains uncovered from the house of a high priest were not less than 135 texts. The location of this house was between the temples of Ba'al and Dagan on the eastern acropolis. The texts were essentially religious literature including 24 tablets which enclosed the all-important literature of Ugarit (Keret, Aqhat, Ba'al Cycle, and Rephaim). The writers wrote most of these texts in Ugaritic except for a few written in Akkadian, Sumerian, and Hurrian.[14]

SUPREMACY OF BA'AL OVER MOT IN UGARITIC CYCLE MYTHS

In this section, an adequate understanding of two keywords is germane to this paper; namely: Ba'al and M^1veth (Death). Because of this, it is on the imperative to consider the lexical analysis of each of them within and outside the context of the Bible.

1. Lexical Analysis of Ba'al

According to BDB, the lexical form of the Hebrew word B^1'al implies "marry, rule over" while its noun masculine means "owner, husband, citizen, inhabitant, ruler, and lord." BDB regards it as a divine name which does not appear in any other place within the context of the Hexateuch other than in Numbers 22:41; 25:3, 5. Its origination might be with the sense of divine ownership instead of sovereignty. People in the northern kingdom seem to have employed it as an equivalence of *'adon* (lord, master) in the southern part. Brown, Driver, and Briggs also advance that, "It was the special name of the God of the Canaanites, Philistines, etc."[15] Elmer A Martens have some ideas in common with

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[13] Ibid, 9-10.

[14] Ibid, 10.

[15] F. Brown, S. Driver, and C. Briggs, "Ba'al," *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon: With an Appendix containing the Biblical Aramaic* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1906), 127.

BDB by advancing that Ba'al is any of the following: "possess, own, rule over, marry" while its noun form is: "owner, husband, Baal."[16]

The lexical form of B^1'al with its derivates appears in not less than 100 times in the OT. It may be a possession or ownership of a house, rule over a place, or marrying a wife. All this shows the commonality of the word within the context of the OT. The theological undertone behind these expressions is evident in the marriage symbolism employed by Yahweh to depict His covenant relationship with the people of Israel in Isaiah 54:5, "For your Maker is your husband-- the LORD Almighty is his name-- the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; he is called the God of all the earth" (NIV). The basis of this metaphor is the "close covenantal tie" of Yahweh's love to Israel and their loyalty to Him in return which serves as the basis for similar imagery in the New Testament between Christ and the Church.[17]

Similarly, the use of "master" and the name of a deity appear among the Ugaritic people. The expressions of "lord" or "owner" when followed by a genitive were also common with this root word in most of the Semitic languages. Besides, the plural form of the noun (Baalim) means "citizens" of a place (Jos. 24:4). Apart from the appearance of this word in names of people such as Jerubbaal (Judg.9:16) and places (e.g. Baalzephon in Exod. 14:2), Ba'al is regarded as "the name of a great active god in the Canaanite pantheon and has other religious connotations."[18] As part of these nuances, the god Ba'al that appeared in the OT is the storm god of the West Semitic people who appeared in Alalakh Tablets (15th century B.C.), Egyptian texts (from the 14th century B.C.), Tell Amarna Letters (14th century B.C.), and Ugaritic texts (14th century B.C.). It was also encountered in Amorite proper names from Mari, Tell al-Rimah, and Chagar Bazar. Again, it later appeared in Phoenician and Punic texts. This name appears both within and outside

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[16] Elmer A. Martens, "Ba'al," *TWOT*, 325.

[17] Ibid, 325-326.

[18] Ibid.

biblical context either absolutely or in construct with names of certain places. This West Semitic deity is also the fertility god.[19]

Furthermore, although biblical writers of the OT had no intention to teach the Canaanite religion, Martens posits that the picture of Ba'al in the OT literature is in tandem with extra-biblical sources. He is above all of the storm gods who give sweet rain that refreshes vegetation. The people attributed dry years to Ba'al's temporary captivity or death. In other words, drought and famine were two of the people's possible experiences anytime Ba'al lost his dominion to M^{1}veth (Death).

According to Martens, the worship of Ba'al by the Israelites began in the Book of Judges. People of ancient Israel submitted to Ba'al throughout the Judges (Judg. 2:11ff; 6:25). Scholars often regard the period in ancient Israel as a time of religious infidelity. The role of Yahweh's judges at this time, therefore, was to deliver the people from the tragic consequences of Ba'al worship which officially became the state religion of northern Israel during the period of the Omrides (1 Kgs 16:31). Although this advance from Martens may be correct for Israel's infidelity against Yahweh was primarily about this worship, their religious infidelity with Ba'al commenced long before this in the wilderness. Again, Martens, citing Lear Bronner, advances that the miracles of the duo of Prophets Elijah and Elisha were on the basis of contending with the powers attributed to Ba'al by the people such as fire (1 Kgs 18:17ff; 2 Kgs 1:9-16), rain (1 Kgs 17:1; 1 Kgs 18:41-46), food (1 Kgs 17:1-6, 8-16; 2 Kgs 4:1ff), children (2 Kgs 4:14-17), and revivification (1 Kgs 17:17-23; 2 Kgs 4:18-37; 2 Kgs 13:20-22). However, their efforts could not rid the land of this cult, and the situation led to the captivity of northern Israel as presented by Hosea. This infiltration also found its way in southern Israel. Despite the reform of Josiah, the nation was not purged of this cult until the people of Judah went to exile (Ezek. 16, and 23).[20]

2. Lexical Analysis of Mot

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[19] Ibid, 326-327.
[20] Ibid, 327.

The lexical meaning of the Hebrew verb "*muth"* essentially implies 'he died while its participial form M[1]wet means 'Death.' According to BDB, death could be either naturally or by other causes. It could be of man (Gen. 25:8; 36:33-39; 2 Sam. 10:1), and of animals (Lev. 11:39). Death can also be a penalty by a human authority as capital punishment (Gen. 42:20; Exod. 10:28; 21:14; Gen. 44:9; Jos 2:14; Num. 35:12, 30). Again, death can take the form of assassination.[21]

In Ezekiel, the notion that God has no pleasure in the death of any man but for them to live is obvious (18:32). The standard teaching of the OT for instructional purpose, as presented in Genesis 3:3, is that death is the consequence of man's rebellion against God's instruction. Therefore, the corruption of the human body and the resultant suffering and pain following the Fall are visible indicators of death. With all this, the biblical editor presents death as the consequence of and punishment for sin, "an ultimate separation from God." In this sense, the Jewish philosophy pictures all human beings as "*'B®nê-M[1]vet*" (meaning "Sons or Children of Death"). Biblical scholars universally employ this root word within the context of the Semitic region for 'dying' or 'death.'[22]

The Canaanites used it to depict "the name of the god of death and the netherworld, *Mot*." Similarly, in Ugaritic culture, the god *Mot* was very prominent ruling the netherworld. As a result of fighting Ba'al, the god of fertility, El, the leader of the pantheon, hated Mot. Ba'al is frequently mentioned in the OT because the Israelites embraced him as the Canaanite god of fertility and rain, among others. Ba'al*'s* cult, therefore, became very popular to the entire inhabitants of the region of the Mediterranean, unlike *Mot*.[23]

3. Ugaritic Ba'al Cycle Myths (KTU 1.1 – 1.6)
Given the value of comparative religion to humanity, especially within the region of ANE, Daniel C. Harlow asserts that certain texts are relevant to the creation narratives of Genesis 1-2. Among them are the "*Atrahasis* Epic," "the *Enuma* Elish," "the *Gilgamesh* Epic" and "the

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[21] BDB, 560.
[22] Smick, 497.
[23] Ibid.

Adapa Myth" of Mesopotamia. The Ba'al and Anat of Canaan relating to the "Ugaritic cycle of cosmogonic myths" are some others relating to this study.[24]

As considered already, Ba'al was a household name in the 10th century Canaan land and was used to depict several things. Prominent among them, citing Botica, is the name of a popular and most dignified deity in the ANE called god Ba'al. In Phoenicia, a city in the coastal part of the Mediterranean, this name appeared in many inscriptions as a reference to human beings and deities. Nonetheless, the worship of the god Ba'al outdated Phoenicia era as the name was prominent in the earlier mythology discovered from the tablets of Ugarit.[25]

Aside from this, El and Ashtoreth were two other pillar gods of the Canaanite pantheon which came from the old Akkad and Ugarit. According to the Ugaritic texts, El was the supreme god called the source or king and the father of all other gods in the Canaanite pantheon. This feature about El appears in many second millennium texts. Notwithstanding, Ba'al was the most popular, active, and relevant to the life of an average Canaanite. The confrontation between Prophet Elijah and the prophets of Ba'al in I Kings 18 is an instance; showing the influence of the worship of Ba'al on the Israelites as the god of fertility in charge of rain and dew, and sexuality. Meanwhile, Ashtoreth is the partner of El; named the "lady of the sea." The Canaanites believed that these two gods had a sexual relationship that led to the birth of other gods.[26]

Moreover, these texts bring some other revelations to the fore regarding how Ba'al attained divine kingship as exemplified by the construction of his royal palace. Before this achievement, Ba'al fought with the extraterrestrial embodied Sea (Yamm) and with Mot (Death). In the first

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[24] Daniel C. Harlow, "Creation According to Genesis: Literary Genre, Cultural Context, Theological Truth." *Christian Scholar's Review*, *httpswww.calvin.eduacademicreligionfacultyharlowCreation%20according%20to%20Genesis.pdf*<Accessed on April 6, 2016> , 168.

[25] Aurelian Botica, "The Theophoric Element Ba'al in Ancient Phonician Inscriptions," *Perichoresis,* Volume 10. Issue 1(2012): 68-70.

[26] Ibid, 71-72

tablet, El, the patriarchal god assigned Sea as the "divine champion" and summoned Kothar, the craftsman-god to build a palace for Yamm.[27] El also instructed Anat[28] to stop the conflict.

In the second tablet, messengers of Yamm suddenly appeared before the supreme council headed by El to request the surrender of Ba'al who was at alert while other deities in council were eating. This sudden appearance created fear and panic in the assembly. In the end, El ruled that Ba'al should become a servant to Yamm. Ba'al challenged this judgment, and the scene ended with Anat and Astarte, the warrior goddesses, reprimanding Ba'al. In the other column (KTU 1.2), the challenge of Ba'al led to the defeat of Sea in the end through the weapons of war made by Kothar. Ba'al celebrated this victory with an isolated feast where one of his servants sang and served him alcohol in an extraordinary cup that no woman could see, not even the goddess Asherah.[29]

In the second segment of the Ba'al Cycle (1.3 III-1.4 VII), Ba'al needed to build a palace in his honour as the new king of the pantheon and needed the consent of El. As a result, he invited her sister Anat to intercede on his behalf. He also appointed Kothar to make some important furnishings for the inducement of Asherah to approach El on his behalf for the same purpose. Asherah did this with great success, and a gathering of deities celebrated this achievement with passion at the inauguration of the palace. Ba'al then gained recognition to be the king of both heaven and earth.[30]

In the third major section of the Ba'al Cycle (1.4 VIII-1.6), Ba'al later attempted to expand his sphere of influence to the underworld over Mot, His previous lord. This ambition consequently led to the demise of Ba'al and his eventual descent to the underworld. Upon this, Anat and El followed a proper order of mourning and system of the burial ritual. El

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[27] Smith, 4.

[28] H.L. Ginsberg, trans., "Ugaritic Myths, Epics, and Legends," *http://www.ericlevy.com/Revel/Intro2/ANET%20Ugarit%20Epics.PDF<Accessed on 29/9/15>,* 129. Anath is regarded as the warrior-goddess.

[29] Ibid, 4-5

[30] Ibid, 5.

after that nominated two minor gods, called Athar and Yd'-ylhn, to replace Ba'al in the divine council but these gods failed for lack of physical qualifications for kingship. In the process of time, Ba'al resurrected to life and was restored to his ruling position after Anat had destroyed Mot. Ba'al, therefore, became an unbeatable king in the council. Allegorically, Ginsberg advances that this story is a type of Divine victory over Death as prophesied by Isaiah (25:8) and fulfilled in Revelation 21:1-4.[31]

Given this prominence of Ba'al over Mot, OT emphasises life, not death. As a result, the longevity of life is believed to be a great blessing (Prov. 3:2). By this perception, there came up the teaching of the OT on capital punishment for intentional murder. Relating to this is God's order to execute those committed to abominable practices so that the Israelites may not learn their traditions, an example of which is a human sacrifice to demons.[32]

INFLUENCES OF BA'AL'S SUPREMACY ON OT PEOPLE
From the preceding, it is evident that Ba'al had over-towing effects on the entire land of Canaan in the OT. His supremacy covered the various spheres of life, especially the religious life of the people. In this section, analysis of some of these influences on the people of Yahweh is the focus using the canonical approach.

1. **Geographical Locations:** The Israelites named some geographical places in ancient Israel after Ba'al during their united kingdom as revealed by the editors of the OT text. The situation also remained during the divided kingdoms of Israel in the north and Judah in the south. A few of these names are the following, namely, Baal Zephon. (Exo. 14:2, 9; Num. 33:7). Bamoth Baal (Num. 22:41; Jos 13:17), Baal Meon (Num. 32:38; Jos 13:17; 1 Chron. 5:8), Baal Gad (Jos 11:17; 12:7; 13:5), Kiriath Baal (Jos 15:60; 18:14), Mount Baal Hermon (Judg. 3:3; Song of Songs 8:11), Baal Tamar (Judg. 20:33), Baal Perazim (Samuel 5:20; 1 Chron. 14:11), Baal Hazor near the border of Ephraim (2 Sam. 13:23), and Baal Shalishah (2Kgs 4:42).

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[31] Ibid.
[32] Smick, 497.

This situation shows a whole lot of influence of paganism not only on the way of life of the people but also on their covenant relationship with God.

2. **Israelites with the Worship of Ba'al:** There are couples of instances of Israelites participating in the worship of Ba'al in the OT. Yahweh often counted this practice as religious infidelity. First, the earliest appearance of the infidelity of this type took place at Shittim when Israelites were on their way to the Promised Land. They indulged in sexual immorality with the Moabites women who later lured them into the worship of Ba'al of Peor (Num. 25:3, 5). Peor is argued to be a phase of Ba'al whose worship was characterised by awful licentiousness.[33] New Testament account brings to the fore that the incident was the aftermath of Balaam's counsel to Balak, the Moabite king (Rev. 2:14).

Second, prominent among the sins committed by the Israelites in their history of rising and falling at the time of the Judges was the worship of Ba'al. They, sometimes, compounded the situation with their love for Ashtoreths. In Judges 2:13, Yahweh charged them with worshipping both gods. Gideon's family also dedicated themselves to the worship of Ba'al with Asherah in Judges 6:25-32.

3. **Prevalence of Ba'al in the United Kingdom of Israel**: Religious infidelity also characterised itself with many of God's people named after Ba'al during the United Kingdom of Israel. This situation appeared in the family lineage of King Saul along with Ner Saul's grandfather (1 Chron. 9:35). Again, Saul named his fourth son *Esh-Baal* meaning "a man of Ba'al" who is equally called Ishbosheth along with Jonathan, Malki-Shua, and Abinadab (1 Chron. 9:39). Jonathan also named his son *Merib-Baal*, meaning "Ba'al is my advocate," which is another name for Mephibosheth (1 Chron. 9:40). This analysis shows the prevalence of this name during the united kingdom of ancient Israel.

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[33] "Baal," *Fausset's Bible Dictionary*, Bibleworks 7 Database, par. 1.

4. **Influence of Ba'al in the Northern Kingdom**: The worship of Ba'al was one major infiltration to the covenant life of Yahweh's people. First, the earliest appearance of this faithless action took the form of marriage, a forbidden union between God's people and the nations. In 1 Kings 16:31-33, God was displeased with King Ahab for marrying Jezebel, daughter of Ethbaal who made her husband jettison Yahweh's worship in Israel. Second, God appointed Elijah as a prophet who later engaged 450 prophets of Ba'al on Mount Carmel (1 Kgs 18:19-40). Although the situation led to the death of the entire prophets, the cult never came to an end. Third, God claimed that He reserved 7,000 Israelites whose knees had not bowed down to Ba'al and whose mouths had not kissed him (1 Kgs 19:18). This incident is another indicator of the popularity of Ba'al against God in Israel. It also points to Yahweh's detest of his worship. Fourth, Ahaziah son of Ahab king in Israel also served and worshipped Ba'al and provoked God to anger (1 Kgs 22:51-53).

Fifth, the writer of 2 Kings 3:1-2 advances that although King Joram son of Ahab did evil in the sight of God; his sin was not like that of Ahab and Jezebel his father and mother respectively. The language of relativity employed here was a result of Joram's singular act of getting rid of Ba'al worship by breaking his shrine which his father had erected. This picture brings to the fore the gravity of Ba'al worship in the sight of God. Sixth, King Jehu destroyed Ba'al worshipped in Israel by deceptively gathering all his prophets together for a feast and slaughtered them in their shrine. Before accomplishing this task, Jehu ensured that none of the dissident prophets was missing and that no one among God's prophets was among them. Jehu claimed to have followed the LORD's instructions from the mouth of Prophet Elijah in all his actions (2 Kgs 10:17-28). This picture is also a clear indication that Ba'al's worship was detestable to Yahweh. It also shows Ba'al's influence over the OT people. The response of any king in Israel and Judah to this worship, therefore, became a standard to determine their record of performance.

Seventh, Ahaziah, king in Israel, injured himself by falling through the lattice of his upper room in Samaria. He, after that, sent messengers to consult Baal-Zebub, meaning "fly-lord, the god of the Philistine at Ekron,"[34] to see if he would recover from his injury (2 Kings 1:2, 3, 16). Elijah, the Prophet of Yahweh, accosted the messengers with the message that the king would not recover for preferring Baal-Zebub to Yahweh the God of Israel (2 Kgs 1:1-6).

Eight, Prophet Hosea employed the imagery of marriage covenant to bring to the fore the nature of Yahweh's covenant relationship with Israel. Because of Israel's alliance with Ba'al, Yahweh alleged the whole nation of marital infidelity for failing to acknowledge Him as the owner of her grain, the new wine and oil, and her silver and gold which she used for Ba'al, her new lover. Yahweh, therefore, decided to punish the nation by taking away His grain and new wine and wool linen given to cover her bride's nakedness, and punish her for the days she burned incense to the Ba'als. In this way, the nakedness of Israel would be exposed (Hos. 2:8-13). This allegory came to pass in 722 B.C. when Yahweh sold Israel with Samaria to the Assyrians, their arch-enemy. In this way, Ba'al's worship in Israel greatly impaired the people's relationship with Yahweh for it was a challenge to His Ownership not only over His covenant people of Israel but the entire ancient Near Eastern world. It also brought about the departure of Ephraim's glory (Hos. 9:10-11' 13:1).

The Assyrian invasion happened in the ninth year of Hoshea king of Israel. This incident took a three years' siege by Shalmaneser IV who got deposed by Sargon. It was the latter that finally conquered Samaria in 722 B.C., the same year he deposed Shalmaneser who took power from Tiglath-Pileser III that died in 727 B.C.[35] The king of Assyria settled the Israelites in Halah, Gozan on the Habor River, and the towns of the Medes. One major reason accounting for Yahweh's action was the people's betrayal for worshipping other gods and following the practices and traditions of other nations

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[34] "Baal," *Easton's Bible Dictionary,* Bibleworks 7, Database, par 13.

[35] "Assyria," *Easton's Bible Dictionary*, Bibleworks 7, Database, par 1.

which He forbade. A particular reference is the worship of Ba'al (1 Kgs 17:5-16).

5. **Influence of Ba'al in the Southern Kingdom**: Just like Israel in the north, Judah in the south with Jerusalem, her capital city was not any different. A descendant of Benjamin had his name after Ba'al (1 Chron. 8:30). Thus, Judah shared this practice with Israel, their sister nation in the north. This custom was immoral going by the standard of Yahweh in the Law, especially the Decalogue.

Moreover, Athaliah seized power after the death of her son King Ahaziah and reigned for six years. In the seventh year, Jehoiada the priest went to the temple where he was keeping Joash, Ahaziah's only surviving son, all along for the six years away from Athaliah. Jehoiada anointed Joash as king. In the end, commanders of the palace guard killed Athaliah at the command of the priest. Afterwards, all the people went to the temple of Ba'al and destroyed it; smashing it on the ground. They also pieced its altars and idols and killed Mattan the priest, who was in charge of Ba'al's worship, in front of the altar (2 Kgs 11:1ff; 2 Chron. 23:17).

Furthermore, one of the main sins that King Manasseh committed was the worship of the god Ba'al. He committed himself to the god together with that of Asherah. He erected altars to Ba'al and made a pole for Asherah just as Ahab king of Israel did in Israel (2 Kgs 21:3). This practice not only infuriated Yahweh's anger but provoked Him to action against Manasseh and the entire people of the land. It is an indication of the popularity of Ba'al and the influence of his worship in the life of God's people until the latter part of the Divided Monarchy of Judah.

However, the Reformation of Josiah king of Judah was one good step taken, which softened the mind of God towards the people against the consequences of the sins of Manasseh. One major thing brought about by this reformation during Josiah's reign was the abolition of the worship of Ba'al in the land. He ordered Hilkiah the high priest, the priests next in rank, and the gatekeepers to remove all the articles

dedicated to Ba'al by Manasseh, his grandfather from the temple in Jerusalem (2 Kgs 23:4). He also removed all pagan priests who burned incense to Ba'al (2 Kgs 23:5).

Finally, one of the allegations Yahweh levied against Judah through Prophet Jeremiah was that the prophets prophesied by Ba'al, following after worthless gods (Jer. 2:8). The people also burned incense to Ba'al, a foreign god, and still appeared in God's temple in Jerusalem (Jer.7:9-10; 11:17). The altars dedicated to Ba'al were as much as the number of streets in Jerusalem (Jer.11:13). Similarly, one other detestable thing performed in Judah to break their tie with Yahweh was the burning of their sons and daughters in the fire as sacrifices to Ba'al at a place called Topheth or the Valley of Ben Hinnom, filling the place with the blood of the innocent (Jer.19:4-6; 32:35). Yahweh, therefore, decided and declared to hand over Jerusalem and her inhabitants to the Babylonians headed by King Nebuchadnezzar for 70 years (Jer.21:1-10; 25:1-12; 32:28-29).

From all this, the evidence is clear that the god Ba'al was supreme to the national life of the people of the ancient Near East across the member nations. His supremacy was with their belief system that he was the god of rain, fertility and storm. Since the world of the time was agrarian, almost everyone depended on Ba'al for a bumper harvest. This scenario was the basis for the dominance of his worship across the world of the time. When the Israelites came to the Promised Land, influences of this kind from the surrounding nations were imminent upon the people of Yahweh, especially from peoples who had long settled on the ground before they did and whom they refused to displace. Circumstances of this kind confirm the definition of J.Oswald Sanders that "Leadership is influence."[36]

CONCLUSION

The cultural influences of the ancient Near Eastern nations on OT people was overwhelming. The writer of this article views the worst of the effects of the influence of this kind to be that which devastated the

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[36] J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership: Principles of Excellence for every Believer* (Geneva: Oasis International Ltd, 1967), 22.

existant covenant relationship of Yahweh with His covenant people of the OT which resulted to the exile of northern Israel in 722 BC and their southern sister nation in 586 BC. The circumstance of this type, therefore, corroborates Richard H. Hess' claim that OT is a record of the influences of the ancient Near Eastern countries on Israel on the level of cultural transformation from extra-biblical viewpoint.[37]

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[37] Richard S. Hess, "Cultural Relationships in the Old Testament Period," *Dictionary of Biblical Criticism and Interpretation*, Porter, Stanley E., ed. (London: Routledge: Taylor and Francis Group, 2007), 63-64.

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