

**The Covenant under Threat of the Baal Fertility Cult: A Historical-
Theological Study.**

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SUMMARY

The Old Testament is the story of Yahweh and His Covenant relationship with His people Israel. Many other Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) peoples are mentioned in the context of their relationship to Israel. This Covenant relationship which began with Abraham had a core component, the gift of land (Gen 12:7), the Promised Land.

The Covenant was ratified at Mount Sinai where the terms, the Ten Commandments were given to Israel. Core to the terms was the obligation that Israel would serve no other god but Yahweh and without any representative image. Israel must be a monotheistic people. Only then would they retain the Promised Land.

The Promised Land was occupied by the Canaanites. The Canaanites though difficult to identify with precision, were a people whose religious cult was the direct opposite of Yahwism. They worshipped Baal the fertility god. The fertility cult was a belief that there is no absolute being but a universal realm with a womb of fertility. This womb is the source of fertility and the gods are the agents. In the land of Canaan, Baal was the agent of fertility. The wealth and fertility of the land, crops, livestock, and humans was attributed to Baal. Baal was worshiped through the fertility cult which had cult personnel like prophets, and temple prostitutes. The fertility cult had festivals in which sympathetic magic was performed to induce the gods into action. This magic involved cultic sex and wine consumption in honor of Baal.

The Canaanites were driven out of the land lest they influence Israel to copy their ways. This would violate the Covenant and Israel would be ejected out of the land because the occupation was based on keeping the Covenant.

There were no strict conditions of obedience in Baal worship like in the Covenant. Baal offered them release from 'Covenant Obedience' to indulge in sensuality while enjoying the blessings. In the end, the Baal fertility cult had such a negative impact on the Covenant that Israel was ejected out of the Promised Land and deported into the Babylonian Exile as seen in the book of Jeremiah.

Ten Key Terms

Yahwism; Covenant Obedience; Monotheism; Fertility Cult; Canaanite; Syncretism; Return; Babylonian Exile; Cultic Sex; Baal Worship

Chapter 1

Introduction

Worship is an inherent desire which is almost instinctive in human kind. Worship is an attachment to a supernatural being resulting in a higher self-definition of the individual. This supernatural being can be a man made object to which is assigned a supernatural and divine status. The essence in many instances is in the act of worship rather than the expected reward from the object of worship. It is more of a therapy than a search for material blessings. Without worship mankind is left to live at a natural animal level and incapable of rationally and morally interpreting his or her circumstances. Worship demands belonging and loyalty to that supernatural 'Being' (or beings) that is the object of worship. The Old Testament reveals how Israel worshipped her God Yahweh and her struggle to remain monotheistic amid peoples who revered multiple gods. This resulted in an existential struggle for Israel. Bronner (1968:1) observes that, 'The story of the Hebrew Bible can be described as a struggle to destroy the heathen deities of the ancient world and to replace their worship by the belief in one God. The Bible as whole can be regarded as a protest against pagan worship of every description.' Livingston (1974:19) also observes that, 'The centre of interest in the Pentateuch is the ancestors of the Hebrews and the beginnings of the nation. Other people are mentioned only in passing as they fit into the genealogies or into the stories.' This nation, Israel, is distinct because of its worship of one God. The ancestors of the Hebrews are prominent in relation to their devotion to their God. The Bible further reveals the conflict between the worship of Yahweh the God of the Covenant, and the attraction to the vegetation gods of the surrounding heathen nations particularly "Baal' the Canaanite deity.

Israel was not just a nation; they were the people of God, the chosen race. God called Israel 'my son.' Yahweh says 'I called Israel my son out of Egypt' (Hos 11:1). This son-ship is demonstrated in the Covenant formula, 'I will be God to you and you shall Be My people (Jer 11:4b)' (Rendtorff 1998:15). From the time of the election through Abraham, Israel was bonded to Yahweh through this

exclusive monotheistic relationship. The worship of this one God was Israel's badge of distinction and bond of union as shown in the credo of Deuteronomy 6:4-6, 'Hear O Israel, Our God is one God.' Bronner (1968:1) further says, 'Thus the story of the Hebrew religion could be told in terms of a tension between a spiritual conception of God and His worship, the hallmark of the genuine faith of Israel on the one hand, and the various pressures from idolatry which attempted to debase and materialise the national consciousness and practice.' The Old Testament was not written in a vacuum. The context in which the Old Testament was written militated against the contents of the Pentateuch. The Ancient Near Eastern society was the melting pot of complex mythology and ritualistic worship. Covenantal monotheism went against the prevailing context, norms and beliefs of the surrounding nations.

Israel was a nation that Yahweh raised in the middle of deep seated myths of belief in divine beings. By the time Yahweh called Abraham, the Ancient Near Eastern religiosity and the concept of their gods was already fully developed. The peoples of the ANE were content with their gods. There was as it were, no searching after other deities. The Summerians, Akkadians and the Canaanites to mention a few, were already established in their cosmogonies and theologies of their deities. Their temples were already fully functional with their rituals. There is not sufficient evidence to show that the nations of ANE were tempted to abandon their gods and worship Yahweh. The Bible portrays the struggle of the chosen people not to become like other nations but remain loyal to their one God as seen in 1Samuel 8:2, 4. Israel demanded for a king, 'And the elders of Israel gathered themselves together and came to Samuel unto Ramah, and said unto him, Behold, thou art old and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like other nations.'

The nations they imitated did not know or worship Yahweh. They had their own gods. Yahweh is the God whom Joshua challenged Israel to worship or forsake, for the sake of the heathen idols which their fathers were tempted to serve (Josh

24:15). Keeping Israel loyal to Yahweh the God of the Covenant was the core of the leadership call. Kings and Potentates received approval or disapproval in proportion to their efforts in keeping Israel faithful to the Covenant. The motif of exclusive monotheism is reflected in the Decalogue given at Mount Sinai, 'I am the Lord thy God who brought you out of the land of Egypt the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in the heavens or on earth beneath or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God' (Ex 20: 2, 3a).

1. The Covenant as Reason for Deliverance

When Yahweh sent Moses to deliver Israel from the Egyptian bondage, He did so based on the covenant made with patriarchs. This is stated in Exodus 2:24, 25, 'So God heard their groaning and God remembered his Covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. And God saw the sons of Israel and God took note of them.' Preuss (1968:40) says, 'Israel knew its God YHWH as "YHWH from the land of Egypt"' (Hos. 12:10, 13:4). As the important preamble of the Decalogue indicates (Ex 20:2; Deut 5:6), this confession about YHWH refers to the exodus from Egypt and the deliverance at the Red Sea as the decisive, divine action leading to the establishment of a community between Yahweh and Israel in both its outward beginnings and its inward foundation.' He is known as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Yahweh had allowed Israel to go into bondage because he was raising a people, a Covenant people who would serve Him only.

The act of delivering Israel from bondage becomes part of Yahweh's credentials throughout the Old Testament. The deliverance distinguishes Yahweh from the other gods. Infact there are two major acts that cannot be imitated by the other gods; the act of creation ex-nihilo and the act of deliverance. Yahweh is the creator of the heavens and the earth (Ps 33:6). Other deities have a claim to creation, but their testimonies are disfigured and impractical as seen in the 'Epic of Gilgamesh' and the 'Enuma Elish.' Israel knows Yahweh as the creator, but it

is the act of deliverance that makes Yahweh the God of Israel and Israel His people. The deliverance from Egypt is as it were the Calvary of the Old Testament. He was raising a monotheistic nation. Preuss (1968:40) further says, 'The event of the exodus was grounded then in Israel's relationship with God and its knowledge of God. The consequential and necessary rejection of foreign gods is based as well on this event. Yahweh's activity of salvation in the exodus event is the foundation of his commandments to his people.' The first commandment of the Decalogue which prohibits the worship of other deities encapsulates the core of the Covenant 'I will be God to you and You shall be my people.' It is a command of emancipation from the pluralistic idolatry of the Egyptian bondage. It is the *modus operandi* for the present; the worship of Yahweh alone. It is a prohibition and protection from the Canaanite gods soon to be encountered in the land of milk and honey.

1.1 Monotheism as Context of the Covenant

Monotheism cannot be fully understood outside the context of 'other gods.' The Covenant cannot be fully comprehended without taking into account the threat of the deities of the other nations, the worst enemy of monotheism. After a closer look at the invasions and wars that Israel fought with other nations, it can be concluded that the danger of extermination and extinction of Israel as a nation was not from the sword of the enemy, but was a direct result of apostasy and worship of idols. When Israel worshipped Baal, Asherah, Molech et cetera, the 'ichabod' which was the divine protection was lifted leaving Israel vulnerable and open to plunder. It is within the context of monotheism that Baal worship becomes a threat to the covenant.

1.2 The Slide into Pluralistic Idolatry

The book of Kings reveals Israel's royal slide into idol worship. Solomon had just built the magnificent Temple, when the lure of the other gods began to appeal. He dedicated the Temple to Yahweh as recorded in I Ki 8:15-61. Of note is verse

60 where King Solomon says, 'That the people of the earth may know that the Lord is God and there is none else.'

1.2.1. Solomon

Chapter 11 of I Kings introduces a strange turn of events in the life of Solomon 'But King Solomon loved many strange women, together with the daughter of Pharaoh, women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites and Zidonians, women of the nations concerning which the Lord said unto the children of Israel, "You shall not go unto them, neither shall they come unto you: for surely they will turn your hearts unto their gods:" Solomon clave unto these in love' (1Kin 11:1,2). Solomon pioneered the nation's slide into idolatry.

1.2.2 Jeroboam

In chapter 12 of the book of 1 Kings there is a royal introduction of idolatry by king Jeroboam. This he does by making two golden calves and introduces them saying, 'Behold thy gods O Israel, which brought you out of the land of Egypt' (1Kin 12:28). These are very significant words, in that throughout the Old Testament Yahweh introduces and identifies Himself as the Deliverer saying, 'I am the Lord thy God, which hath brought thee out of the land of Egypt out of the house of bondage' (Ex 20:2). This is a thematic preamble which is always quoted when Yahweh affirms His authority over Israel. By using the phrase 'behold thy gods O Israel,' Jeroboam gave idolatry a royal endorsement.

1.2.3 The Resident Evil

In the times before Jeroboam, idolatry in Israel was not a royal dictate. It was prevalent but it was not a state religion. Individual households practiced idol worship as seen in the story of Micah in Judges 17:1-6. The difference between the idol worship of the times of Joshua and the Judges and that of Jeroboam is underscored by verse 6 which says, 'In those days there was no king in Israel; and every man did what was right in his own eyes.' From the apostasy of King Jeroboam, idolatry became a resident evil in Israel. This is seen in the recurring

statement at the end of each monarch and can be seen in the words spoken against Omri, 'And Omri acted more wickedly than those who were before him. For he walked in all the ways of Jeroboam the son of Nebat and in his sins which he made Israel sin, provoking the Lord God of Israel with their idols' (1 Kin 16:25, 26). The same statement of condemnation is repeated against Ahab the son Omri, 'And Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the Lord more than all who were before him. And it came about as though it was a trivial thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat that he married Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and went to serve Baal and worshipped him' (1Kin 16:30). The sin of Israel which Jeroboam the son of Nebat made Israel sin was the institution of idol worship at Bethel and Dan (1Ki 12:27-30).

1.3 Idolatrous attachment

This is a brief overview to show that the Ancient Near Eastern peoples were deeply religious. They were closely attached to their gods. Israel was challenged by these highly venerated deities. Commenting on the peoples of the Ancient Near East Alomia (1987:10) says, 'Throughout the whole Fertile Crescent men worshipped in a very devoted way some gods and goddesses who were recognized as personal protector gods. This worship has its roots in the consciousness of the nearness of a god (ess) who stood as an assistant (helper) protector or protectress i.e. a guardian god or goddess.' Israel had been a recipient of the saving acts of Yahweh but they still chose to adopt the protector gods of the ANE forsaking the God who delivered them from bondage. It is this worship of the Ancient Near Eastern gods that posed a threat to the Covenant. Rice (1990:106) sums the pollution of Israel when he points out that one of the most flagrant violations and challenge to the Covenant and monotheism is the sin of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, in 1 Kings 12:25-33. For many centuries to come, Israel would live under the malady of polytheism as seen in the life of Israel's kings. The apostasy of kings will be dealt with in detail when the challenge of Baal worship is examined.

According to the book of Jeremiah the Covenant is broken. The cause: Spiritual adultery because Israel has espoused the foreign gods. Yahweh is no longer 'Our God is one God' (Deut 6:41). Even if Israel does not acknowledge it, the gods have won her loyalty. It is for this reason that Jeremiah wishes his head was a foundation of water so that he can weep for his people (Jeremiah 9:1). It is indeed ichabod for the glory has departed.

1.4 Problem Statement

The purpose of this research is to identify the areas of conflict as well as the areas attraction between the Baal fertility cult of the Canaanites and Covenant of Yahweh and Israel. What was so offensive in the Canaanite religion that the Canaanites are declared the anti-elect or enemies of Israel? The research will establish and compare the irreconcilable religious practices of the Canaanites and the people of the Covenant. How and why Israel failed to resist the lure of the Baal fertility cult. The study will demonstrate that it was Baal worship that led to Israel being ejected out of the Promised Land into exile as seen in the book of Jeremiah and other prophets.

Whenever there is infidelity to the Covenant, the most common cause is the worship of other gods. Murder, adultery et cetera, did not necessarily constitute a violation of the Covenant. These sins did not dethrone Yahweh. The sinner would still have a guilt conscience because he or she would recognize the authority and rule of Yahweh. The sinner could still atone for his or her sin through the sacrificial system administered by the priest. Idol worship would be a denial of the very existence of Yahweh. This would imply the absence of authority, and hence no guilt or wrong doing. Israel was elected and covenanted to worship Yahweh. The sin of David (2 Sam 11, 12:1-7) is a clear example. He committed adultery with Bathsheba and God dealt with him as an individual. It was not treated as a national sin and apostasy. However idol worship was national harlotry.

It is quite observable that scholarship has expounded on the election and covenant motifs. There has been in depth study on the concept of the election and covenant. There is no scholarly dispute on the fact that the Covenant motif is one of the dominant themes of the Pentateuch. Scripture and history on the other hand has attested to the ever constant threat to the Covenant posed by the deities of the Canaanites. One would superficially conclude that because of the numerous theophanies and wonders performed by Yahweh, the chosen people would have demonstrated unquestionable loyalty. After such wonders like deliverance from Egypt (Ex 12:40, 41), deliverance at the Red Sea (Ex 14:29,30), the crossing of the Jordan (Josh 3: 15-17) and the fall of Jericho (Josh 6:1-21), Israel should have trusted Yahweh like their forefathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Evidently this is not the case. Why didn't the covenant relationship bring complete trust between Yahweh and Israel? What appeal did the gods have over the chosen people that would make them vascillate between two opinions? Joshua concluded his leadership by posing the question, 'Choose ye this day' (Josh 24:15). This question would echo throughout the history of the chosen people. Infidelity dogged them like a shadow in the brightness of Yahweh's glory. This infidelity is demonstrated in Israel's regard of Yahweh as part of the pantheon. Lowery (1991:211) makes a correct observation about this syncretism when he says, 'References through the monarchy reflect the syncretistic character of the first temple cult. Yahweh indisputably headed the national pantheon but other gods sat in Judah's heavenly court. Indigenous Judean gods such as Ashera and Baal had rituals performed for them as part of the royal cult. And in accordance with the terms of international alliance, non- Judean gods were worshipped in the capital city's "embassy row" along the Mount of Olives opposite Jerusalem.'

Hence one of the key themes in the Old Testament is the call to return "*shuwb*" as seen in Hosea 6:1, 'Come let us return to the Lord. He has torn us but He will heal us. He has wounded us, but he will bandage us.' Israel should return as illustrated in the marriage of Hosea to a profligate woman Gomer. Jeremiah the

prophet was appointed to the nations and the kingdoms to call Israel to 'return to Yahweh' her God.

Jeremiah uses the term 'return' more than 40 times in his message to Israel as outlined in Strong (1990:875). A closer examination of Jeremiah's use of the word 'return,' according to my observation, can be subdivided in four main thrusts.

Return to the covenant (Jeremiah 11:10)

Return to monotheism (3:22)

Return to righteousness (4:1)

Return to the land (30:3)

The return of Israel to Yahweh is the single most important aspect of the relationship between Yahweh and His people. This is the call of the prophet Jeremiah. Nichol (1977:565) observes that Canaan was theirs by virtue of the Covenant relationship to God. By their persistent violation of the Covenant, they violated their right to the land. Captivity was inevitable, not as a retributive punishment, but as a remedial discipline and it fell to Jeremiah to explain the reasons for the captivity and to cooperate with God's plan in the experience. The remedy to the captivity was returning to the Covenant because all that pertained to their identity and welfare was embodied in the covenant. Returning to Yahweh would mean restoration to the Covenant relationship, restoration to monotheism, restoration to righteousness and restoration to the land. Thompson (1980:76) says Jeremiah has a profound concern with the covenant. He makes notable use of the Hebrew root 'swb' which occurs in the verb 'sub' to turn. He goes on to say in many instances where Jeremiah makes use of the root 'swb' the main emphasis seems to lie on the idea of "return", repent and turn back.

Kapelrud (1965:26) points out that, 'The campaign of Jeremiah against Baal and the fertility cult also becomes more comprehensible when it is realized that Baal is the designation not of a minor local deity but one who played a significant role in the religion of both the Canaanites and their neighbours.' What is it that Baal offered that he posed a constant threat to the covenant between Yahweh and His

people Israel? Jeremiah the prophet himself says, 'How long? Is there anything in the hearts of the prophets who prophesy falsehood, even these prophets of the deception of their own hearts, who intend to make My people forget My name by their dreams which they relate to one another, just as their fathers forgot My name because of Baal?' (Jer 23:26, 27). In chapter 32:29, Jeremiah again mentions the Baal problem when he says, 'And the Chaldeans who are fighting against this city shall enter and set this city and burn it, with the houses where people have offered incense to Baal on their roofs and poured out libations to other gods to provoke Me to anger.'

Israel was not threatened by war or invasions because Yahweh would defend them. The Covenant was not threatened by disease because Yahweh would heal. The Covenant was not threatened by famine because Yahweh would feed. In all these negative circumstances Israel knew that Yahweh would override and bring about good. However, the worship of foreign deities would lead Israel to reject Yahweh and put her in such a position that she could not claim Yahweh's protection and blessings. Through the Covenant Israel was guaranteed of existence and survival from generation to generation. This meant that even in times of exile or slavery they would remain a people if they did not intermarry or adopt the customs and worship the deities of the other nations. Yahweh would defend from the sword. Could Yahweh intervene and defend from idolatry? If He defended, could the relationship still remain ambulatory and Covenantal? Yahweh would not treat Israel like a vassal. The problem and the mystery is why and how did Baal win the heart of Israel? The research will seek to show how Baal lured Israel through the fertility cult and sensual religion. It will show how Israel forsook the Covenant and suffered ultimate deportation.

In describing the threat and process of extinction, Ortlund (1996:32) says, 'Danger unfolds in stages – first as a treaty of mutual advantage, then an invitation to share worship, the eating of a sacrifice made to god or goddess, and finally intermarriage with the Canaanites with the result that all distinctions may in

time be expected to dissolved. What begins as an agreement between friends eventuates in the extinction of Israel as a people uniquely covenanted to God.' The process of desensitization would render it difficult for Israel to maintain their identity let alone perceive the difference between the Canaanite social norms and cultic practice and the high covenantal ethical demands. In many instances the dilution of strong cultures has followed the same process and Israel would be no exception.

1.5 Aim of Study

The Old Testament is a record of the origin of peoples, the movement of peoples and the religions of peoples. Prominent among these aspects is the religion of the people. Other aspects are mentioned in relation to the people and their worship. The story of Israel is the story of worship. The Covenant is an agreement on worship. It is an agreement of a monotheistic relationship. The Covenant is an agreement to worship as seen in the first and second commandment. The first commandment reads thus, 'You shall have no other gods before me,' and the second, 'You shall not make yourself an idol or any likeness of what is in the heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth' (Ex 20:3, 4). Hence the rationale of this study is to show that the Covenant or worship relationship between Yahweh and His people was more threatened by the worship of foreign deities, particularly Baal, than any other sin that Israel would commit. The aim is to show that idol worship is the most offensive sin, because it denies the very existence of Yahweh the creator God.

1.6 Hypothesis

My hypothesis is that the combination of sensuality and worship is one of the most potent evils that militate against obedience to the moral code and the ethical demands of Yahweh. Sensuality beclouds the conscience and disarms the worshipper of the best intentions to live a moral life. The fertility cult of Baal and its sensual rituals disempowered Israel from living up to the Sinaitic code. The desert 'origin' before entering a lush green and

fertile territory influenced Israel to venerate the god of such a beautiful land. Yahweh religiosity is anchored in the blessing and curse motif. Yahweh is a gracious God who shows goodness and loving kindness but will not compromise moral and ethical standards in order to accommodate the wayward worshippers. He would bless them but this blessing would oblige them to obey. On the other hand Baal would bless them without the blessing and curse conditionality as found in their covenant relationship with Yahweh. How could the disobedient (in Yahwistic covenant terms) be so blessed and prosperous? Baal offered Israel blessings without moral obligation. *Israel was offered release from obedience.*

A brief overview of the immediate culture shock that Israel would experience upon entry into the Promised Land would be appropriate in order to create a context for this hypothesis. Israel had her own God, Yahweh the God of the forefathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Through His election and covenant with Abraham Yahweh had chosen Israel as His own possession as seen in this statement, 'I will be God to you, and you shall be my people' (Gen 17:7). Through this covenant formula, God would deliver, protect and prosper His people if they remained faithful. By being disloyal to Him, they would not only be subjected to the rule of other nations, but the gods of their conquerors would be imposed on them as an admission of being subservient. Hence they would in some instances worship other gods by force and not by choice. The Baals, unlike Yahweh who was invisible, were visible and touchable gods. They were gods of vegetation, fertility, and rain. Their powers were associated to the provision of the daily needs of their worshippers. Nichol (1979, 8:104) states that, 'The Baalim were considered nature deities who took care of vegetation and increase of cattle and flocks.'

Aaron's golden calf in the wilderness is a perfect illustration of the sensual and visual appeal of the idols. The Bible says, 'So the next day, they rose early and offered burnt offerings and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to

eat and to drink and rose up to dance' (Ex 32:6). In comparing Israel's association with the peoples of the ancient Near East, Livingston (1974:29) concludes that the Canaanites had the closest and most continuous relationship with the Hebrews. The Canaanites were the long term inhabitants of Palestine. The people and their land are referred to more often in the Pentateuch than any other people or land. Coming from the desert where nothing grows and there is no rain, Israel would be challenged in Canaan because of their inexperience. They knew how to survive in the desert where they lived as gatherers and not growers. They would need the Canaanite expertise in order to learn the art of living in a strange weather system. They were coming to inhabit a land of pastoral as well as crop agriculture. Being born and bred in the desert, they lacked the skill of tilling the land, and for this, they would depend on the Canaanites. The challenge however, would be that the training and practices would be permeated with idolatry (Ortlund 1996:27).

When describing the social contact of Israel and the Canaanites, Bronner (1968:2) observes that, 'In settling down to an agricultural life, the Israelites had to learn matters from the Canaanites and in the process they came under the influence of the sensuous fertility cults of the natives with their child sacrifices, depraved godlets, and immoral religious practices.' The worship of Baal was more appealing because there were no moral and ethical obligations which demanded strict adherence with the intensity seen in the Covenant with Yahweh. Of note is the absence of a strong concept of right and wrong in the worship systems of the Ancient Near East. Bronner's description of the Canaanite religious practice paints a picture depicting the gods and goddesses as immoral and violent. This is in total contrast to Yahwistic monotheism. Bronner (1968:6) further notes that, 'For the God of Israel had nothing in common with the mythological beliefs of the people of Canaan. We never hear in the Bible of the God of Israel having a partner, being married, eating and drinking, going hunting or having other human frailties or shortcomings. He is above nature and controls it but never part of it. Ethical concepts are not emphasized in the Ras Shamra

while they abound in Scripture.' Baal needed no repentance and turning away from sin. That, which was considered immoral and evil in the worship of Yahweh, was the very acceptable acts of worship in the Baal cult.

Some have argued that it is an overstatement to claim that Baal worship was a morally bankrupt religious practice. Baal himself and other gods do not seem to have standards of morality that govern their actions. The notion of goodness does not compliment godliness if ever such terminology was used. The vices of immoral lives like, war, sexual orgies, and killing for pleasure appears to be the lot of their lives. They certainly were not moral examples to emulate ethically and religiously (Bronner 1968:6)

The human conscience seeks for pacification whenever it detects deviation for the socially acceptable norms. The behaviour of those who occupy the higher strata of society is normally scrutinized by those below. Usually it is done to find an alibi for some deviant behaviour. It is worse in a scenario where the source of permissiveness is perceived to be from the deity itself.

Livingston (1974:129) describes the morality of the gods saying, 'The gods and goddesses were subject to all the needs, weaknesses and woes of mankind. They made mistakes of judgement and committed grievous moral wrongs. Some were killed and some were banished to the nether world. They were dependent on the human cultic system for food and drink. They could be manipulated by magicians. '

The gods would be angry if they were not appeased or given what they wanted. Their anger was not necessarily at the evil acts of their subjects because they were not gods of righteousness. The heavy emotional involvement in the worship of the heathen gods was more appealing to the sensual and lower passions of Israel. The worship was more of permission to fleshly indulgence than guarding against the same. The apparent absence of the sin prohibition and

moral code of conduct in the worship cults was more liberating to Israel than the Sinaitic code (the ten commands as given in the Sinai Covenant). Kapelrud (1965:66) points out that, 'The worshippers were active participants in the cult, weeping and lamenting when Baal descended under the earth and joining whole heartedly in the celebrations when he returned triumphantly after defeating his enemies.' He further observes that the climax came with his enthronement and the great sacrificial feast, at which there was boisterous junketing and wine flowed freely, the whole ending in unrestrained debauchery when the god's marriage was celebrated (Kapelrud 1965:66). From the above observations, it can be seen that Covenant was under constant threat from Baal because the cult and the rituals of Baal worship were of such sensual nature and appeal to the lower emotions that Israel would abandon the ethical and moral demands of the Covenant.

Baal was venerated as the provider of the fundamental basics of life. He was worshipped as the provider of rain, the fertility of the land, the fertility of the live stock and the fertility of the people for procreation. All these are integral to human existence and survival. Any deity that provided these was deemed divine. One would therefore hypothetically conclude that worship of Baal was a sensual experience which appealed to the whole person, giving occasion to uninhibited passion. This act of worship imposed a negligible ethical code of conduct if there was any. There was no call to repentance. Israel found it more appealing than the worship of Yahweh; hence they played the harlot and adopted the fertility cult of the Canaanites. In addition to that, Baal was visible and touchable by the representation of images. The prosperity of the 'land of Baal' was a challenge to the Covenant people. How could disobedience and blessing go together?

In contrast to the fertility orgies of the Baals, Yahweh demanded repentance and adherence to a strict moral code of conduct; the Decalogue or the Sinai code. In the worship of Yahweh the sexual passions were kept in check. There was also strict prohibition of representation by graven images as seen in Exodus 20:4

because Yahweh is invisible and untouchable. From the above information it would not be far-fetched to further conclude that if the worship of Baal was sensual and dramatic and associated with the fundamental basics of life, then it would be difficult for Israel to resist. Hence they failed to honour and adhere to their covenant relationship with Yahweh. Baal worship was hinged on one of the irrefutable laws of nature that aroused emotions overpower the reasoning capacities of the mind. Livingston (1974:158) is right when he says, 'The covenant insists that the emotional involvement of the worshipper be centred in the God of Israel alone. This is the emphasis of the first of the Ten Commandments and Deuteronomy 6:5. Idolatry was the threat of exclusive devotion and the most dangerous enemy of the covenant relationship. When applied to God, the concept of jealousy does not carry a connotation of warped emotion but rather an insistence on the singleness of worship of Jehovah.'

1.7 Delimitation

The Covenant theme is a rather encompassing motif in the Old Testament. This research will be limited to covenantal monotheism and the prohibition of idol worship particularly Baal, the god of the Canaanites. The Baal fertility cult and its impact on the Covenant will be explored. It is general knowledge that Israel was lured by many gods of the ANE but this thesis will focus on Baal, the god of the Canaanites. The research will show how the violation of the Covenant through Baal worship led to the deportation into exile as seen in the prophetic ministry of Jeremiah. Jeremiah rebukes Israel saying, 'They are turned back to the iniquities of their forefathers, which refused to hear my words; and they went after the other gods to serve them: the house of Israel and the house of Judah have broken the Covenant which I made with their fathers (Jer 11:10). The gods which Jeremiah refers to is Baal worship as seen in verse 13, 'For according to the number of thy cities were thy gods, O Judah: and according to the number of the streets of Jerusalem have ye set up alters to that shameful thing, even alters to burn incense unto Baal.'

1.8 Methodology

The methodology of research to a certain extent pre- determines the outcome. Various research methodologies have led to new conclusions on similar themes of the Bible. These may not be deemed erroneous but rather new discoveries within the inexhaustible mine of the scripture.

The study of the Covenant and Baal worship falls under one of the core theologies of the Old Testament. The Covenant is one the most dominant themes of the Old Testament. Segal (1967:29) makes a correct observation when he says, 'The chief subject of the Pentateuch is the story of the covenant with the first of the patriarchs Abraham (Gen 15; 17) which was confirmed with his successors Isaac (Gen 26:3-4) and Jacob (Gen 28:13-14).'

The Old Testament is the story of Yahweh and His people Israel. It is the story of the divine relationship initiated by Yahweh which is binding upon His people. Brueggemann (1997:418) sums this relationship saying, 'The covenant made with Abraham (and so with the Genesis ancestors) is one of divine initiative that is unconditional, and the covenant made at Sinai is one of human obligation. The obligation is to love Yahweh. This is the first commandment, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might' (Deut 6:5). Various approaches have been used to study Yahweh and His people and the Old Testament as a whole. A brief overview of the most popular approaches will be given.

1.8.1 The Historical-Critical Method

This section is intended to create an awareness of the dominant approaches to the study of the Old Testament and show some of the valuable contributions and existing challenges to the communities of faith. The most accepted hermeneutical approach is the historical-critical method. This method is accepted by many on the basis that it claims to be scientific and therefore frees the Scriptures from doctrinal encumbrances.

1.8.2 The Origins of the Historical-Critical Method

The historical development of this method can be traced to the 17th and 18th centuries, this being the period of the enlightenment. Davidson (2000:90) records that it was Richard Simon (1638-1712), a protestant who converted to Catholicism, who was the founder of the Biblical criticism. He continues to say later German scholars developed an approach to scripture 'from below' without reference to the divine element. It is this Biblical criticism that came to be known as "the historical-critical method. Other scholars picked the method up and expanded it. One of them according to Davidson (2000:91) was Julius Wellhausen (1844-1918) who worked on an approach of the historical- critical method known as source criticism.

1.8.2.1 Definition

Poythress (1988:32) defines the historical- critical method as 'a hermeneutical approach of studying the Bible applying scientific methodology.' He outlines the 'Baconian" scientific method from which the historical critical method derives its approach. He tabulates it as follows:

1. Gather data: Hard facts for which there can be no dispute.
2. Formulate a general (hypothesis) accounting for the data.
3. Derive predictions from the hypothesis.
4. Check the predictions by making experiments.
5. If the predictions prove true, give the hypothesis the status of a (tentative) law. Laws are always subject to further testing.
6. If a prediction turns false, return to step 1 and attempt to derive another hypothesis.

These are the steps which serve as the hinges of the historical-critical method. They have under girded most of the endeavours by scholars to understand Scripture. Scripture claims two dimensions; the heavenly and the earthly. Davidson (2000:94) adds more detail to the historical – critical method when he

says, 'The objective is to arrive at the correct meaning of scripture, which is the human author's intention as understood by his contemporaries.' Perdue (1994:19) commenting on the dominance of the historical-critical method says that, 'Historical criticism has continued to be the dominant paradigm for biblical studies including much of Old Testament Theology. Its questions and goals have continued to focus on history qua history, that is the determination of what 'really happened' and 'why.'

The historical- critical method employs several principles in analysing Scripture. These are dominant approaches which scholarship in general has applied in studying of the biblical text and there are several of them, but three will be mentioned. According to Davidson (2000:94) there is:

- a. The principle of criticism – (methodological doubt). The autonomous human investigator may interrogate and evaluate scripture apart from the specific declarations of the biblical text.
- b. The principle of analogy-present experience is the best criterion for evaluating the probability of biblical events having occurred, since all events are similar in principle.
- c. The principle of correlation- (or causation). A closed system of cause and effect leaves no room for the supernatural intervention of God in history.

1.8.2.2 Challenges to the faith Communities

As I mentioned earlier on, the Bible makes claims of divine origin. The elimination of divine intervention and attempt to divorce Scripture from the doctrines of the church robs the Bible of its authority and therefore reducing it to mere literature.

Perdue (1994:20) makes mention of this challenge when he says, 'With the goal of history being the presentation of history qua event, the Bible is at least in the first and primary instance, not sacred scriptures expressing and witnessing to the faith of believing communities; rather it is one of the many sources including

literary texts and cultural artefacts, for reconstructing social, economic, political and religious life of ancient Israel.'

This brings into question the notion of 'salvation history' which states that God has acted in history through historical communities. Any claim that there is such a thing as 'salvation history' should be based on the faith of the subject faith of the believer or that the believer has 'chosen' to believe. It is not because there is sufficient persuasive data presented in the Scriptures. This agrees with the principle of 'methodological doubt' which promotes the independence of the human investigator (Perdue1994:20). The community of faith has a challenge in that this approach to the handling of the text hampers the proclamation of the gospel. The historical-critical method handles the text in such a way that a lot of doubt is introduced (Linmann 1995:85).

1.8.2.3. A balanced approach

A balanced approach is to recognize that the historical-critical method is a useful approach that equips and allows the researcher to interrogate the historicity and literal accuracy of the Bible. The historical-critical method has enabled scholars to go behind the text, proving in many instances that the Bible is a reliable historical document. Furthermore a balanced approach, however, is also to respect the literal claims and original intent of the authors of the biblical documents. This is because the Bible is a product of the community of faith. It is not a product of philosophical minds like that of Aristotle, Socrates and Plato. Neither is it governed by the scientific laws of Isaac Newton, Albert Einstein and the like. Its authors claimed divine inspiration, 'Now the word of the Lord came to me saying.'(Jer1:4). 'And the word of the Lord came to me saying, son of man, set your face towards the mountains of Israel and prophecy against them... (Ezek 6:1). The principle of correlation or causation which is hinged on cause and effect, thus leaving no room for supernatural intervention of God in history is not compatible with the very origin and core intent of Scripture. The rejection of supernatural intervention plucks out the taproot of scripture and reduces it to

mere earthly writings. However, the historical-critical method is still one of the bench marks of academic study of Old Testament theology.

1.8.3 The Historical-Grammatical Method.

This research will follow the historical-grammatical method also known as the historical-biblical method. The research will take the Bible in its canonical form. But before I elaborate, I wish to echo the words of Levenson (1993:110) who says, 'The contextualization of biblical documents in the cultures in which they were written is not only the hall mark of historical-criticism, it is also inevitable.' This means any research method will have strong elements of the historical-critical method since the researcher has to investigate what lies behind the text in order to determine the meaning in the present literary form. It is indeed unavoidable to contextualize Biblical documents in the cultures in which they were written. Readers of Biblical documents are in many instances third party participants. They are not the direct recipients or addressees of the text. It therefore becomes imperative that cultural context be taken into account. What a term meant then may not be what it means today.

The historical-grammatical method accommodates both the historicity of biblical documents and the supernatural intervention of God and takes into account the cultural context. The method recognizes the legitimacy of the biblical claim of inspiration. The method also operates on the premise that the Bible is a product of the community of faith and hence cannot be separated from the doctrines of the church. To do so would be a violation of the source and original intent.

1.8.3.1 Definition

Davidson (2000:94) defines the historical-grammatical method as, 'The attempt to understand the meaning of Biblical data using methodological considerations arising from Scripture alone.' He further says the objective is to arrive at the correct meaning of Scripture, which is what God intended to communicate, whether or not it is fully known to the human author or his contemporaries (1 Pet 1:10-12) (Davidson 2000:94). In fact in many instances Israel understood the

prophets in retrospect. From the above definition and objective, it is already apparent that the two mentioned approaches would give differing conclusions even on a similar subject.

Davidson outlines the basic supposition of the historical biblical method; three of which are:

- Sola scriptura: The authority and unity of Scripture (the Bible both the Old and New Testament) are such that Scripture is the final norm with regard to content and method of interpretation (Is 8:20).
- The Bible is the ultimate authority amenable to criticism; biblical data are accepted at face value and not subjected to an external norm to determine truthfulness, adequacy, validity, intelligibility (Is 66:2).
- The Bible equals the word of God; the divine and human elements in Scripture cannot be distinguished and separated (2 Tim 3:16, 17).

The intent of the above outline of the methods is to create an awareness of the methods of studying the Old Testament. In view of the fact that this research is for the community of faith, the methodology applied will heavily lean on the historical-grammatical method. The subject under study is that of faith and loyalty. It is a research intended to discover what led the “chosen” people to violate the covenant by worshipping Baal. What appealed to them that they would disregard Yahweh’s miracles of deliverance and go after the gods of the Canaanites?

1.8.4 Research Design

The research will trace the historical origin, development of monotheism, and Israel’s exclusive covenant relationship with Yahweh. The research will examine the Ancient Near Eastern mythology and its peoples. This is because the Old Testament is a record of the origin of peoples, the movement of people and the religions of people. Other aspects are mentioned in relation to these people’s life orientations. It will focus on the Canaanites and the worship of their god. The study will outline the conflict between Yahweh the God of the Covenant and Baal

the fertility god of the Canaanites. The study will also analyse the significance of the First and the Second Commandment in the Decalogue. In the First Commandment Yahweh seeks exclusivity. In the Second Commandment Yahweh prohibits the worship of other deities. The lure of the Baals because of their sensual religion led Israel to forsake the covenant and suffer deportation. This is seen in the book of Jeremiah when he says, 'Therefore thus saith the Lord; Behold, I will give this city into the hands of the Chaldeans, and into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and he shall take it: And the Chaldeans that fight against this city, shall come and set fire on this city, and burn it with the houses, upon whose roofs they have offered incense unto Baal, and poured out drink offerings unto other gods, to provoke me to anger' (Jer 32:28,29). The exile is largely because of the provocation of Yahweh by the worship of Baal.

1.9 Overview of Selected Authors Comments on the Subject.

In this section a brief survey and overview of what some scholars and writers have said on the matter under discussion will be given. This is an attempt to establish the fact that the conflict between the Covenant people and the Baal worshipping Canaanites has been a matter of research for many decades if not centuries and that the debate goes on. It is clearly observable that the Bible is also a polemic against the worship of the deities of the foreign nations. There has always been tension between polytheism and monotheism. Yahweh called Abraham from the Ur of the Chaldeans, a polytheistic community in that there is no mention of the worship of Yahweh among the Chaldeans. (Gen 11:31; 12:1-7). The Ur of the Chaldeans was practically a land of idolatry. This is seen in that Yahweh first appears to Abraham who then becomes the father of the faithful, the first patriarch and pioneer of monotheism. Yahweh elects Abraham and his seed becomes the chosen race. The call to worship Yahweh also serves to show that Yahwism is introduced to a people already steeped in idolatry. Idol worship is already a resident evil.

1.9.1 Origins of Idol worship

Ancient Near Eastern stories of creation do not point to Yahweh as the creator of the universe. Since worship is based on creation, the Ancient Near Eastern peoples venerated the gods cited in the creation stories as the creator gods.

Apart from the biblical creation account, there are other creation stories like the 'Epic of Gilgamesh.' In addition to that some scholars have developed what they call the '*chaoskampf motif*.' Day (1988:1) defines the chaos *kampf* as a theory that says there was divine conflict at creation between God and the sea monster. The proponents of this motif base it on the following texts-Psalms 74:12-17, 89:10-15, Job 26:5-14, 9:5-14, 38:8-11. Day (1988:4) further observes that the Old Testament allusion to the sea monster is not Babylonian but Canaanite. The Ugaritic texts contain not only an account of Baal's defeat of the rebellious sea god Yam, as a result of which he was acclaimed king, but also allusions to a defeat of leviathan (*itu-litan*) twisting one. Job 26:13 refers to the fleeing serpent. This may give credence to the chaos *kampf* motif that the dragon could indeed have resisted the act of creation.

The *chaoskampf motif* was very strong among the Canaanites. Hence their god Baal had to defeat Yam the sea god before he could become king. The Canaanites would not doubt influence Israel to worship their victorious god Baal. Of the groups that Israel was not to associate with, the most detestable were the Canaanites. Yahweh promised to drive out the Canaanites and prohibited any intermarriage between Israel and them. There is a strict prohibition against the worship of other gods including the Canaanite gods (Ex 23:23-24, 28).

1.9.2 The Deities: Ancient Near Eastern Mythology

Among the Ancient Near Eastern peoples, the universe is not created and governed by one deity. Brubacher (1990:15) observes that, 'In Ugaritic myth ,

the universe is conceived in several major realms or spheres each ruled by a powerful deity representing an important aspect of the cosmos, and each described as a royal kingdom or province in the cosmic empire.'

This is a fundamental difference with monotheism whose foundation is on the creation of the universe by one God. Brubacher (1990:16) mentions Yam as the god of the cosmic water systems responsible for the sea and rain. Baal, whose name in Hebrew means lord, embodies the forces which support life on earth. His power is seen in the thunderstorm roaring from the Mediterranean with benefits of life giving rains on which the whole process of agricultural life in Syria-Palestine depends. The Bible lists some of the deities as follows: Ashtoreth, the goddess of the Sidonians, Milcom the detestable idol of the Ammonites, Chemosh, the detestable idol of Moab, and Molech, the detestable idol of the sons of Ammon (1 Kin 11:33). One common denominator of these deities is that they were attached to nature and part of nature. The changes in the seasons were not only a sign of their activities but of their presence as well. Their credentials of divinity were evident in the abundance of rain, grain, livestock, vegetation et cetera et cetera. If they failed to provide these essentials of survival, they were deemed dead.

These gods have been commonly referred to as vegetation gods. The aridity of Palestine and large part of Syria and the scarcity of trees, made greener trees look supernatural. Green trees were usually regarded as holy because the places where they grew were bound to acquire a reputation for having a special life force (Ringgren 1973:158). These deities plagued Israel for a long time. One of the cultic practices that plagued Israel was the Asherah pole and Baal. The Bible is precise when it says, 'And they forsook all the commandments of the Lord their God and made themselves molten images even two calves, and made an Ashera and worshipped all the host of heaven and served Baal' (2 Kin 17:16).

The fertility cult was the driving force in the worship of deities. Gerstenberger (2002:54) cites 'Bes'. He says 'bes' is a guardian demon of the bedroom and the

events of birth and childcare are connected with it... 'Bes' has thick legs between which a long animal tail and long penis hangs down. It is trusted that his ugly face will be a particularly effective deterrent to demons. He further says, 'In an Israelite family, before exile, there was always also the worship of a goddess who guaranteed family fertility' (2002:52).

This shows that much as they had public idols or deities which were worshipped under trees and temples et cetera there was also the 'household' worship or the domestic cult or private piety (as seen in Gen 31:19, 30-35, Laban pursues Jacob because he has taken the house hold gods). The act of having an idol of fertility in the bedroom makes a statement of deep seated loyalty. A god that dwells in the bedroom is deemed more effective than one worshipped at the shrine. The bedroom god is the trustee of the lives of the worshippers because he is present at the time of vulnerability and intimate intercourse. If Yahweh was the driving force of fertility, then the figurines could have been of Yahweh.

1.9.3 Baal Worship

In the pantheon of the gods, Baal was the most common object of worship in Israel. Baal had prophets and prophetesses. The prophet Elijah had a contest with the prophets of Baal on Mount Camel. Elijah asked a question that reveals the magnitude of Baal worship in Israel, 'And Elijah came near to all the people and said, 'How long will you hesitate between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal follow him.' But the people did not answer him a word. Then Elijah said to the people, 'I alone am left a prophet of the lord but Baal's prophets are 450 men' (1 Kin 18:21 & 22).

These prophets of Baal were men of Israel who had assumed the priestly office of Baalism. Baal is mentioned on numerous occasions in the Old Testament. In many instances when Israel is challenged to choose whom to worship, the choice is between Yahweh and Baal. Baal is identified as the chief Canaanite god. The books of 1st and 2nd Kings refer to Baal not less than 30 times. This reference

is in relation to other prophets and idols of Baal. The biblical account shows that Canaan strongly influenced Israel. But there is no evidence for a similar impact of Israel on Canaan.

Horn (1979:104) defines Baal as Ba'al (heb), 'lord' 'possessor' 'husband.' The name is found in Akkadian Be^l, in ugaritic and Phoenician as b~l , he further says the name Baal was a designation for a local god in the sense of "lord" in Baal-gad, Baal-peor, Baal-hermon. The Canaanites believed that the Baal's dwelt in holy trees, springs, mountain summits. Jeremiah is right when he says, 'The Lord said to me in the days of Josiah the King, have you seen what faithless Israel did? She went up on every high hill and under every green tree, and she was a harlot there' (Jer 3:6). These Baalim were considered nature deities who took care of vegetation and increase of cattle and flock on which the people were dependent for their livelihood. The Baalim therefore formed a pantheon. This was a direct contradiction and confrontation with the covenant whose foundation is monotheism, the worship of one God, Yahweh (Horn 1979:104).

1.9.4 The Covenant Formula

Where as Baal worship is about veneration of local gods and images, Yahwism is about the worship of one God. This is the core of the Covenant and the theme of the Pentateuch. Segal (1967:53) is right when he says, 'The real theme of the Pentateuch is the selection of Israel from the nations and its consecration to the service of God and His laws in a divinely appointed land. The central theme in this development is the divine covenant with Abraham...' This election of Abraham is a paradigm shift from idol worship to monotheism.

The exclusive relationship of belongingness has come to be known as the 'covenant formula' Rendtorff (1998:11) says, 'The assertion that 'Yahweh is Israel's God and Israel Yahweh's people, is one of the central statements in the Old Testament. It is expressed in a variety of linguistic forms. Among these, one characteristic phrase almost formula like in character stands out clearly, "I will be God for you and you shall be people for me."

Baal worship was an ever present and constant threat to the covenant formula. Israel in many instances, failed to maintain this exclusive belongingness as enshrined in the Decalogue. The very first commandment states that “You shall have no other gods before me” (Ex 20:3).

1.9.5 Kings versus Idol Worship.

From the apostasy of Solomon (1 Kin 11:1-11) kings rose and stumbled on the issue of idol worship. The test was their faithfulness to Yahweh and the eradication of idol worship. Solomon violated the first commandment. This he did with impunity disregarding the wealth and wisdom bestowed upon him by Yahweh. Then there followed the act of Jeroboam in an attempt to hold on to power. Rice (1990: 106) commenting on Jeroboam says, ‘Foremost of Jeroboam’s innovations was the creation of the national shrines at Bethel and the introduction at each of the new cult object a golden bull contemptuously called calf.’ The act of Jeroboam could be regarded as the official introduction of polytheism and idol worship. Jeroboam acted against the very dictates and expectations of the throne. Being the King, he reigned in the stead of Yahweh. Even though Israel had asked for a king and was ruled by kings, in practice the kingdoms were theocracies. Kings were representatives of Yahweh. In this instance Jeroboam is representing the wrong god or gods. This deviation opened the door for the adoption of other gods. It led to the adoption of Baal worship and the assimilation of Canaanite ways (Rice 1990:106).

In the centuries that followed, Israel’s kings struggled to eradicate polytheism. They were deemed good or bad depending on how they handled the issue of other gods. It appears that the Ancient Near Eastern Kings were the determinant of the religious pulse of their subjects. The king’s religion became the state religion. This could be because blessings were viewed as ‘national’ blessings and curses were viewed as ‘national’ curses. The gods blessed or cursed the nation. The allegiance of the king was a big factor in the blessing and curse

motif. The reforms carried out in the monarchy were a reflection of the syncretistic character of the first temple cult. These reforms were induced by the prophets who acted as the conscience of the nation, through the kings of course. The kings were not only the authorizers and implementers of reform; they were also the chief reformers. This is because the kings allowed a situation where Yahweh was reduced to a head of a pantheon when He should be the only God of Israel. Gods like Asherah and Baal had rituals performed for them (Lowery 1991:21). It is also important to note that vassals were forced to worship the gods of the suzerain states. Israel on many occasions was forced to worship the gods of the Assyrians, the Philistines and the Syrians etc. Some of the pagan cults in Israel, cults like human sacrifice were adopted as result of Assyrian domination (Villancourt1988:20).

1.9.6. Preliminary Conclusion

One of the facts that underscore the understanding that the Covenant was more threatened by idol worship than any other thing is the observation that no religious reform would be complete without the elimination of idols or the foreign gods. Monarchs who are recorded as having deviated from the covenant are those who permitted and participated in idol worship. Mweemba (2006:44) advocates that, 'No matter how deep they went into apostasy, the chosen people knew that idol worship was the most prohibited practice in the covenant relationship.' It is no surprise that the reforms, in fact any reforms were directed at the elimination of idol worship and any other cult that made them serve other gods.

CHAPTER 2

THE CANAANITES

2. Introduction

The Ancient Near East presents a mosaic of Semitic ethnic groups and peoples. Among these are the Akkadians, Sumerians, Phoenicians, Babylonians, Assyrians, Egyptians, Canaanites, Philistines, Israelites et cetera et cetera. One of these is the “chosen race,” the Israelites who emerge as a distinct monotheistic society. This automatically puts the Israelites on a conflict course with other nations whose deities are numerous. This conflict is a threat to Israel whose existence and identity is defined by the worship of one God, Yahweh.

Of the many people groups that Israel comes in contact with, the Canaanites are the greatest enemy. It is not Israel that identifies the Canaanites as the worst enemy but Yahweh warns and instructs Israel to have no dealings with the Canaanites because of their gods. The Bible would not be written the way it is, were it not for the presence of the Canaanites. The narratives of the Pentateuch have such a plot because of the Canaanite problem. Even the demands of the Covenant become distinct and strict because of the Canaanite contrast. One would even say Israel as the elect is more prominent because of the anti-elect, the Canaanites. Since the study focuses on how the Canaanites fertility cult impacted on Israel’s covenant relationship with Yahweh, it becomes imperative to objectively identify the Canaanites as a people. Who were the Canaanites? Where did they come from? What was their society like? What did they worship and how did they worship? Why were they deemed the anti-elect?

2. 1 Challenges of Canaanite Identity

The book of Genesis presents the existence or origin of the Canaanites from a genealogical perspective. The name Canaan first appears in the post-flood generations’ account of Genesis chapter 9. In Genesis 9:19 the word *nephats* (Zodhiates 1990:80) meaning scatter or populate is used. The text actually says, ‘These were the sons of Noah; and from these the whole earth was populated.

The use of the word *nephats* 'scatter' emphasizes the fact that whatever races or people groups that would inhabit the earth; they would be off-springs of Ham, Shem and Japheth. Day (1992, 3: 225) states that , 'According to the genealogy of the sons of Canaan, the Canaanites were composed of the Jebusites, the Amorites, the Girgashites, the Hivite, the Arkites, the Sinite, the Zemarite, the Aradite and the Hamathite. The statement and "afterward the families of the Canaanite," refers to the families mentioned above. These are all the direct offspring of Canaan the son of Ham.' The post-flood narrative of genealogies simply says, 'Now the sons of Noah who came out of the ark were Shem and Ham and Japheth and Ham was the father of Canaan.' In this brief record of the sons of Noah, Ham is immediately identified as the father of Canaan. In verse 22 Ham is again identified as the father of Canaan. It is Ham who sees his father's nakedness, but the curse seems to be pronounced on Canaan. This may be implying that Canaan would eclipse his father and brothers in prominence. This is of course evident in the whole of the Old Testament.

A further account of the genealogy of the descendents of Ham is given in Genesis 10:6-18. In verse 18 the last half says, 'and afterwards the families of the Canaanite were spread abroad.' The word Canaanite is used in singular. This is in line with the Old Testament style of naming peoples after a person or patriarch. This applies to the land as seen in Genesis 12.

Yahweh commands Abram to leave his country and go to a land that He, Yahweh will show him and there he will become a great nation (Gen 12:1, 2). Abram obeys the command and leaves for the Promised Land. This land is the "Land of Canaan as recorded in Genesis 12:5, 6, 'And they set out for the land of Canaan; and thus they come to the land of Canaan.'

The narrative simplicity of Genesis 11 and 12 is in stark contrast to scholarly complexity of scholars like Lemche (1991), over the identity of the Canaanites as we shall see in the next pages. There is no scholarship dispute as to the

geographical location of the land of Canaan except for the variance in the peripheral boundary demarcations. However, this does not distort the location of the land of Canaan. The question is on the ethnicity of its people and the periodization of occupation. It is also a challenging task to identify the Canaanites with precision in view of the fact that the Hebrew Bible does not seem to be objective in its account of the Canaanites.

Commenting on the Biblical narrative, Mazabow (1973:111) says,

As such the Biblical account of the Canaanites are of a decidedly polemical nature, viewing as they do the life and religion of Canaan not in an objective manner but rather as an abomination in the eyes of the Lord and as an evil which must be opposed and destroyed. This does not, however, minimize the value of these accounts. At present it has become evident as a result of archaeological discovery that the Bible narrative, far from being a collection of "pious tales" reflects authentically the milieu of the age of which it tells.

The polemical nature of the Biblical account does not negate or deny the existence of the Canaanites. It would be absurd for the Hebrew scribes to write volumes of polemics against a fictitious enemy. The fact that there is substantial writing about and sometimes against the Canaanites is in itself evidence that a people called Canaanites are a historical people. In as much as the Biblical account is polemical, attempts should be made to go behind the text and establish the historicity of the Canaanites. This is not with intent to discredit the Bible account but to establish the indubitable historical evidence. The Bible should also be treated as a historical record because the contexts of the Bible narratives are historical places. Most of the stories of the Bible took place in well-known and established places like Egypt, Babylon, Lebanon, Assyria, Syrian, Canaan, (etc). These are places recorded in secular as well as sacred history.

2.1.1 Absence of Canaanite Historical Records

The above paragraph seems to paint a simplistic view of the origin of the Canaanites. Using the historical–critical approach which seeks to determine what lies behind the text, scholars like Killebrew have revealed a rather difficult and complex picture of Canaanite origin and identity. Some of the challenges as mentioned by Mazabow (1973:4) are the absence of Canaanite inscriptions from the third millennium. This makes it extremely difficult if not impossible to construct a precise social and political history of the inhabitants of the land of Canaan.

2.1.2 Lack of Canaanite Sources by the Canaanites

The absence of Canaanite writings about themselves makes the reconstruction of their social and political history a difficult exercise if not a record of assumptions.

Other scholars like Wiseman (1973:29) concur to say, ‘A true picture of the Canaanites is hard to form because we lack sufficient records from an indubitably Canaanite source. There is nothing that can be recognized at once as Canaanite by modern man, nor is there any clear trace of any ancient distinguishing feature.’

A Canaanite source of inscription about themselves would undoubtedly be treated as primary information and more authentic than any other. It should, however, not be assumed that the non-availability of these records means that the Canaanites never existed. Scholars have to focus on other sources of information and that is archaeological and the records of other peoples with whom the Canaanites had dealings. Thompson (1976, 1:702) records that, ‘The earliest document referring to the Canaanites is an inscription of Amenophis II c. 144 BC reporting two campaigns in Asia. Among the war captives were 500 *Maryana*, and 640 *kyn’n.w*. The *Maryana* were a Hurrian military aristocracy and the *kyn’n.w* another social group, probably the merchant aristocracy of the coastal and trading centre of Syria and Palestine.’ The archaeological data

poses a challenge in that there is variance in the identity, dating and interpretation of archaeological findings. Furthermore inscriptions from other peoples may be partial and be written from a biased perspective in that the writers could have had their own objective. If the inscription is written from the conquest perspective it could take a 'minimization propaganda' strategy making the other group a non entity. Hence a lot of objective originary information would be left out.

2.1.2.1 Egyptian Sources of Canaanite Identity

In the case of the Canaanites, scholars have relied on 'secondary' information which is mainly Egyptian records. Commenting on this source, Mazabow (1973:4) says, 'There is evidence, however, even from this most ancient period of Canaanite history, of relations with Egypt. Vessels of Canaanite type have been found in the first and second dynasty tombs.' It may be difficult to prove Egyptian domination of the Canaanites by observing the Canaanite vessels found in Egypt. These vessels could be goods traded between Egypt and Canaan. The trade could have been by the Canaanites and Egyptians or simply traders who would buy and sell. Perhaps the vessels were tools of the trade used to carry spices. It is also possible that they were part of the taxes that the Canaanite vassal state paid to Egypt (Mazabow1973:4).

Other scholars agree that information about the Canaanites is largely external. Wiseman (1973:29) concurs saying, 'It follows that knowledge of the Canaanites and isolation of any traits as peculiar to them rests initially upon the witness of other peoples. The promise, possession, loss and partial recovery of Canaan form the central theme of Hebrew Bible, the extent of the land occupies some place in it, but the inhabitants little attention beyond the generality of their wickedness by which their extermination was justified.' Egyptian documents and other cunei form scripts are the main sources of information which supplements the Hebrew Bible, though in random fashion, the texts of Ugarit making the outstanding contribution (Wiseman 1973: 29)

The Egyptian source of Canaanite information is acknowledged by other scholars. Killebrew (2005:12) points out that, 'Canaan in the thirteenth and early twelfth centuries was defined largely by the imperialistic policies of the Egyptians.' In circumstances of oppression and domination it is usually the imperialist government that controls the media and other records. If the Egyptians controlled Canaan, then the scribes whether Canaanite or Egyptian were under the instruction of the Egyptians in order to capture data from the Egyptian perspective. It is observable that the Amarna letters seem to reflect that the economy of the Canaanite City states was under the governance of Egypt, the politics as well (Killebrew 2005:12) Other evidence of Egyptian domination is brought to the fore by Lipniski (2006:46) who says, 'The relatively high percentage of Scarabs with the name Ramesses III from tell al Far'ah, tell Gemmeah, Lachish, Bethshan are all rightly seen as further indications of Egyptian rule during his time.'

The above comments of scholars portray a state of affairs that shows that there can be no indisputable identity of the Canaanites from the sources outside the Hebrew Bible. Sources outside the Bible may not be used as hard evidence to critic the Bible because they are also probable. They may be used as evidence to question the infallibility of the Bible but not as hard facts. So far the consistent portrayal of the Canaanites by the Hebrew Bible makes it a record worth considering. In any case it is the Bible that has prompted the entire research about the Canaanites. There can be no complete research about the Canaanites without taking into account the record of the Hebrew Bible. It has been mentioned that the Bible has a polemic sting against the Canaanites, on the other hand, many scholars write about the Canaanites as if to punch holes in the Biblical account hence jeopardizing their claimed objectivity.

2.2 The Identity of the Canaanites

Scholars take an external approach in the process of identifying the Canaanites. In contrast to the Hebrew Bible which identifies the Canaanites as the descendents of Canaan (Genesis 9:18), scholars begin with the definition of the name 'Canaan'. Gray (1964:15) says, 'Canaan derives from Kinahna by which the Semites of Mesopotamia in the second millennium denoted the Syrian coast to Carmell Head; from it they obtained the much prized purple dye (Kinahhu) produced from the shell fish native to these shores.' Zobel (1995, 7: 212) says, 'The proper noun ke'na'an occurs 94 times in the Hebrew Old Testament. The various derived gentilic forms occur 74 times.' He goes on to say the LXX regularly renders the noun with 'Chanaan' 90 times and the objective chanaanions and its derivatives 64 times (1995, 7:213).

As mentioned earlier the absence of original Canaanite information poses a rather serious challenge to the work of identifying the Canaanites. This is seen in the statement saying, 'The meaning of the name Canaan is not clear. By and large, there are two schools of opinion. One considers Kanan to be a non Semitic loan word; the other thinks the word is Semitic or more precisely west Semitic.' (Zobel1995, 7:213). Obtaining meaning from the etymology of a word has always been a challenge. There are many reasons why names are given. Some are given as an acronym, while others are actually a mispronunciation of the original. A case in point is the name of the river Zambezi in Zambia. The original name is actually 'Kasamba bezi' meaning only those who know the waters can swim in there. The missionaries or explorers could not pronounce the name and mispronounced as 'Zambezi.' If anyone could attempt to dig into the etymological meaning of the word Zambezi, chances are that they may be way off the mark. Thompson (1976, 1: 701) states that, 'The exact meaning of the term *'kn'(n)* is unkown. Outside the Bible it occurs both with and without the final *n*. The final '*n*' is known in Semitic languages and also in Hurrian as a suffix, and as such it may be there.'

Ugarit is one of the Ancient Near Eastern sites that have shed a considerable amount of information on the Canaanites. As a non-biblical source, Ugarit has been extensively excavated to find archaeological data for scientific identity of the Canaanites. The information from Ugarit has for years been subjected to scrutiny by various Old Testament scholars Pope, Kapelrud, de Moor and many others. But like any other archaeological information it is subject to varied interpretation. Some as seen below have concluded that Ugarit may not have been a Canaanite city. Rainey (2000:213) states that, 'The Ugaritic records record *'ya'i lu*, a Canaanite (KTU2 496:7) just as they record an Egyptian, or a Hittite or an Assyrian. Furthermore, a fragmentary report on a law suit found at Ugarit (RS 20. 182 A+B) mentions the "sons of Ugarit and the sons of Canaan" as the disputants. Ugarit and its kingdom were not part of Canaan and its inhabitants were not considered Canaanites.' Day (1992, 1:828) concludes that, 'The etymology of the word "Canaan" remains obscure – if it is of Semitic origin, it probably derives from the root *kn*, to bend, to bow.'

In many instances the names of people groups have no intrinsic value. They are names given to people groups by outsiders who may attach a particular characteristic that is commonly portrayed by the behaviour of that people. There may be nothing essential about the name. Sometimes people groups are named from a "phonetic" characteristic of speech or from the name of a Patriarch. For example the Zulu tribe of South Africa derives its name from a founding Patriarch known as "Zulu Kantombela" (1709) (<http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/zulu>).

It is therefore logical that the Canaanites could not have called themselves Canaanites. Other people who traded with them could have called them Canaanites based on an observed characteristic or the name of a Patriarch like Canaan the son of Ham. The debate may not be necessarily on the title of the pre-Israelite inhabitants, but on the fact that the land was pre-occupied before the Israelite conquest. The debate revolves around the fact these peoples practised

a religion and culture that would lead Israel to forsake the covenant relationship with Yahweh.

2.3 Canaanite Ethnicity

The question of ethnicity has been examined by many scholars from various angles. Some of the scholars question the validity of the Bible narratives. Of interest is the statement by Lemche (1991:84) where he says,

I would like to stress that these lists of the pre-Israelite nations of Palestine cannot be considered historical documents from which we may draw information as to the ethnic composition of the Palestinian population before the arrival of the Israelites. It is accordingly, meaningless to invest much energy in studying the identity and history of the nations mentioned in the lists as if they had ever played a role in the history of Palestine. Although such discussions of the historical identity of these nations are quite common, the reason being that some of the names may be compared to some of the names of nations of ancient Syria in Bronze age, they have hardly anything to contribute to the history of the land.

There is partial truth in the above statement though Lemche takes a rather extreme disregard of the record of the Hebrew Bible. The term Canaanite does not answer the question of ethnicity and homogeneity of the people's that occupied the land or the territory identified as the land of Canaan. Are they Canaanites because they lived in the land that bears the name? Are they Canaanites because of their language or ethnical identity? In many nations people are referred to by the name of that particular nation's identity. But within that nation there are different ethnic groups. For example, in South Africa, like all other countries citizens are referred to as South Africans, however, within the borders of South Africa there are different ethnic groups namely the Zulu people, Sotho people the Xhosa people to name a few.

2.4 Canaanite Ethnicity in the Hebrew Bible

As mentioned earlier some studies on the Canaanites take an anthropological approach. These studies have heavily relied on archaeological evidence and have immensely contributed to the understanding of the Canaanites. Notably there seems to be firm conclusions. Indeed there are varying views on the issue of Canaanite ethnicity. Though the Hebrew Bible records the Canaanites from a polemic perspective, it is clear on the issue of ethnicity. Canaan is one of the Sons of Ham the son of Noah (Gen 9:18). Commenting on Genesis 9:18 22, Rainey (2000: 212) simply states that, 'Canaan was the son of Ham and grandson son of Noah. He became the ancestor of the people later called the Canaanites.'

Canaan's descendants are the Canaanites who grew into families and spread abroad (Gen 10:18). The Hebrew Bible demarcates their land saying, 'And the territory of the Canaanite extended from Sidon as you go toward Gerar, as far as Gaza, as you go toward Sodom and Gomorrah and Admah and Zeboiim, as far as Lasha. These are the sons of Ham, according to their families, according to their languages, by their nations' (Gen10:19, 20). The words 'by their languages' may imply that though they had a Canaan descent from Ham, they may not have shared the same language. If that be the case, then the Canaanites spoke a Canaanitish language. It is widely acknowledged that the presence of the Canaanites in the Hebrew Bible is due to the role they played, and that is blocking Israel from taking the promised land (Killebrew 2005:93). She continues to trace their origin saying, 'The middle and late Bronze Age inhabitants of the region, the Canaanites, were the ancestors of later age inhabitants of the region. The Canaanites were the ancestors of late Iron Age population groups, including the coastal Phoenicians, the Israelites located in the high land regions and the Trans Jordanians Ammonites and Moabites' (Killebrew 2005:93).

This indicates that there is no outright rejection of the record of the Hebrew Bible. There might be variation in the period of occupation but the Canaanite

designation and the conflict with Israel seems to be general knowledge. The presence of the Canaanites is neither a reconstruction nor a redaction. They may be polemically positioned by the Hebrew historians, but the evidence that points to their existence seems to be sufficient. The availability of archaeological evidence as seen in the Ugarit and ancient Egyptian artefacts, be it scanty, lends credibility to the fact that the Canaanites existed and could have come into contact with Israel.

Killebrew (2005:94) goes on to say, 'One can identify archeologically speaking a second-millennium material culture in this region that shares many features in common and forms a "social boundary." Thus it is more preferable to use the term Canaanite to describe this culture and the people who produced it and spoke a Canaanite language. However, this is not implying that Canaan or Canaanites indicates an ethnic entity. Based on the archaeological evidence, considered in light of the appearance of the terms Canaan and Canaanite in several second millennium texts, Canaan is used here to refer generally to the Southern Levant and Canaanites with reference to the multiethnic people living in this region during the second millennium (Killebrew 2005:94). The above comment may not be particular but it gives a general and working definition of the Canaanites. Ancient Near Eastern people may be difficult to tie to a pure pedigree. The rapid movement of migration poses a challenge for such a task. But that does not mean the Canaanites do not have a traceable beginning.

Kauffman (1972: 76) commenting on Canaanite ethnicity says, 'The population of the Canaan was ethnologically very mixed. Twenty people are listed in it in various combinations. Eleven are mentioned in Genesis 10:15–18, ten including four that are not in the first list are mentioned in Genesis 15:19–21. Of these seven appear in Deuteronomy 7:1, the Hittites, Girgashites, Amonites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites; and of these seven, six are named in Exodus 23: 23; 24; 34: 11 and Deuteronomy 20:11. In numerous passages there is a special mention of the Canaanites and Amorites.'

The geographical position of the land of Canaan made it attractive to habitation by many peoples. Moscat (1957:108) states that,

Canaan was a testing ground for military and commercial rivalries of the great powers between which it lay. Migrating peoples poured into it again and again for it was a region attractive in itself for its fertility, and had open access on all sides and offering further passage in all directions. . . it was open to Egypt, to Mesopotamia, to Asia minor and to the Mediterranean.

It is observable that Ancient Civilizations grew around river systems. Up north in Mesopotamia you have the Tigris and the Euphrates. These river basins were the cradle of great civilizations like the Akkadians, the Sumerians; the Babylonians et cetera et cetera. Down south was the Egyptian civilization established on the banks of the river Nile. The traders from the North would pass through the land of Canaan to Egypt. They would avoid the arid “negev” because of the marauding Bedouins. This made Canaan a highly contested region. It could have also made Canaan a multicultural place. The presence of the Canaanites in the Hebrew Bible may actually be very authentic. There is no doubt among scholars as to the existence of the Canaanites. This is attested by the Hebrew Bible and archaeology. Rainey (2000:214) states that, ‘It is not possible to define an entire group as the “Canaanites,” but a social entity recognized in the Bible as the “inhabitants” of Canaan (Exodus 15:15) is distinct from the Philistines and from the Transjordan Edomites and Moabites.’

A definition of ethnicity would form a base for concluding remarks on the Canaanites. The Concise Oxford English Dictionary (2006:490) defines the word ethnic as, ‘relating to a group of people having a common national or cultural tradition. It denotes origin by birth rather than by present nationality.’ The challenge in the identification of a single ethnic Canaanite society arises in the tribal naming system of the Hebrew Bible. Tribes are named after a patriarch.

Like the two sons of Lot Moab and Ammon. Moab becomes the father of the Moabites and Ammon the father of the Ammonites (Gen 19:37; 38). It therefore, would not be preposterous to conclude that these 'two tribes' spoke exactly the same language. Fontes (1997, 4: 27), defines *sebet* as rod, staff, sceptre or tribe. Both *sebet* and its synonym *matteh* originally referred to parts of a tree from which a staff or weapon could be made. The most prevalent meaning ascribed to *sebet* in the Old Testament is that of tribe.' The idea of *sebet* would then mean that Old Testament tribes were not groupings of unrelated peoples. Each prominent patriarch would be the originator of a tribe.

The word 'tribe' *shebet*, has a root meaning of a 'branch.' This illustrates the concept of tribe in the Old Testament. It may not mean a difference in language and culture. It may simply mean the name of the patriarch. The Canaanites therefore may not have had distinct ethnic identity from the other descendents of the sons of Ham. They could have risen to prominence because of their wealth and the god they chose to worship and the rather strategic land they inhabited. Bearing in mind that deities were basically family protectors, Baal worship could have spread among Canaanite families passed on from father to son. Their prominence in the Hebrew Bible comes as a result of Baal worship that proves to be a threat to the covenant of Yahweh and Israel. The Canaanite worship of Baal made them the anti-elect and long standing enemies of Israel as seen in these chapters, Exodus 23:28; Josh 3:10; Judges 1:3; 1 King 9:16. Pertaining to the argument on the existence of the Canaanites, the Bible seems to offer a more logical and consistent record. The many encounters between the Canaanites and Israel are more documented in the Bible than other sources. The historicity of the Canaanites would have been more authentic if they, the Canaanites had any documentation of their interaction with Israel. The current debate hinges more on probability. Hence the use of words like more plausible, most probable et cetera.

2.5 The Philistines

Another people group that are closely related to the Canaanites in terms of their relationship to Israel are the Philistines. The Philistines are also polemically portrayed in the Hebrew Bible. They were enemies of Israel. They intermittently oppressed Israel especially during times of the Judges and Samuel. In Judges 3:3-4 they are listed among the tribes that would test Israel's loyalty to the commandments of Yahweh. Samson, as reflected in the book of Judges Chapters 13,14,15,16 seems to have been raised to defend Israel from Philistine oppression. In Samuel 5; 6:1–21, Israel has an encounter with the Philistines when the ark is captured and returned.

2.5.1 Philistine Identity

Hindson (1971:13) commenting on the Philistines says,

In the Old Testament the ancient “sea people” are designated as the “Philistines” (pelestium) who inhabited the area known as the “land of Philistines.” Josephus calls them alluphuloi and the Septuagint refers to them as Philistim. The land of the Philistines also became known as Philistia. Some scholars say that it is from this term that the modern name “Palestine” is derived. He also states that this is to be identified with the Egyptian Priest and the Assyrians Palastu.

The Philistines were not part of the displaced people from the ‘land of Canaan.’ Hindson further observes that they became the ruling class and took over five old Canaanite city kingdoms and their influence extended in land to Joppa, Jabneel, Zerar and Sharaham (Hindson 1971:14).

The Hebrew Bible identifies the Philistines from the genealogical perspective. They are descendants of Ham the son of Noah. The Bible traces their genealogy saying, ‘And the sons of Ham were Cush, and Mizriam and Put and Canaan (Gen 10:6).’ It continues to say , ‘And Mizraim became the father of Ludim, and Anamim and Lehanim and Naphtuhim and Pathrusim and Cashuhim (from which came the Philistines) and Caphtorium (Gen 10: 13,14).

Identifying Ancient Near Eastern people groups is a daunting and challenging task. This is partly because of the peoples' migratory behaviour. Migrations are not usually massive ground marches from one territory to another. They are rather gradual and long spread in time and territorial occupation. In many instances smaller communities settle permanently as the larger groups proceed. Sometimes it is vice versa, the larger group will settle while the smaller proceeds. In some cases the route of migration may be infested with war like tribes, and this may result in the whole migration being captured and forced into slavery. Migrations are generally accompanied with conflict. The new territory is usually occupied and requires conquest before settlement. This may lead to the disintegration of people groups or they may actually be wiped out by the occupants of the new territory.

Dothan (1992, 5:326) paints this scenario:

'The *Pelitim* whose country of origin is unknown must have come to Canaan through the Aegean basin destroying the Mycenaean and Minoan civilizations. They partly came overland via Anatolia destroying the Hittite empire, Ugarit, Umurru, and partly by ship via Crete (Captor of the Bible Amos 9:7, and Jeremiah 47:4). It is highly probable that this process of migration left a number of Philistine settlements which later mixed with other cultures and could have lost their distinct Philistine identity.

The Philistine destination was Egypt. This led to a clash with Ramses II in 1190 that defeated them. He later settled the conquered Philistines, mostly as Egyptian mercenaries in the coastal town of Gaza, Ashkelon and Ashdod (Dothan 1992, 5:326). The Bible makes mention of the presence of the Philistines along the coast saying, 'Now it came about when Pharaoh had let the people go, God did not lead them by the way of the land of the Philistines, even though it was near; for God said, "Lest the people change their minds when they see war and return to Egypt' (Exod 13:17).

They were sons of Mizraim (Egypt) and of Ham. There is consensus among many historians that they came from the eastern Mediterranean area but their original home and migration route are uncertain. It is quite probable that they stopped at Crete, called Caphtor in the Old Testament (Hindson 1971:15). It is a rather daunting task for any scholar or historian to trace the origin and movement of a people group with precision. Most of the Ancient Near Eastern people can best be described as 'ethnic mosaics' because of the way they intermarried and carried each other into servitude in the event of war. Hence the most usual way of identifying them was by the name of the original patriarch or the land they inhabited. Other marks of identity would be the material culture. In many cases the migrating groups came with material culture that was distinct from the local culture. In the case of the Philistines, their origin is reflected in all aspects of their Aegean inspired material culture, including ceramic typology and technology, food ways, architecture, cultic practices and city planning. The clear break with the previous ceramic tradition of the late bronze II settlements at Pentapolis cities is sudden and startling, indicating that the earlier Canaanites were overwhelmed by a new population bringing traditions completely unrelated to any cultural tradition in the immediate or surrounding area (Killebrew 2005:15).

The Philistines could have overwhelmed the Canaanites by superior military prowess or they could have come with a more advanced culture that the Canaanites adopted. However, in view of the fact that these people groups were actually kingdoms. It is most likely that the domination was through military might.

2.5.2 The Philistine Problem

There is need to make reference to what is known as the 'Philistine problem.' Abram has contacts with the Philistine king Abimelech of Gerar as seen in Genesis 21:32, 34. Isaac also has contact with the Philistines at Gerar (Gen 26:1). These contacts are problematic because some writers believe that the Philistines come much later. Hindson (1971:17) however suggests that in the light of recent discoveries and clear statement of the text, it is most reasonable to

conclude that there were small settlements of Philistines in the land of patriarchal times.

A process of cross pollination between cultures took place. The influence of Philistines on Israel can be seen in some things adopted by Israel. The system of double and crossed wall with storage space within was borrowed from the Philistines. Israel adopted the military practice of “battle by championship” as seen in David and Goliath (I Sam 17:31 – 58). This is clearly of Philistine origin It was not the modus operandi of warfare in Israel (Hindson 1971:29). It is a rather natural phenomenon that people pick-up new ways from those they come into contact with by conquest or mutual integration. A nation may have superior military prowess but will, in many occasions, accept the deity of the conquered people. Dothan (1992, 5: 326) states that, ‘Very early the Philistines accepted the local Canaanite deities; dedicating temples to Dagon in Gaza (Judges 16:21-23), Ashdod (1Sam 5:2-3), and Beth Shan (I Chron 10:10-12) and Astarte’ (1Sam 31:10).

In my concluding remarks I would say if the Hebrew Bible concept of the tribe ‘*shebet*’ is applied, then the Philistines were closely related to the Canaanites. They are both offspring of Ham the son of Noah. The difference may lie in the choice of the deity they worshipped, Dagon. It should be noted that the life orientation of the Near Eastern peoples was patterned according to the dictates of their gods.

Of the peoples that had profound influence on Israel, both in culture and worship, the Canaanites, the Philistines and the Moabites are the most significant. For instance the encounter at Baal-Peor left an indelible Moabite mark on Israel (Num 25:1-5)

The Ancient Near Eastern peoples were in constant territorial conflicts either as a result of migration or imperialistic expansionistic ambitions. Some of these conflicts are mentioned in the Bible but largely from the spiritual perspective. The Canaanites are a very significant group in the Bible because of their perpetual

conflict with Israel both for territory and deities. The historicity, identity and ethnicity of the Canaanites are a subject of scholarly debate. Some perceive a conflict between the account of the Hebrew Bible and scientific archaeological evidence. There may not be records left by the Canaanites themselves but the records from Ugarit and Egypt suffices to legitimize their existence. From the evidence available it is possible to reconstruct the history of the Canaanites. Their role and status is made prominent by the conflict of their pluralistic deity system with the monotheism of Israel and their expulsion from the 'Land of Canaan.' The Philistines did have conflict with Israel but not at a scale like that of the Canaanites. The difficulty in precise identity of Ancient peoples arises out of the fact that scholars are far removed in time. This makes it difficult to find ample archaeological data. Furthermore, the effect of time and natural elements on the data poses a challenge in interpretation. Though an attempt has been made to identify the Philistines, it is well understood that they were not a major threat to the Covenant.

CHAPTER 3

THE CANAANITE PROBLEM

3. Ban on the Canaanites

The word Canaanite is almost synonymous with evil in the Yahweh-Israelite covenant context. In many instances it is mentioned for confrontation or pollution of the 'chosen race.' This chapter will focus on outlining the reasons why the Canaanites were viewed with such contempt.

Israel's deliverance from Egypt was not only from oppression, but was more of emancipation from the Egyptian deities. Israel was delivered to worship the God of their forefathers as seen in the speech of Moses and Aaron to Pharaoh, in which they say, 'The God of the Hebrews has met with us. Please, let us go a three days journey in to the wilderness that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God, lest He fall upon us with pestilence or sword' (Ex 5:3). Israel was delivered to worship her God Yahweh. This was understood by Pharaoh's servants as well. Pharaoh's servants also said, 'Let the men go that they serve the Lord their God. Do you realise that Egypt is destroyed' (Ex 10: 7b). This emancipation was with a view that Israel would worship Yahweh without interference and encumbrance in the land of Canaan. Would this dream be realized among the Canaanites whose worship practice was the antithesis of Yahwism?

3.1 The Promise of Land

When Yahweh called Israel's patriarch Abraham, He promised him and his descendants land as part of the Covenant. The promise says, 'And the Lord appeared to Abraham and said, 'To your descendants I will give this land.' So he built an altar there to the Lord who appeared to him (Gen 12:7). This land was inhabited by the Canaanites (Gen 12:6). Even when Israel is set free from the Egyptian bondage, they are to be brought into an already occupied land, 'So I have come down to deliver them from the power of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and precious land, to the land flowing with milk

and honey, to the place of the Canaanite and the Hittite, and the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite' (Ex 3: 8).

The phrase 'land of milk and honey' means the land was naturally endowed with fertility. It had good fertile soil and a good supply of water, rain and rivers. The mention of milk and honey implies that the land could, and supported large flocks of livestock. This is seen in the measure of Abraham's wealth, 'Now Abraham was very rich in livestock, in silver and gold' (Gen 13:2). Abraham refused to take loot or spoil after defeating the kings who had kidnapped his nephew Lot (Gen 14:21-24). Kaiser (1990, 2:316) describes the land saying, 'It was a land flowing with milk and honey in that the sheep and the goats gave the milk, while the nectar of the vine and work of the bees added more delectables, and those in abundance.'

The other implication of the phrase the 'land of milk and honey' could be that the inhabitants had well cultivated the land in order to realize its full potential. They were experts in agriculture. This potential in agriculture was in turn dependent on the weather pattern especially rain. If any deity would receive the loyalty and adoration of the inhabitants of the land, it would be the deity who provided rain. The Canaanite economy was heavily dependent on a good supply of rain. They knew their god Baal as the storm-god. On the other hand Israel had been raised in Egypt, a land that is not dependent on rain. They had spent 40 years in the desert where their lives were not dependent on rain. The land of Canaan had an environment they had never seen before. It had an economy, the agricultural economy they were not familiar to. If anything, they would have to depend on the Canaanites for orientation and that would include the rain provider. Kaiser (1990, 2:316) says, 'The mention of six nations lends credit to the fact the land was spacious. It also implies that there would be battle to possess the land. The six nations would indeed resist. Furthermore, Israel would not on their own take the land. Coming from the desert they would be ill prepared for battle. It would be the powerful hand of Yahweh that would bring them into the land as He took them out of Egypt (Ex 13:14).'

One of the issues that come to the fore about Israel's occupation of the land is the question of the authority of scripture and justice. Was Israel justified to possess the land? The authority of scripture has come under question in view of the dispossession of the Canaanites of their land. Kaminsky (2003:397) questions saying, 'How can one possibly maintain that the conquest tradition, which relates that God called the annihilation of every Canaanite man, woman and child is an authoritative part of scripture on par with other items such as the Ten Commandments or the story of the Exodus.'

Such issues have been raised from many quarters and rightly so. Many in search of the answers have suspected that such texts are insertions of the redactionists. This casts a shadow of suspicion on the authority of the biblical record. However, if one takes a closer look at the social temperament of Israel, one discovers that history and the Bible do not portray Israel as a war machine like Assyria or Babylon. Of course other conquests portray Israel as the marauding Hapiru of the desert. From the military prowess point of view, Israel would not insert an unfounded claim of authorization on something they were not capable of achieving. Kaminsky (2003:400) is reasonable when he elaborates to say, 'The most difficult problem raised by the concept of election in biblical literature is not the issue of why some are elect and others are not, how the elect and the anti-elect should interact with each other, but rather the notion that certain individuals, families, groups or nations constitute a category best labelled as "anti-elect." The anti-elect include those who are viewed as so evil or dangerous that warfare against them may include a call to as well as either the destruction of their livestock and other possessions or the dedication of these to a deity.'

It would be difficult to justify the dispossession outside the context of the Covenant and faith of Israel. Within the context of Covenant, one would say there is reasonable justification. Abraham was given the land while the Canaanites were there. He could not possess the land because his household was small bearing in mind that he was not given to rule the land but to occupy it as a home. The Covenant context suggests that Yahweh placed Israel in that land

strategically so that the rest of creation may come to know Him and be blessed (Gen 12:3). Other nations would come to know Yahweh as they passed through the land of Canaan on their trading errands. Would the knowledge of Yahweh make society better? Would the other nations lead a better life if they accepted the God of Israel and the Covenant?

Perhaps the adoption of the Covenant and its terms would curb some of the vices prevalent in the non-covenant communities. The ethics of the Covenant code would foster respect of the human right to life, right to own property, and regulation of interpersonal relations (this is not to suggest that other societies did not have ethical values). Some of the commandments like, 'You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not commit adultery (Ex 20:13-15) would without doubt bring balance of life to any society or nation.

Furthermore the issue of land is a complex one. What gives a society or a nation rights to a particular piece of land? Is it by being born there? Is it by conquest or by divine instruction? History testifies to the land occupation wars. Powerful nations have overrun and occupied the land of the weaker ones. The motivation varies. Some have taken land because of its natural resources like agricultural productivity, mineral wealth like gold, diamonds, oil et cetera et cetera. Others occupied new lands because they were fleeing from oppressive rule in their motherland like the Pilgrim Fathers who fled to America in 1620. The Huguenots and Afrikaners occupied South Africa under similar circumstances. It is only unfortunate that the 'godly refugees' became oppressors of the 'ungodly indigenous' who should have been blessed by their advent.

To the average mind, the notion that Yahweh would order the extermination of a particular people to make way for His chosen people is contrary to His nature or acclaimed nature. How would a loving God choose one group and destroy the other. This question has generated debate for which there is no conclusive answer. This is because the concept and the context of election may not be fully grasped by scholarship and the populace at large. There may be answers but

frankly speaking the real answers may not be researchable. May I also mention that this is a controversial issue that deserves its own exhaustive treatise. I consider the overview given sufficient within the context of this study.

Attempts have been made to dissect and categorise the Ancient Near Eastern people. This is an effort to understand their ethnic origin, social orientation and religious practice. Kaminsky (2003:398) suggests that, 'The idea of election presupposes three categories rather than two -: the elect, the anti-elect and the non-elect. The elect are God's chosen people Israel. The anti-elect are those few groups who are deemed to be enemies of God who Israel is commanded exterminate.' There is not much challenge with the elect because it places them in particular favour with Yahweh even though it brings obligation which is punishable if compromised. The non-elect also stand in a position of privilege. If they choose to enjoin themselves to the chosen people, they may share a hopeful future with Yahweh. The non-elect were referred to as strangers. There was special instruction with regard to strangers, 'You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt' (Ex 22:21). The debate rages around the anti-elect who are to be exterminated to make way for the chosen race Israel. The answer to this irreconcilable difference may lie in one's concept of Yahweh. If taken as one of the deities, there is no prospect of harmonization. If Yahweh is understood as the creator God, then the rationale in the Bible may be sufficient. This chapter will attempt to outline, within the biblical context some of the reasons for the extermination of the Canaanites.

My observation is that in a number of instances the overriding factor has been divine instruction. There are many stories, both indigenous and otherwise, about claims of divine instruction to occupy some piece of land. The issue of Israel's occupation of Canaan can be addressed from more than one perspective. From the faith perspective the Jewish historians can justify it within the Covenant context. From the imperialistic perspective, it is 'political evolution' the survival of the fittest. There is cognisance that the issues involved are much deeper than the above attempt to address the matter.

The promise of land as a gift of inheritance from Yahweh is mentioned to Abraham, Jacob and Isaac. These are the patriarchs of God's people. The land is notably mentioned in the context of possession by dispossession. Israel is to possess the land through conquest. They have to conquer the Canaanites and dispossess them of the land in order to possess it. The land is promised as a gift while it is possessed by the Canaanites, the Hittites and the Moabites.

The giving of possessed land to Israel is a statement that all land belongs to Yahweh and He can give it to whoever He pleases. It also means that the legitimacy of land ownership lies not in unilateral prowess but in bestowal and sanction by Yahweh.

Israel was instructed to conquer the present occupants of the land. This they would achieve because Yahweh would fight for them. But would they also win the battle of faith? Would their religion influence and conquer the religions of the Canaanites? Did the Canaanites discover that, where as they would succumb to the armies of Israel, Israel would through moral compromise lose their protection and blessings if they polluted them with their debased religious practices? Did they know that Yahweh would withdraw from a disloyal and adulterous Israel?

3.2 Why the Ban on the Canaanites

Abraham came to inhabit the land as a blessing to the families of the earth (Gen 12:3), not only him but his descendants would be a blessing as well. Does this include the Canaanites? Why does Israel start by exterminating the inhabitants of the land before becoming a blessing? Abraham is not given the land that he and his descendants may co-exist with the Canaanites. His descendants would have to exterminate the Canaanites. Abraham's act of erecting an altar to worship Yahweh serves as a land mark of claim and ownership of the land of Canaan (Gen 12:7). The reason given for the extermination of the Canaanites is because of their wickedness, 'It is not for your righteousness or for the uprightness of your heart that you are going to possess their land but it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord your God is driving them out before you, in order to

confirm that oath the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob' (Deut 9: 5).

Christensen (1991, 6:184) states that, 'In short the action of God is the fulfilment of an ancient promise to Abraham which incidentally also made reference to the iniquity of the Amorites (Genesis 15:16). The gift of God's land was an act of judgement on the Canaanites (v.4) as well as an act of faithfulness to the Covenant promise in times past.' Hence the possession of the land is based on the initiative and act of Yahweh. The method and consequences of possession would be Yahweh's responsibility. They were to feel no remorse or self praise for the conquest. The dispossessing process would have far reaching impact on the dispossessed but that would be for Yahweh to account for. This was the Deuteronomic understanding and interpretation of Israel since the land was a gift and an inheritance. Yahweh the giver would justify their actions as it was a blessing on their part while it was a curse on the other.

When Israel settled in Egypt there was no instruction not to intermarry with the Egyptians, even in the absence of prohibition the Bible only mentions Joseph as having married an Egyptian (Gen 41:50). According to the Dictionary of Theology (2000: 226) on Patriarchal prohibition of intermarriage it says,

We might conclude that it grew out of the hostility toward the Canaanite fertility cult arguing the wife, standing in special need of blessing bestowed by the deities responsible for a multitude of offspring, was much more vulnerable than her husband to the danger of slipping into worship of these Canaanite gods. The Canaanite fertility concept was hinged on a strong belief that the fertility of the land, the livestock and people was a direct blessing of the gods. Human procreation was venerated by the Ancient Near Eastern peoples as a 'mystical mystery of life.

The increase in population was owed to the Canaanite gods. In contrast to the Egyptian settlement, Yahweh prohibited Israel from association and integration with the inhabitants of the land of Canaan, particularly the Canaanites. This

would not be accomplished by the erection of walls between Israel and the Canaanites. The Canaanites were to be driven out of the land.

The inheritance of the land of milk and honey seems to follow a process of prohibition, protection and eviction. Israel is prohibited from going after the gods of the other nations. She is protected from the gods of the nation by driving out the nations. When Israel goes after other gods and fails to drive out the other nations, she is evicted into exile. The Old Testament is a battle ground for the gods. The wars between nations are actually battles of the gods. Prohibition and protection seems to be Yahweh's strategy to avoid the pollution of the Covenant community.

3.2.1 The Prohibition against Foreign Gods

When the patriarch Jacob returns to the land of his fore fathers, Yahweh meets him at Bethel, 'Then God said to Jacob, "Arise go up to Bethel, and live there; and make an altar there to God who appeared to you when you fled from your brother Esau" (Gen 35:1). The instruction to make an altar there is a command to worship Yahweh since an altar is sacred structure of worship. The action performed by Jacob in obeying the instruction shows that Yahweh can not be served with other gods. Jacob knows they cannot come to the altar with foreign gods. He gives this instruction, 'Put away the foreign gods which are among you, and purify yourselves, and change your garments; and let us go to Bethel; and I will make an altar there to God, who appeared to me in the day of my distress and has been with me wherever I have gone' (Gen 35: 2,3). Jacob is at this time introducing his household to the one God who has been with him. He is shifting their allegiance from the gods of Mesopotamia to Yahweh. The act of putting away foreign gods that Jacob had not been strictly worshipping Yahweh the God of his forefathers Abraham and Isaac. At this juncture in life Jacob and his family were making a transition from the old life of many gods to the worship of Yahweh only (Sailhamer 1990, 1:217). However his wives did not share his monotheistic views. The purification process was a preparation to meet this one God. One of

the major elements in the purification process was the forsaking of foreign gods because their worship was considered an impurity. It should also be noted that Jacob did not grind the idols into powder as Moses did to the golden calf in the wilderness. Jacob just buried the gods. The significance of burying is not known but it could mean the death of polytheism (Hamilton 1995, 2: 317). Wenham (1994, 2:323) states that, 'Worship of other gods was always incompatible with serving the God who said, 'Thou shalt have no gods before me' (Exodus 20:3). Commenting on the earrings it says, 'It could be that burying earrings with the foreign gods expressed complete determination to dispose of idols and any material that could be used to replace them' (Wenham 1994,2:323).

This is the beginning of the emergence of monotheism. The patriarch Jacob and his descendants shall not worship any other god except the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Ex 3:6). Israel is prohibited from mixing with other people because of their gods. It is not necessarily the people but their worship practices. Hence the word gods appears at almost every warning. Throughout the Pentateuch, there is a strong prohibition against the worship of other deities other than Yahweh. In the process of deliverance from Egypt, Yahweh executes prohibitive judgements against the gods of Egypt (Ex 12:12). The execution of judgements on the gods of Egypt is a prohibition against their worship. Gispert (1982:119) comments to say, 'In the case of some of the plagues this religious significance can readily be seen; the entire background of the plagues was the battle between the Lord God of Israel and the gods of the Egyptians who had to be exposed in their non existence and impotence.'

After the crossing of the sea, in the song of Miriam, Israel sings praises exalting Yahweh while diminishing the gods of the Egyptians (Ex 15:11). The Biblical account of the slavery of Israel in Egypt does not show that there was any religious oppression. It is common knowledge that what are recorded are the forced labour and the Egyptian attempt to exterminate Hebrew male children. This was intended to eventually eliminate the Hebrew people. They were to be thrown into the river Nile. It is not clear whether they were being sacrificed, since

the Nile River is one of the Egyptian gods or it was just an act of clearing away. Kaiser (1990, 2: 372) comments to say, 'Indeed "all the gods of Egypt" would be judged by this final plague of God. Obviously those deities whose representatives were linked with beasts were dealt direct blows – the bulls, cows, jackals, goats, baboons, lions, rams etc. With the sudden death of representatives there would be little doubt that it would be interpreted as a direct blow to the gods of Egypt themselves.'

The existence of Israel was hinged on the worship of one God Yahweh. The worship of other gods would be a reversal of the nation building process initiated through Abraham by a covenant. The process included a 400 year detour into Egypt. There is no explicit mention of Israel adopting Egyptian gods except the foods (Ex 16:3). The threat of worshipping other gods did not lie in the land of slavery; it lay in the land of milk and honey, the Promised Land. In slavery as seen in the Egyptian experience, Israel kept her distinct identity. Worship usually becomes a point of resistance for the enslaved. It becomes as it were the only solace. But in the land of freedom there is laxity. If Israel was polluted in Egypt Yahweh would still move them out of danger by relocating them. He could, as He did, purify them through a process of wandering like the desert experience. However, the pollution in the Promised Land where they were to be permanent dwellers could be permanent as well. It was therefore imperative that there should be no contaminating contact between Israel and the Canaanites. Yahweh did not caution on the dangers of association with the Canaanites, He banned and prohibited it. The Canaanite Baal fertility cult would disorient Israel from trusting Yahweh as the provider of rain, harvest, increase of livestock and children. They would emulate the Canaanites who had all these things but were not Covenant people and did not practice covenant obedience.

3.2.2 Prohibition in the Decalogue

The Decalogue, which is the code of the Covenant, begins with a prohibitive commandment, 'Thou shalt have no other gods before me' (Ex 20:3). Newsome

(1998:77) observes that, 'Many ancient people believed that each nation owed special allegiance to a particular god who served as a patron and protector of that nation: for example Dagon for the Philistines and Baal for the Canaanites. Because of this national linkage, gods were considered to be territorial.' The second commandment prohibits the making of an idol, not even a likeness of what is in heaven or on the earth or in the sea (Ex 20:4). The third commandment is a clear prohibition against worship of other deities and a warning of the wrath of Yahweh up to the fourth generation of those who worship idols (Ex 20:5).

Durham (1987, 3:286) comments to say

The Second Commandment has to do with Yahweh Himself and His gift of His presence to Israel. Israelites are forbidden to make images for the worship of Yahweh because He is Yahweh, as Leviticus 19:4 says. Nothing created can serve to represent Him, not even in the whole range of created order from top to bottom and in the realms of mythopoeic creatures, in heaven above and in the waters below the earth because Yahweh has made everything and every being. He is in a way in them all, but what is more important He is beyond all. He is "The one who always is." Yahweh the "I am" who is present with them. No image conceivable to them could serve to represent Him. They must worship Him as He is not as they would envision or would like Him to be.

The names of the other gods were not to be mentioned in Israel, 'Now concerning everything I have said to you, be on your guard, and do not mention the name of other gods nor let them be heard from your mouth' (Ex 23: 13). In most instances the name of a god is mentioned in an invocation summoning the god to action to aid in dire circumstances. It may not be mentioned in the everyday casual talk. Since the Israelites were about to cross into the Promised Land, where only the name of Yahweh is to be worshipped, they must desist from the mention of the names of other deities. They should not be named in an oath,

prayer or even in song. This would jeopardize their future in the land of Canaan (Gispén 1982:230). There is further prohibition in Deuteronomy 6:14, 'You shall not follow other gods, any of the gods of the peoples who surround you? Even inquiring is banned, 'Beware that you are not ensnared to follow them after they are destroyed before you, and that you inquire after their gods, saying "How do these nations serve their gods that I may also do likewise" (Deuteronomy 12:30).

There are numerous instances where Yahweh explicitly forbids Israel to worship other gods like in Deuteronomy 12:31; 28:14, 36; 29:17, 18; 32:16, 17 Josh 24:15; Judges 10:13 1 Kings 9:9, 1 Chronicles 5:25.

3.2.3 Protection of Monotheism

The Canaanite deity pluralism was an abomination to Yahwism because it struck at the root of monotheism, 'Here O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one.' If the idols are not eliminated, the foundations of Yahwism will be shaken. There are two verbs often used in relation to the breaking down of the idols. In the *Zodhiates* (1990:1753) *nathats* is used for the literal breaking down of the idols. They were to be physically pounded not just overthrown in a sense of proving that they were just objects without life and power and divinity. To try and prove that they were just mere objects would still leave a snare *mowqash* – a snare or an entanglement to Israel. The pillars were to be smashed *shabar* – broken to pieces in a sense of perishing.

Concerning the taking of land, Yahweh was not grabbing land He was eliminating pollution. Israel would take *nachal* (*Zodhiates* 1990:1748) the land as an inheritance from Yahweh. They had no claim to the land except receiving it as a heritage from the Lord. The conquest was simply a means. The land was not a trophy won in a competition but an inheritance of Grace.

In as much as the ban on the Canaanites was thorough and permanent throughout the generation of Israel, Baal worship persisted in Israel. The prophets denounced Baal worship. In 1 Kings Chapter 17 and 18 we find a

drought inflicted on Israel. Yahweh brings a drought to show that Baal, the rain god is no god at all. He fails to end the drought by bringing a storm since he is a storm god. The drought climaxes in a contest between Elijah and the prophets of Baal. Who will bring the fire? Is it Baal or Yahweh? Baal loses the contest and his prophets are slain as well (1 Kin 18:40). Another serious encounter between Baal and Israel is found in 2 Kings 10: 18–28. Jehu eradicates Baal out of Israel. He pretends to be a worshipper of Baal and gathers all the prophets of Baal for sacrifice only to slaughter all of them and smash their pillars.

Commenting on the extermination of the Canaanites, Hawk (2000:24) says, 'Against the integrity of Israel, the peoples of the land signify the opposing concept of plurality, the "many" in contrast to the Israelite "One." This threat is so potent that Deuteronomy mandates their annihilation. In a sense the peoples of Canaan threaten Israel much more by their difference than by their walled cities or iron chariots.

The worship of many gods would lead to the disintegration of Israel. It might lead to war among the twelve tribes and eventually the extinction of the chosen race. The worship of Yahweh was the bond of union and badge of distinction. Kaufmann (1985:76) comments to say, 'The land was given to Israel as their home and not for them to rule over its people. The Israelites were commanded to expel or to extirpate the peoples of the land of Canaan. They were not to let them remain in the land, nor make any treaty with them, not even a treaty of tribute.' Israel was not even allowed to make tributaries of the nations of the land of Canaan. The Canaanites would with time still over power Israel. The Canaanites would be too culturally established that the new comers would be no match. They could subdue and make vassals of distant nations with which they would not have direct contact and therefore no real risk of pollution. It is true that because of Israel's ethnic incapacity, they would not conquer the land rapidly. They have to do it piece by piece and little by little. The determining factor would be the ethnic power of the Israelites in overthrowing the people and occupying the land (Kaufmann 1972:78).

I am keenly aware that Israel left Egypt devoid of nationhood but a distinct people. Israel would not develop into a nation because the Egyptians would not entertain any sign of self-governance on the part of Israel for they were slaves. In fact the very numbers of Israel were kept under control lest they become too numerous (Ex 1:10). Israel, in the early stage of development is frequently referred to as the 'people of God.' Because of the numerical insignificance, it was important for Israel to settle as a distinct people. This would allow for the development of nationhood and national faith. Israel would then avoid the risk of being absorbed into other cultures and worship practices. With an established national identity and faith practice, Israel would then absorb other nations into her culture and worship. Other nations would then be enjoined to Israel without the risk of dilution.

Mills (2006:29) makes the following observation, 'But what made Israel stable and unique, and facilitated its takeover of power in the area was its religious faith. Religious ideology made a harmonious whole with social and political systems and so created a new culture, that of "mono-Yahwism." Israelite society developed from Israelite religion. 'The inhabitants of the land of Canaan and their many gods were a serious threat to mono-Yahwism. Monotheism would not prosper amidst the pluralism of the Canaanites. Throughout the Old Testament Israel struggled to maintain a pure monotheistic relationship with Yahweh. The lure of the Canaanites deities posed a serious challenge.

How did monotheism emerge? Did Israel understand this monotheistic relationship? Were the demands of monotheism too stringent? Did they understand the conditionality of their occupation of the land? The observations by Morham (2004:62) has the following observation,

In no case was Israel to conform, but in every case they were to conform to God's statutes. Put succinctly, these framing statutes deal with external boundaries around Israel's culture. These laws were to contribute to Israel's identity vis-à-vis her neighbours. If an alien was to be admitted into

the culture, they would only be allowed on condition that they did not violate the external boundaries (Lev 18:26; 20:2). Penalties for violation were personal death – (20:2, 9-16) and national forfeiture of the land which led to national death. Within the context of the Exodus narrative, Israel is here portrayed as entering a physical boundary that by God's design had a cultural boundary which was invisibly superimposed upon it. Exit from the cultural boundary led to exit from the physical.

Social–emotional interactions are one of the most difficult sociological dynamics that can ever be controlled or governed. Social interaction has no boundaries as it were. Only proximity is the determining factor, the closer the people are to each other, the more likely they cross pollinate. The further apart they are, the less the chance of mutual interaction. It would have been difficult for Israel to resist this dynamic while interacting with the anti–elect, the Canaanites. While the cultural boundaries existed in the mind of Israel and the consequence of crossing it, to the Canaanites Israel was a desert people who needed to be absorbed and cultured in the civilized Canaanite life style. Israel saw an enemy in the anti–elect but the Canaanites saw a people in need. At a surface level, the Canaanite lifestyle would be appealing because of its non-ethical and non–commandment practices. The most reasonable protection would be physical separation that would automatically result in cultural separation.

One of the non–ethical practices of the Canaanites was their sexual orientations. Contrary to the Canaanite sexual orientation, Israel had strict sexual laws that were deemed life giving. Morham (2004:79) explains that, 'Sexuality was thus not only a constituent part of life, as it also functioned as a metaphor of life: its fruit was a blessing, so it was part of living; its violation produced a curse, so it was part of dying. Loving happened in the boundaries of familial religious and national structures, dying happened outside.'

From the Canaanite perspective, sexual improprieties were part of the social milieu of life. They were not a threat to the nation. These practices were actually

in conformity to the Baal fertility cult. They were part of the rituals of life. On the other hand sexual violations would mean the death and expulsion of Israel. Disassociation was therefore a matter of life and death to Israel as a nation. Whether Israel itself as a nation, cherished the distinct identity, is another issue. But because of the election–covenant relationship, sexual violations would reduce Israel to the status of the non–elect. If Israel adopted the Baal worship and the fertility cult, she would deny the absolute divinity of Yahweh. Israel would be released from covenant obedience. The deliverance from Egypt would no longer be a significant ‘salvation act’ of Yahweh, and Yahweh would lose His credentials of having delivered His people.

The Canaanites were prosperous people. They lived in walled cities; they had vineyards and all kinds of fruit. Livestock was in abundance, the land flowed with milk and honey. They did not worship Yahweh neither did they know Him. They worshipped Baal who as far as they were concerned was the source of their prosperity. Israel would be tempted to access these visible blessings of Baal. To do this they would have to worship like the Canaanites. There would be a complete departure from the obedience required by the Covenant as a condition for blessings of rain and harvest. The Canaanites had existed for centuries without the knowledge of Yahweh and had prospered. Their prosperity was not on the condition of obedience as required by the Ten Commandments. The Canaanites would use the long years of prosperity to convince Israel to reject Yahweh and the Covenant. The only protection was to drive the Canaanites out so that they would not practice their worship as a nation. The absence of the Canaanites and their gods would leave Israel to practice their monotheism without the tension of comparison. It is for this reason that the origin and development of monotheism should be carefully traced and analysed.

3.3 Protection by Extermination

The prohibition of worshipping Baal was accompanied by protection. This protection would not come by the subjection of the people in the land of Canaan

to the imperial authority of Israel. Neither would they be adopted into the faith of Israel. Gispén (1982:234) further observes that Israel could not adopt the religions and cultic practice or the morals of the nations that Yahweh had mentioned. The commandment to exterminate and to destroy the sacred stones had to be carried out relentlessly. Israel would only be protected by the extermination of Canaanites, hence the instruction to 'drive out' the inhabitants of Canaan.

Among the numerous passages which instructs Israel to drive out the Canaanites, there are three major ones in the Pentateuch and these are, Exodus 23:24 –33; 34:11 – 17, Numbers 33:50 – 56, and Deuteronomy 7: 1 – 5; 20: 10 – 18.

Israel is instructed to destroy them, 'You shall not worship their gods, nor serve them, nor do according to their deeds, but you shall utterly overthrow them and break their sacred pillars in pieces' (Exodus 23:24). Commenting on the Exodus 23:23-34, Kaiser (1990, 3:446) states that, 'These nations, God's angel would "wipe out," i.e. remove from their national not necessarily personal existence, for surely David had Hittites in his army (2 Sam 23:29) and was friendly with a Jebusite (2 Sam 24:18-24). It was the worship and practices of these nations that was strictly forbidden. Instead Israel was to demolish these gods and smash their "sacred stones." These *massebot* were free standing stones that were associated with the veneration of deities particularly the male deity.'

Since Israel was Yahweh's people and was responsible for their habitation, He would settle them in the land He pleased. This required the creation of an environment devoid of other worship practices contrary to Covenant stipulations. It was not Israel that made the choice to dwell in the land of Canaan. Yahweh settled them, but it rested upon them to show their fidelity to Him by serving Him alone. In Exodus 34:12 the command says, 'Watch yourselves that you make no covenant with the inhabitants of the land into which you are going, lest it become a snare in your midst.' In Numbers 33:50–56 the instruction given to

Moses is to tell the children of Israel to drive out the inhabitants of the land and take possession of it. Deuteronomy 7:1-5 sounds the same warning.

The command to destroy is protective. The nations in the land of Canaan will teach Israel detestable (*giluli*) things (Deut 20:18). They must utterly destroy them. The instruction not to associate is because of the gods they worship. Thompson (1976:125) comments saying, 'The tragedy of forgetfulness was that Israel would turn to the gods of the peoples around about which were in fact no gods. These were gods of nature and fertility, whose normal moral requirements were not to be compared with the stern ethical demands of Yahweh.' In the instruction to disassociate and eliminate the inhabitants of Canaan, strong words like, dispossess and destroy are used. This creates a sense of complete separation leaving no room for negotiated settlement. These words capture the thrust of the expulsion.

In Exodus 23:28; 33:2 the word '*yaresh*' (dispossess) is used to instruct Israel to expel the inhabitants of the land of Canaan. The Hebrew word '*yaresh*' (dispossess or drive) out is used in the verse that instructs Israel to expel the inhabitants of Canaan. *Yaresh* means to seize, to take possession of, to possess, to occupy, to drive away, to expel, to disinherit, to dispossess. It means to devour. *Yaresh* has a military sense of invasion for the purpose of settling in the territory (Zodhiates1990:1733). Lohfink (1990, 6:376) gives a softer meaning of *yaresh*. He states that, 'The qal of *yrs* occurs 164 times in the OT. Akk. *Yaritu* "heir" and *yaritutu*, "inheritance." The etymological meaning is inheritance. It is inheritance not associated with the violence of war. Other meanings are "treading up," "take possession of.'

The literal meaning of the word *yaresh* describes the manner in which Israel would possess the land. It is unfathomable that the Canaanites would simply migrate out of their land without serious resistance. Moreover they did not know this God Yahweh. They also believed that their god would fight for them. In this sense *yaresh* implies that Israel would be motivated to take the land as a

heritage from Yahweh. They would take the land without remorse and completely by any means at their disposal. They would not negotiate, they would subdue.

On the other hand inheritance usually takes place in a peaceful and sober atmosphere. It is an honourable passing of title and wealth from the Patriarch to the chosen one. Of course each culture has its own norms and guiding principles. An inheritance ensures continuity of family or national wealth. It is also quite evident that inheritances are sometimes violently contested. The violence that accompanied Israel's possession of the land cannot be clearly established in the etymology of the word that describes the process. Wright (1997, 2:547) states that, 'There is no agreement on the etymological root meaning of the word *yrs* particularly as to whether it had military origin in relation to taking possession through conquest and violence, or whether it was primarily connected with family inheritance and leadership' (Gen 15:3).

The gift of the land was based on the oath which Yahweh had sworn to the forefathers. It was a divine inheritance from Yahweh and a 'descendant' inheritance as the 'seed' of Abraham the first heir of the land.

The retention of the land was a different matter altogether. The land could only be retained by obedience and loyalty. Yahweh would not hesitate to drive Israel out of the land should they prove to be disobedient. He would deal with Israel the way He treated the other nations on grounds of their wickedness.

Yaresh is used in Exodus 23:28; 33:2. It is used with reference to the expulsion of the Amorite, the Canaanite, the Hittites, the Perizzite, the Hivite and the Jebusite (Ex 34:11). It is used in the active voice referring to the act of Yahweh driving the Canaanites out. In Numbers 33:52, Israel's instruction to drive the Canaanites comes with a command to destroy all their worship paraphernalia. In fact that is the whole purpose why they are being driven out, 'You shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you, and destroy all their figured stones and destroy all their molten images and demolish all their high places.' There should be no trace of the people and the gods. They should not exist physically,

nor should they exist in terms of memorabilia. Only Yahweh should be worshipped.

The destruction of the deities and images is found in almost all the prohibitive commands as seen in Exodus 23: 24 'You shall not worship their gods, nor serve them, nor do according to their deeds; but you shall utterly overthrow them and break their sacred pillars in pieces.' It is the same injunction given in Exodus 34: 13, 'But rather you are to tear down their altars and smash their sacred pillars and cut down their Asherim.' Ortlund (1996:31) commenting on Exodus 34:12-16 says, 'These verses imply that even if the land is cleared of institutional manifestations of idolatry, the altars, the pillars, the Asherim, a danger still exists that the paganism they stand for could be renewed through friendly relations. The Canaanites would retain a sense of affinity with, and duty to their local gods.' There is a repetitive emphasis in the destruction of the idols of Canaan. In Deuteronomy 7:5 Israel is again warned saying, 'But thus you shall do to them: you shall tear down their altars and smash their sacred pillars, and hew down their Asherim and burn their graven images with fire.'

Yahweh did not want Israel to have visible remains of the worship practices of the Canaanites. The Canaanite idols should be out of sight and out of memory. If pillars, alters, and Asherim were left lying around, Israel would be tempted to turn them into trophies of victory and would forget that Yahweh drove the nations out. The paraphernalia might be turned into national heritage. Israel might be tempted to honour the fallen nations. Israel was Yahweh's heritage. The 'salvation history' of deliverance from Egypt, the desert sojourn, the conquest and settlement was to be Israel's only memorabilia from generation to generation. Yahweh was actually executing judgement on the gods and their worshippers.

CHAPTER 4

ONLY ONE GOD?

4. Monotheism

This chapter focuses on monotheism because the threat of the Canaanite Baal fertility cult and plurality of deities cannot be fully understood without a clear comprehension of Israel and monotheism. It is the worship of one God that sets Israel apart from other Semitic peoples. It is the worship of one God that sets Israel against other nations. The Covenant is simply a set of terms and regulatory framework of the will and worship of this one God. The conflict between Yahweh and the gods of the other nations is the core cause of the conflicts between Israel and the other nations. Yahweh executed his judgements on other gods for and through Israel.

Apart from the perspective of intolerance, there is a general belief that the concept of monotheism creates the concept of an evil being. If there is an absolute holy being, then there should be an absolute evil being. The belief in one is incomplete without the belief in the other. This chapter will attempt to trace the development of monotheism in Israel. It will take a brief survey of the extra-biblical material in order to take into account the processes and views of other ethnic groups on the subject of monotheism.

The question of monotheism like many other issues in the Hebrew Bible is a highly contested matter. From a sociological point of view, deity pluralism brings tolerance and good ethnical interaction. The risk of genocide from fanaticism is minimal. There is no coercion to worship one god as there are no instructions to one group of people making them superior or chosen. Each people group becomes devoted to their god while respecting the deity of the others. There is no heretic to be burned at the stake.

At the inception of this monotheistic relationship, Yahweh declares to the patriarch Abraham, 'And I will establish my covenant between me and you and

your descendents after you throughout at their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you' (Gen 17:7). This is what has come to be known as the covenant formula. Rendtorff (1998:11) as quoted earlier on says the assertion that Yahweh is Israel's God and Israel Yahweh's people, is one of the central statements in the Old Testament. It is expressed in a variety of linguistic forms. Among these, an almost formula like phrase stands out clearly. "I will be God for you and you shall be people for me."

There are divergent views on the origin and practice of monotheism. Scholars have come up with theories most of which are contrary to the picture painted by the Hebrew Bible. This could be due to the fact that there is no historical record about any absolute beginnings of religion. Of all the religions known to us, none has a solid independent beginning. They are built on earlier strata of previous religions (Alberty 1994:25). No one has laid a firm foundation as to how Israel adopted the worship of one God, given the common practice of deity pluralism by almost all the surrounding Semitic peoples. Even Egypt, where Israel was raised as a nation, worshipped many gods. In fact Yahweh executes judgement on the Egyptian gods as He liberates Israel (Ex 12:12).

The name of the God worshipped by Israel is not the matter under discussion or how Israel came to be a monotheistic nation. What is clear in the Hebrew Bible and the ancient Near Eastern worship practice is that Israel is known to have worshipped one God. She fought her battles in the name of this God. Israel was instructed to exterminate other nations, particularly the Canaanites because they were a threat to this exclusive relationship of belonging to one God.

4.1 Definition of Monotheism

There are many scholarly definitions of monotheism. One of the precise is by Baumann (2006:9) which simply states that by the concept of 'monotheism' is meant that only one deity exists.

Smith (2001:15) defines monotheism as, 'The first involves exclusivity that proclaims Yahweh alone (*lebadd*) or no gods "apart from, besides" Yahweh (*Zulat*). Monotheistic exclusivity is not simply a matter of cultic observance, as in the first commandment's prohibition against "no other gods before me" in Exodus 20: 3 and Deuteronomy 5: 7. It extends further to an understanding of deities in the cosmos (no other gods period). The second involves statements claiming that all other deities are "not" (*en*), "no things" *elilim* or dead *metim*.'

He goes on to cite texts like Deuteronomy 4:35, 'Yahweh alone is God, there is none without Him,' 2 Kings 19:15, 19, Isaiah 37: 16, 20, 'You alone are God of the earth. Nehemiah 9:6, 'You alone are Yahweh.' Psalm 86:10, 'You are God alone' (Smith 2001:152). There are numerous texts in the Hebrew Bible which indicate the presence of other gods at least venerated by the peoples. The 'existence' of other gods is not that there are essentially other gods. The other gods exist in the minds of the worshippers and have been created by their hands. Isaiah 2:8 gives a precise view of idols in the Hebrew Bible. He says, 'Their land has been filled with idols. They worship the work of their hands that which their fingers have made.' Monotheism has been defined as the conviction that there exists only one God and no others. The emphasis is on existence not necessarily the worship of one God. Worshipping one god among many may not be the essence of monotheism. Monotheism is different from polytheism, which is the reverence of multiple gods. It is also different from henotheism and monolatry which are hinged on the worship of a supreme above the lesser ones (Betz 2000:916).

In chapter 37:19, referring to the Assyrians Isaiah says, 'And they cast their gods into the fire, for they were not gods, but the work of man's hands, wood and stone. So they destroyed them.' The Hebrew Bible deals with the issue of idols with a perspective that says deities are a product of human imagination and the work of human hands. They exist and are accorded divine attributes but they do not 'essentially exist.' They are an aberration.

Ringgren (1966:67) has another view. He says, 'The religion of Israel was not originally monotheistic in the sense of denying the existence of other gods. It would be proper to call it "monolatry or henotheism." From a certain point of view, this is the characteristic taken by a national religion. In practice, only the gods of one's nation are significant; other gods may exist but are of no consequence.' However, one of the distinguishing characteristics of Israel is the belief that there are not several gods of Israel but one. Yahweh also demands exclusive devotion. He further points out that in most cases the word used for Yahweh is Elohim, which is morphologically a plural form, although it is always connected with a verb in the singular. This suggests that there is reference to the plural of majesty (Ringgren 1966: 67). There seems here, to be a reverse interpretation of the first commandment to mean that the prohibition is recognition of the existence of other gods, only that Israel should not worship them. Israel should worship Yahweh with the knowledge that the gods of the other nations are no gods at all. The recital of Deuteronomy 6: 4, 'Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God. The Lord is one,' declares Israel's monotheism. This text is given as an expression of loyalty and a polemic against other gods.

Stark (2001:9) brings in another perspective that not all religions are based on the belief in the supernatural. Some beliefs in the supernatural are not religions either. Others are just magic with rights and incantations. One characteristic is that magic fails to give a general account of existence.

He also explains that some conceive the supernatural as divine essences. These basically provide no benefits or blessings. Neither can they act on behalf of humans. They are not worshipped with sacrifices or supplications but inspire only meditation and ritual offer accompanied by abundance of magic (Stark 2001:10).

Israelite monotheism is not a conceptual divine essence. Israel worshipped a God who is transcendent. He is above, and not part of nature even though He is immanent. The salvation history of Israel is created by Yahweh's acts on behalf of and for Israel. Yahweh is not just a recipient of rituals and sacrifices; He has a

history of supernatural intervention with His people. It is so etched in the memory of His people that they worship Him for what He has done even before they seek for the fulfilment of His promise. Other deities do not have a salvation history except records of vicious conflicts of dominance and power struggles among them. Kauffmann (1972:29) makes a concise definition of monotheism when he says, 'The mark of monotheism is not the concept of a god who is creator, eternal being, or even all powerful; these notions are found everywhere in the pagan world. It is rather the idea of a god who is the source of all being, not subject to a cosmic order, and not emergent from a pre-existent realm; a god free of limitations of magic and mythology. The high gods of primitive tribes do not embody this idea.'

The radical difference of Israel's God from other gods made her too different from the rest of the Ancient Near Eastern people and their deities that social communion would be impossible to realize. Israel would have to tone down her concept and belief in her God before attempting to socially integrate. It is true that the other deities do not embody this idea of an absolute being that is free of limitations and a source of all being.

4.2 The Origin of Monotheism

In spite of the many writings by scholars on monotheism, there is no clear distinctive starting point of monotheism. What scholarship offers are probable origins and sources of monotheism which could have influenced Israel. The origins of monotheism cannot be attributed to one person or people group.

4.2.1 Egyptian Source of Monotheism

Stark (2001:32) points out that, 'Just where true monotheism first arose remains unknown.' He however, mentions that, 'One of the earliest known instances occurred in Egypt where more than a thousand years before the birth of Jesus, Pharaoh Amenhotep IV proclaimed Aten to be the One God.' Stark quotes a hymn attributed to Pharaoh himself which says,

Oh living Aten, creator of life. O sole God, beside whom there is none. You made the earth as you wished, you alone...All peoples, herds, and flocks; All upon the earth that walk upon legs, All on high that fly on wings. You set every man in his place, and you supply their needs. Everyone has his food. His lifetime is counted. For you made them for yourself, Lord of all lands...You are in my heart (Stark 2001:32).

The embracing of one God Aten, led Pharaoh Amenhotep to change his name to Akhenaten (the glorious spirit of Aten) and initiated the worship of the solar disk as Aten's visible aspects (Stark 2001:32).

From the Egyptian perspective of monotheism, it may be concluded that it is not as an established system of belief of Israel or any other people. One may consider it as an attempted imposition by kings just because they had power to do so. This is contrary to human nature which loves a myriad of gods. Betz (2000:916) states that, 'Most research on monotheism is based on literary sources that tend to favour state religion over the beliefs of the common people.'

There seems to be an implication that a state religion was the most conducive climate for the emergence of monotheistic societies. Perhaps as a result of the belief that kings were sons of the gods. The military machinery of their kingdoms assisted them to enforce their beliefs on their subjects. The kingdom coffers could also easily fund the state religion.

Kirsch (2004:2) points out that, 'Men and woman in every age throughout the world have offered worship to literally thousands of gods, goddess and godlings, male and female alike, and they still do. Only very late in the development of homo-religions did monotheism "one god-ism" first emerge, and whenever some visionary king or prophet sought to impose the worship of one deity to the exclusion of others, he would discover that ordinary people so cherished their many beguiling gods and goddesses that the very idea of monotheism was appalling.' He also mentions that Akhenaten could have been the originator of monotheism and suggests that Israel could have adopted it from the Egyptians

(Kirsch 2004:5). Betz (2000:916) also traces the origin of monotheism to Egypt saying, 'In Egypt, Pharaoh Akhenaton is associated with the earliest monotheism (1350-1334 BC). Having come to the throne as Amenophis IV, Akhenaton changed his name to reflect his strict devotion to one aspect of the Sun God (Re), the Aten, i.e. "disk of the sun." The embedding of the roots of monotheism in kingship decrees is contrary to the Hebrew Bible which declares monotheism as a revelation to the Patriarchs. It is a revelation in which Yahweh offers gifts and blessings. He performs wonders and enters into a covenant which makes Him Israel's God and Israel His people. In Genesis 12:1-3, Yahweh commands Abram to leave his country. He offers him a gift of land and promises to make him a great nation. Yahweh and Abram enter into a covenant in which Abram is the recipient of gifts and blessings. Abraham is covenanted to worship Yahweh only. Yahweh becomes the God of Abraham.

Furthermore, Yahweh enters into a covenant at Sinai with a people that have seen His miraculous acts of deliverance. At this time there is no ruler in for Israel except a leader, Moses. He would not be in position to impose monotheism on Israel. It is highly improbable that Israel could have adopted monotheism from the Egyptians because the established Egyptian worship practice was that of deity pluralism. The Hebrew Bible mentions that Jacob already worshipped one God when he went into Egypt. Yahweh is known as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Ex 3:6).

4.2.2 Canaanite Origin of Monotheism

Other scholars suggest that Israel was influenced by Canaanite mythology in adoption of monotheism. Becking (2001:105) says:

The mythology of the pluriform Canaanite EL could have been the source for the greater part of the ancient Israelite mythology of Eiyhwh. Some qualities of EL such as wisdom, kindness, fatherhood, blessing and creativity belong to the nearly exclusive property of El Yahweh, not only in Ugarit but also in Israel. They are qualities which relate to the predominant

in age of El as the father of the gods and of men, the *bny bnwt*, “the creator of all creatures.” Monotheism has certain peculiar aspects that make it rather incompatible with other religions in general.

Rosenbaum (2002:177) comments saying: ‘Israel’s original contribution to the development of religion is taken “to be ethical monotheism,” that is the idea that the universe is created and directed by a single being who wants us to behave in certain ways.’ In the Ancient Near Eastern worship practice the concept of an absolute being who is the absolute creator is not prominent. It seems there are no absolute ethical standards. Lang (1983:13) concurs saying, ‘The introduction of monotheism into the consciousness of mankind is the greatest achievement of the ancient Hebrews.’ Hebrew ethical monotheism characterizes the Ten Commandments or Decalogue of Exodus 20:1-17. The commandments in verses 12-17 are of serious ethical nature. The obligation to honour one’s parents, the prohibition of murder, stealing, adultery, bearing false witness and coveting are all moral and ethical demands which are more embraced in Hebrew monotheism. The prohibited practices among the Hebrews were tolerated among the Canaanites.

As a pre-warning against the unethical conduct of the inhabitants of the promised land, Yahweh issues a warning in Leviticus 18:2,3, ‘Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, I am the Lord your God. You shall not do what is done in the land of Egypt where you lived, nor are you to do what is done in the land of Canaan where I am bringing you, you shall not walk in their statutes.’ These statutes were a warning against the boundless sexual practices of the Canaanites who according to the Hebrew Bible appear to have had no serious ethical standards. In fact the prohibited practices in Yahwism, were the very rituals of worship in the Canaanite religions. This of course created moral conflict between Israel and the Canaanites. This will be explored further in the chapter on the Baal fertility cult.

The ethical demands are an outcome of the nature of the Hebrew God. Christen (1969:11) says, 'The dominant tenet of the Hebrew is the absolute transcendence of God. Yahweh is not in nature. Neither earth, nor sun, nor heaven is divine; even the most potent natural phenomena are but reflections of God's greatness. It is not even possible to properly name God.' He further says, 'It has rightly been pointed out that the monotheism of the Hebrews is a correlate of their insistence on the unconditional nature of God. Only God, who transcends every phenomenon, and who is not conditioned by any mode of manifestation, only an unqualified God can be the grounds for all existence' (Christen 1969:12).

As stated in the introduction of this chapter, several observations and questions have been raised for and against monotheism. The refinement of the faith of Israel has been through the claim of the worship of one God. The dispute is on whether only Israel enjoyed this uniqueness exclusively. Baumann (2006:11) states that, 'Claims about the uniqueness or singleness of the divine are found in the millennia of Mesopotamian texts prior to the common era. This destroys the popular view which has been the unquestioned norm in the history of biblical interpretation. It relates to the belief that the biblical faith was unique in the Ancient Near Eastern world in its insistence that only one god must be worshipped namely Yahweh the god of Israel.' Baumann (2006) is partly right that there may be evidence indicating that there are other communities who may have been monotheistic. It is however, not evident that their concepts of divinity could have been as refined and as high as that of Israel. Any deity that could be represented by an image would not be comparative to Yahweh's being and attributes and transcendence as stated above.

The insistence on the absolute transcendence of Yahweh does not ignore the fact that many ethnic groups worshipped different gods. Yahweh is not of one the lesser gods who rose in power and divinity above other gods to become what He is. The Hebrew Bible does not portray that picture; neither do the extra biblical sources trace His rise like that of Baal. The insistence is based on the fact that Yahweh is completely detached from the characteristics of other deities.

Baumann (2006:12) further argues that in addition to a great hall of goddesses, figurines attest to the fact that the worship of Yahweh during the monarchic period, particularly in the family cults was not without alternative. This is the scenario painted by the Hebrew Bible. Other gods existed but they are regarded as the work of the hands of their worshippers. Commenting on how the Assyrians have destroyed other kingdoms, Isaiah points out that the Assyrians have not only overthrown those kingdoms but also the gods, the “work of men’s hands” (Is 37:19).

Many Old Testament prophets maintain the same stance with regard to the gods of other nations. These gods pose no threat to the essential being of Yahweh. They are material and creaturely like their makers. They do not challenge the functionality of Yahweh as the creator God, particularly in the mind of Israel. However, they are a threat to the loyalty of the worshipper, the chosen race. In that sense the gods of the other nations posed an alternative to the monotheism of Israel. While Israel has her God, the nations also have their own gods whom they serve and Joshua does not question their potency as seen in his challenge of Joshua 24:15b. Joshua’s recognition is an awareness of the gods who may pollute and dislodge the faith of Israel to Yahweh. Whether the gods are real or not, the fact is they materially exist and have worshippers.

Everhart (2004:52) comments on monotheism from a feminist perspective saying, ‘Recent scholarship provides growing material and textual evidence that multiple deities were worshipped alongside Yahweh in Ancient Israel. Yahweh’s position as the sole Israelite deity has come increasingly into question...even texts construed to support the allegiance of Yahweh reveal traces of female worship and leadership.’ The presence of other deities does not lead Israel to equate Yahweh with these deities. Even if Israel forsakes Yahweh, she does not diminish His absoluteness. His elevation is actually the cause of rebellion sometimes. He is at times considered to be too far above to regard mortal man. The material gods are considered immanent providers of immediate needs. The difference in the belief system and life practices of the Canaanites and Israel do

indicate that it is highly unlikely that Israel could have adopted monotheism from the Canaanites. The Canaanites were actually regarded as a threat to monotheism.

4.2.3 Deity Conflict as Source of Monotheism

The development of monotheism tends to follow a conflict motif. The supremacy of the deities is not necessarily based on their creative power but on heroism. There are bloody conflicts of the gods. The deity who emerges victorious becomes transcendent. This deity becomes the supreme or national god with others as lesser gods. Betz (2000:916) comments, 'The prime example of this move towards monotheism or monolatry is the elevation of the Babylonian god Marduk. The creation epic of Enuma Elish (ANET 60-72), often compared with Genesis 1:1-2:4a is an example of myth making with the purpose of elevating Marduk to the rank of the "king of the gods" by means of divine conflict. This myth in which Marduk becomes the creator and organizer of the universe was later copied to the Assyrians who substituted the name of their god Assur for the Babylonian Marduk.'

This ascendance to prominence also characterises many of the deities of the Ancient Near Eastern peoples. Divinity does not feature much because the gods are also subject to the passions that assail the human beings. The conflict motif also characterizes the Baal cycle. Betz (2000:916) notes that, 'Tablets discovered on the Syrian coast at Ras Shamra (Ugarit) contain a variety of myths and legends including the Baal cycle (ANET 129-42) in which the Canaanite storm-god Baal is elevated as supreme god and ruler of the cosmos.' The conflict is not necessarily to win the total allegiance of the worshippers, it is a conflict for 'kingship among the gods.' It is not a once of battle but a perpetual lifestyle.

There is a view that Yahweh also ascended to supremacy through conflict as summed up by Betz (2000:916) who states that, 'With the centralization of the state under David and Solomon, there emerged certain advocates who elevated Yahweh as the supreme God of all the divinities (including El, Asherah and Baal),

thus making Yahweh the, “God of Israel.” It is true that the Hebrew Bible declares the victory of Yahweh over other gods. He executes judgements on the gods of Egypt when He sets Israel free. The difference however, is that Yahweh is not striving with siblings as in ancient cosmogonies. He does not struggle with deities whose divine powers He recognises, but gods who He declares none existent.

According to the Hebrew Bible, Yahweh’s supremacy is strongly based on His creative power, that He brought the Universe into existence. This is also echoed by Kauffmann (1972). This is evident in the following texts. The Fourth Commandment of the Covenant code details the reason why Yahweh should be worshipped and not the other gods, ‘For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them and rested on the seventh day, therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy, (Ex 20: 11). In the seven day cycle Israel would pause to honour Yahweh as the creator of the heavens and the earth. In Isaiah 40:25, 26, Yahweh declares that there is no comparison, ‘To whom shall you liken Me that I should be equal?’ says the Holy one. Lift up your eyes and see who created these stars, The one who leads forth there host by number, He calls them by name; Because of His greatness of His might and the strength of His power, not one of them is lost.’

The unified society of Israel is an outflow of Hebrew monotheism. In a society where many deities are venerated, it is not possible to have an ethical code like the Ten Commandments. The different deities are likely to have conflicting moral codes that would confuse the worshippers, hence the absence of strict moral demands. In polytheistic societies, the emphasis is not so much on moral conduct but on the appeasement process. Variety in appeasement would not divide society as it was based on means. Hebrew monotheism distinguished itself from the rest of the Semitic societies because of its emphasis on obedience, human relations and worship practice.

Israel’s life practice was governed by an absolute God with absolute commandments. It was Israel’s absolutes that were under threat from the almost

codeless Canaanites. If Israel adopted the Canaanite way of life, she would lose sight of the absolute God and eventually lose her absolute distinction. From the above survey it can be seen that Israel could not have learned or copied monotheism from the Egyptians or the Canaanites because of the seemingly irreconcilable differences. Israel is delivered from the Egyptians so that she may worship her God. Israel is banned from association with the Canaanites so that she may worship Yahweh only.

4.3 Origins of Hebrew Monotheism

In as much as there is debate on how monotheism began, there is substantial evidence that the Hebrew people were distinctly monotheistic people. There are distinct landmarks which point to definite acts of Yahweh where He reveals Himself as the only and true God. The call of Abraham in Genesis 12:1-9 is one specific act of disclosing Himself and calling Abraham to worship Him only. There also evidence that other deities were worshipped in Israel, but it was regarded as deviant behaviour. It was not the modus operandi of the faith of Israel. Israel worshipped Yahweh as evident in the covenant relationship and Hebrew prophecy. Some have argued that the theology of Hebrew monotheism is a phenomenon largely derived from the inserted texts in the Hebrew literature (Baumann 2006:21).

In the societies cited earlier on, monotheism developed over long periods of time. In some societies it was imposed by kings as a state religion. The time of development lends credence to the process. In other words the development of monotheism can be historically traced. This is evident even in the development of Hebrew monotheism.

Hebrew monotheism is a practice that developed over a long period of time too. Albertz (1994:32) makes the following observation, 'As far as we can recognize, in the early Israelite families the worship of a family god was more or less monolatrous, but this practical worship of one god still completely lacked the exclusiveness and intolerance which was later to be so characteristic of Yahweh

religion.' Having lived in Egypt for four hundred years without Priests and Prophets, it should be expected that the beginnings of the religion of Israel should be crude. The understanding of the people would be a long process. This process was to a certain magnitude influenced by circumstances which include the topography of habitation. Israel's sojourn in the desert was an environment conducive to the development of the belief in one God. This is because topography does influence worship and ethical behaviour. Stark (2001:14) gives an interesting description on the influence of topography when he says,

On the other hand nomadic freedom can only be bought at a price; for whoever rejects the complexities and mutual dependencies of agricultural society, not only gains freedom but also loses the bond with the phenomenal world. In fact he gains his freedom at the cost of significant form. For wherever we find reverence for the phenomena of life and growth, we find preoccupation with the immanence of the divine and with the form of its manifestation. But in the stark solitude of the desert where nothing changes, nothing moves (except man at his own free will) where features in the landscape are only pointers, landmarks without significance in themselves, there we may expect the image of God to transcend concrete phenomena altogether.

4.3.1 Desert Wanderings and the Development of Hebrew Monotheism

The desert wanderings played a very significant part in the development of Hebrew monotheism. Not only did the natural phenomena aid the Hebrews to grasp the concept of one-godism, but it also instilled a sense of dependence in order to survive the life threatening barrenness of the desert. When one is exposed to the dry unproductive desert environment, one is highly prone to seek divine intervention not from nature (because its ruggedness looks unpromising) but from the heavens above. Yahweh gave them manna from heaven demonstrating that he was the only source (Ex 16). The supply of water from the rock was viewed as a divine intervention (Num 20:8). This encouraged Israel to

trust the reliability of this 'one' God. The desert can be regarded as a natural classroom where Yahweh would instruct Israel without competing for her attention with other deities. Survival in the desert would only be by divine providence.

The desert 'developed' monotheism would be seriously threatened in the lush green fertile land of Canaan where seasons bring drastic changes. The environment in which monotheism developed was a total contrast to the land of promise. The topography and cultures of the land of Canaan were in direct opposition to monotheism. Whereas Israel worshipped one transcendent God, the Canaanites worshipped immanent vegetation gods with forms (images) of manifestation. The fertility cults intended to stimulate the vegetation gods were conducted in immoral festivals which struck at the root of the ethical norms of Hebrew monotheism. Cundall (1976, 1:432) points out that, 'These local baals were believed to control fertility in agriculture, beasts and mankind. It was highly important to secure their favour particularly in an area like Palestine with few natural springs and with an uncertain rainfall.'

4.3.2 Yahweh's Acts and Monotheism

Furthermore, Hebrew monotheism is based on the evidential acts of Yahweh. The first act is that of election. In Deuteronomy 7:6-8, the Bible says,

For you are a holy people to the Lord your God. The Lord our God has chosen you to be a people of His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. The Lord did not set His love on you, nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of the all the peoples, but because the Lord loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the Lord brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

The word '*bachar*' (NASB 1990:977) can denote Yahweh's love for Israel. The election is not based on Israel's competence but on Yahweh's love. After the election Yahweh begins to act on behalf of Israel. He delivers, guides, blesses and defends Israel from the enemy. Israel is constantly reminded of the works of Yahweh, 'I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the house of slavery' (Ex 19:2). It is the deliverance that gives Yahweh the legitimacy to be Israel's God. In Exodus 19:4, the Bible says, 'You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians and how I bore you on eagle's wings and brought you to myself.'

The idea that Hebrew monotheism is 'original,' is viewed with scepticism. It is generally believed that Hebrew monotheism is an imported concept. From the cited scholars above like Baumann (2006) it is clear that Hebrew monotheism is suspect. The lapse of Israel into polytheism is attributed to the fact that it was not a foreign practice to them.

One thing observable is that the monotheism of Israel was not enforced by the monarchy but by the prophets. The prophets claimed revelation and inspiration. It was not mere state religion with a view of unifying the nation. A closer look at Yahweh's self introduction and attributes reveals compelling evidence that Hebrew monotheism is 'originary' and not imported. Durham (1987, 3:283) comments to say, 'The autokerygmatic phrase "I am Yahweh," *Anok* Yahweh has been referred to as the "primary formula" and "self presentation formula." The phrase functions as an assertion of the authority of Yahweh "One who always is Your God.'

This is Yahweh's *modus operandi* of introduction. Yahweh declares Himself as singular, absolute and distinct. Though Israel would deviate and have many gods, she knew that Yahweh is one. Durham (1987, 3:284) further says, 'These "first words" of Yahweh to Israel, "indispensably prior to all that is to follow," are "the centre and focus of the whole Pentateuch" and the very heart of the whole Old Testament and in connection with what follows them.'

From Yahweh's self introduction we can see that monotheism is a revealed phenomenon. If Yahweh is so passionate about being the only God for Israel, He cannot borrow some foreign concept of monotheism and apply it to Himself. The first commandment of the Decalogue sets the parameters of monotheism. Durham (1987, 3:284) states that, 'The first of the Ten Commandments is basic to the nine that follow it and to the relationship the Decalogue is designed to ensure. It sets forth an expectation of absolute priority, a first and fundamental requirement of those who desire to enter into the covenant relationship with Yahweh.'

This demand of loyalty is almost exclusive to Yahwism. The Canaanite pantheon does not have the same emphasis of supremacy. The gods are more preoccupied with dethroning each other than the loyalty of the subjects. On the other hand the subjects do not seem to be inquisitive enough to search the nature and being of their deities. In contrast to the other gods, Yahweh will not be worshipped as part of a pantheon. It has to be Him only. Kaiser (1990, 2:422) commenting of the first commandment says,

In the first commandment there is only one difficult expression. It is the phrase *al-panaya* besides/before me. No where does this Hebrew phrase mean "except" me. Such phrases do exist in Isaiah vocabulary: "There is no God apart from me" (*mibbal' aday*)... "there is none" (*'ayin zulati*, Isaiah 45:21) and "non besides me" (*'en 'od*, Isaiah's 45:6) But none of these were used. The result is however the same....I will not give my glory to another.

Yahweh is not worshipped exclusively because His worshippers have recognized his attributes and have elevated Him above all the other gods. It is Him who brings forth evidence of His mighty acts of creation and His works for and on behalf of Israel. Indeed Yahweh will not give His glory to another. There is no one besides or before.

Another phrase that emphasises monotheism is Yahweh's title of being 'jealousy.' This is reflected in the second commandment, 'You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship them or serve them; for I the lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and on the third and fourth generation of those who hate Me...' (Ex 20:4, 5). Kaiser (1990, 2:486) says, 'The word "jealousy" (*qanna*) is mentioned twice for emphasis (Exodus 20:5). This particular word is used only for God, occurring about five times in the OT, and illustrates the parallel between idolatry and adultery.'

The jealousy of Yahweh is not the same as envy. Yahweh is not jealousy because He has been outperformed or that He lacks attributes possessed by other gods. He is jealousy for devotion. It is the jealousy of possession. The word jealousy is also strongly used in a marriage context. Yahweh has a right to be jealousy because Israel is betrothed to Yahweh as seen in Hosea 2:19. In this numina marriage Israel cannot be betrothed to other deities because that would be an act of flagrant adultery. She cannot be a wife to Baal. If she became Baal's bride, she would not only commit harlotry but would be rejecting Yahweh as her God. Israel's rejection of Yahweh would leave her open to plunder. One can also say the jealousy of Yahweh is more of obligation than just possession. Peels (1997, 3:938) makes the following pertinent comment, 'God's *qina* is the fiery reaction to the infringement of His rights, vis – a- vis Israel and to the violation of *berit* (cf Isa 42:8; 48:10). Israel is God's people and He is Israel's God. Anyone outside the circle of the covenant is "non – people" (l'o' 'am) and "no- god" (lo el) Deut 32:21.'

In conclusion, Israel is chosen for a purpose as seen in Genesis 12:3 and Deuteronomy 7:6-8. We do not have declaratory statements of election and purpose among the vegetation gods of the Canaanites. The relationship of Yahweh and Israel is exclusive. On the other hand, the Canaanite cultic practice is that of functionality and plurality. Their gods are immanent and have realms of

authority and have specific functions. The adoption of Canaanite worship practices would dismember and distort this exclusive monotheism of Israel. In Exodus 34:14, Yahweh declares, 'You shall not worship any other god, for the Lord whose name is jealous is a jealous God.' Hebrew monotheism could not co-exist with the Baal fertility cult of the pre-occupants of the Land of Canaan whose gods were no gods at all in the eyes of Yahweh. There might be similarities between Hebrew monotheism and other monotheistic nations, but the language Yahweh uses to introduce Himself shows that Hebrew monotheism was distinct. It was not an imported idea that Israel could have adopted from the Egyptians who were their masters for over 400 years (Ex 12:40). It is in this context of monotheistic jealousy that the threat of the Canaanite fertility cults to the Covenant should be understood.

CHAPTER 5

THE COVENANT

5. The Covenant Motif

The conflict between Israel and the Baal fertility cult can only be fully comprehended within the context of the Covenant. If Israel did not have a covenant relationship with Yahweh, the story of the Hebrew Bible would be different. In this chapter I will trace the origin and nature of the Covenant between Yahweh and Israel. I will point out the inherent areas of tension between the Covenant stipulations and the Canaanite fertility cult.

The covenant idea is so dominant to religion that the Bible is referred to as the Old and New Testament. The word testament simply means an agreement. This is a description of the relationship between God and man. The whole concept has its foundation in the relationship of Yahweh and Israel (Mendenhall 1954:50). The Pentateuch paints a picture of close kinship between the patriarchs and further that these were bound by blood ties. Would it be necessary for a covenant to bind them as a religious group? A kinship relationship is a horizontal bond. A religious relationship on the other hand is both horizontal and vertical and that necessitates a covenant relationship (Mendenhall 1954:51).

After tracing and determining the origin, meaning and demands of monotheism, the Covenant can be studied within context. Many scholars have written on the covenant motif or theme of the Old Testament and many are still writing. Various aspects of the Covenant have been emphasized by different scholars. Some like Dumbrell (1984) have focussed on the etymological meaning of the Covenant. Others like Newman (1960) have looked at the extra biblical origin of the Old Testament Covenant and similarity with Ancient Near East treaties. On this aspect the focus has been on the comparative study of the Hittite treaties and the Old Testament.

The intent of this chapter is to highlight the 'particularity' of Israel in belonging to Yahweh, the Covenant bond of exclusive monotheism and the moral demands of the Covenant on Israel. The threat of Canaanite worship of many gods will be further investigated. Some scholars have concluded that the Covenant is the central theme of the Pentateuch. Segal (1967:29) observes that, 'The chief subject of the Pentateuch is the story of the covenant with the first of the patriarchs Abraham (Genesis 15, 17) which was confirmed with his successors Isaac (Genesis 26:3, 4) and Jacob (Genesis 28: 13,14).' Other peoples who are part of the Pentateuch narrative are mentioned in relation to the Covenant. They are driven out, exterminated or used to punish Israel for violating the Covenant. They are at the same time invited to emulate Israel in character and join in the worship of her God. Rendtorff (1998:11) points out that, 'That Yahweh is Israel's God and Israel is Yahweh's people are one of the central statements in the Old Testament. It is expressed in variety of linguistic forms. Among these, one characteristic phrase almost formula like in character stands out clearly: I will be God for you and you shall be people for me.' This does not imply that Yahweh was a God without people to worship Him. Hence He went scouting for worshippers. He was seeking a relationship with a people through whom He could bless all the families of the earth (Gen 12:3). Rendtorff further says, 'For Israel to be God's people means in particular keeping His commandments, the first (and second) commandment above all.'

The core of the Covenant is the first commandment. Israel belonged exclusively to Yahweh. All other blessings would flow if Israel remained exclusively Yahweh's people. If they worshipped Him alone, he would act on their behalf. Playing the harlot, worshipping Him and other gods would render Him impotent not in a mystical sense but in that Yahweh is not and cannot be part of a pantheon. The Covenant is critically important in securing this relationship.

5.1 Importance of the Covenant

In recognizing the importance of the Covenant, Newman (1960:61) says, 'For the Old Testament, the Mosaic covenant is the covenant par excellence. It dominates all covenant traditions. There are more explicit references to it than any other covenant between God and man.' According to the Hebrew Bible, the Covenant is initiated through and with Abraham in Genesis 12. Of particular note is verse 7 where Yahweh includes the 'seed' of Abraham as part of the Covenant. In other words Israel becomes God's people while in seed form. The experience of Mount Sinai was ratification as it shall be explained in the later pages. He further notes that, 'The covenant was a relationship between God and a particular people which began in a particular place at a particular moment in history. In other words it is characterized by "particularity" (Newman 1960:78). There is no doubt that the Covenant relationship elevated Israel above the peoples of the Ancient Near East, especially in the psychological perspective of the Hebrew historians. It is the Covenant relationship that makes Israel the people of the Hebrew Bible. Ringgren (1966:119) also makes the same observation. He says, 'The covenant idea then was so basic to Israel that even the restoration of a broken relationship was conceived as a covenant. The covenant idea became the normal form for Israel's association with God.'

The Covenant relationship is what created and defined the nation of Israel. It is in fact the story of the Old Testament or the Hebrew Bible. All other nations, events, and commandments are recorded or given to define the Covenant, warn against its violation, pronounce a curse for violating it or announce a blessing for adhering to it. Without the Covenant relationship with Yahweh, Israel would not be the people of the Old Testament. The chosen race would not be 'chosen.'

5.2 Etymology of Berit

The word Covenant is known both to the man in the pulpit and the researching scholar. The origin and etymology of the word Covenant or 'berit' has been a subject of intense study. Despite the variances, there is consensus that the word

'berit' describes the relationship between Yahweh and Israel. The question one would ask is, 'Should we describe the meaning of the word Covenant from the etymology of the word or from the practice or acts of enacting a covenant? Does the practice define the word or the word describes the act? The question is raised in view of the many derivative meanings a word can have. The practice might give us a better understanding than being limited to the etymological meaning of the word. It should, however, be borne in mind that practices evolve over time. Dumbrell (1984:16) makes a rather a startling observation when he says, 'The task of determining the etymology of *berit* is made more difficult by the fact that there is no true consensus as to the origin of the word.' He further states that the derivation which has most commanded itself and probably ought to be adopted is that which takes it back to the may be original meaning of the middle Assyrian noun '*binlin*' a word whose sense is bond or 'fetter.' This sounds more probable since in the Old Testament when the word *bond* is used in the contexts where relationships are established or confirmed, it seems to imply obligation.

5.2.1 Berit as Fetter

Some scholars have emphasized more on the binding meaning of the word *berit*. Newman (1960:45) defines the word berit from the Akkadian verb '*baru*' meaning bind. He calls it a chainlike relationship between the covenant participants which unites them. Another meaning could be the Akkadian noun '*birtu*' denoting in the 'midst.' This noun is preceded by the preposition, '*ina*' to form '*inaberit*' meaning 'between.' This may point to the *cultic* right in which the participants pass between animals that have been cut as seen in Genesis 15:17, and Jeremiah 34:18 (Newman 1960:45). There are a number of verbs that are used to indicate the establishment of a Covenant. However, the most common is '*karat*' literally meaning to cut, cut off, and cut down. This verb occurs 86 times with berit. (Newman 1960:47). Hasel (1995, 7:352) states that, '*Karat berit*, "cut or make a covenant" derives from the literal cutting of one animal or several animals. The noun *berit* expresses the purpose of the act: ratification of the covenant. The development of the idiomatic meaning of *karat berit* begins with

the actual “cutting” of an animal in ritual or ratification ceremony, which establishes the binding nature of the covenant relationship itself.’

5.2.2 Berit as Food

A number of definitions have been posited by scholars. McCarthy (1973:3) says, ‘The essential word itself *berit* is related to the root ‘*brh*’ which indicates food and eating. Hence the idea that the original meaning of the word stemmed from the covenant meal and that the characteristic phrase ‘cut a covenant’ grew up because one had to cut up food for the covenant meal.’

The etymology of the word *berit* has been a matter of intent study by many scholars. Much as it has received considerable attention, there seems to be no precise definition of the word.

Scholars have given all possible meanings to the word *berit*. The abundant variety of the possible meanings of the word *berit* raises the question as to whether the modern interpretation captures the original meaning and intent of the word. Nicholson (1986:94) defines the word *berit* as coming from the root, ‘*barah*’ and ‘eat’, from which comes the nouns *biryah*, *barut* ‘food’. Thus derived, *berit* would have had the semantic development ‘food (eaten by those making the covenant)’. He further suggests that it may derive from a homonym of the root ‘*barah*’ to see, to look at’ ‘to look at with favor’ hence to choose’...(Nicholson 1986: 94).

5.2.3 Berit: Covenant Oath and Covenant Meal

From the practice of the two parties, Yahweh and Israel, it is quite observable that the relationship was mutual and binding as seen in the covenant of Isaac and Abimelech in Genesis 26:23-33. Having seen that the Lord is with Isaac, Abimelech approaches Isaac for a Covenant of peace (they agree to leave each other alone). The Covenant ceremony begins with a meal or feast of eating and drinking. ‘Then he made them a feast and they ate and drunk,’ (Gen 26:30). Then

there follows the oath. 'And in the morning they rose early and exchanged oaths; the Israel sent them away, and they departed from him in peace' (Gen 26:31). Kalluveetil (1982:11) notes that 'Eating together of portions of the same food had profound meaning for the ancient Semites. It was a symbol and confirmation of fellowship and mutual social obligations. By this very act the participants are tied to one another by a bond of friendship. They indeed become kinsmen, since only kinsmen eat together'. In Genesis 31:53-55, the pattern of the covenant between Isaac and Abimelech is repeated. Jacob makes an oath and then makes and calls his kinsmen to a meal (covenant meal). In the morning Laban departs in peace. The covenant to do each other no harm has been sealed. The above examples were parity agreements or covenants between equals.

The Covenant was enacted by an oath and a meal establishing a binding agreement to leave each other in peace or to live together in mutual obligation. The Sinai Covenant is enacted in a similar way, except that it is not a covenant of separation but of belonging. Yahweh and Israel will from henceforth be God and people like husband and wife. The Covenant ceremony begins in Exodus 19:4-8 where the Lord says, 'You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians and how I bore you on "eagles" wings and brought you to myself. Now then, if you will obey voice and keep my covenant, then you shall be by my own possession among all the peoples, for the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation..... And all the people answered together and said, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do! And Moses brought back the words of the people to the Lord." Having eaten with Yahweh, Israel would not have the liberty to dine on the alters of other deities.

5.3 The Sinai Covenant

The Sinai Covenant between Yahweh and Israel is sealed by an oath. Yahweh introduces Himself; 'You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians:... and how I bore you on eagles wings and brought you to myself (Exodus 19:4). What He did to the Egyptians are His credentials that He is worthy to be the God of

Israel because it took divine power to break the Egyptian bondage and set them free. He is entering into an oath as a credible partner. The 'bearing on eagles wings' is a statement of commitment to act on behalf of Israel. Yahweh will act on behalf of and fight for Israel. Yahweh is acting out of His '*hesed*' – loving kindness for Israel. This *hesed* forms the context of the covenant. Commenting on 'hesed' Zobel (1986, 5:62) says,

Everything that is said focuses on what Yahweh does for Israel and the individual worshipper. The history of Yahweh's people, past present and future, the life of the individual Israelite, in fact the entire world is the stage for the demonstration of Yahweh's loving-kindness. Yahweh has decided in favor of Israel; He has promised life, care, and alleviation of distress and preservation, indeed he has filled the whole earth with His loving-kindness. He has granted fellowship with Him to His people, to all mankind, to the entire world. And this act, like the promise and assurance of future help and fellowship, is characterized by permanence, constancy and reliability.

In His demonstration of *hesed* that is permanent, constant and reliable to Israel, Yahweh expected to evoke the same response from His people. Even though they were not equals in the relationship, Israel was not expected to deviate from the Covenant and worship other gods. The *hesed* of Yahweh would not flow to Israel while she bowed to other gods. Infact the *hesed* would turn into consuming anger that would destroy Israel. Resisting the Canaanite Baals was one of the most important signs of loyalty to Yahweh in the Promised Land.

The Ten Commandments in chapter 20 are given because a relationship, an oath exists between Yahweh and Israel. The Ten Commandments do not bring the relationship into existence. They are terms to safe guard the relationship. The core of the relationship is stipulated in the very first commandment, 'You shall have no other gods before me.' The rest of the commandments are given up to verse 17. Then there follows the regulations and ceremonies of the Covenant relationship which are outlined in chapters 21, 22 and 23. In chapter 24 there is

an affirmation of the Covenant. The people respond and say, 'All the words that the Lord has spoken, we will do' (verse 7). Of particular interest is the consummation of the relationship through a covenant meal, 'And they beheld God and they ate and drank (verse 11). The Covenant is complete. There is an oath and a meal. Israel is bound to Yahweh. The fact that they are in the presence of God and are not consumed is a sign of acceptance. The issue of the covenant meal is does not have a consensus. Nicholson (1986) is diametrically opposed to the notion of a covenant meal. It may mean however that the meal serves as a reinforcement of the leadership authority and self-confidence for the tasks ahead (Durham 1987, 3:345).

5.3.1 The Sinai Covenant and the Hittite Treaties

Some scholars who have examined the Sinai covenant pattern and that of Abraham and Abimelech, Isaac and Abimelech have suggested that these covenants of the Hebrew Bible could have been influenced by the Hittite covenantal system. Newman (1960:56) says that, 'The most illuminating parallels to the Mosaic covenant have come from the Hittite texts. There are two kinds of Hittite treaties. Parity treaties were between equals and Sovereignty treaties between a great King and his vassal.'

He further outlines the main elements of the Hittite treaty as follows:

- The preamble: This consists of the identification of the author of the covenant who is the king. He gives the genealogy, his titles and attributes.
- Historical prologue – what the king has rendered to the vassal in the past.
- The vassal's obligations to his king are enumerated and they include:
 - a. Prohibition of other foreign relationships outside the Hittite empire.
 - b. The prohibition of hostility toward any other vassal of the Hittite king.
 - c. The obligation to complete loyalty to the king.
- Provision for deposit in the temple and periodic public reading.
- The list of gods as witnesses.

- The curse and blessing formula (Newman 1960:56,57,58)

Newman's (1960:59) comparative outline of the Sinai Covenant to the Hittite treaty stands as follows:

1. Preamble. 'I am Yahweh your God' (Exodus20:2)
2. Historical prologue: 'Who brought you out of the land of Egypt the house of bondage' (Exodus 20:2)
3. Stipulations. The Ten Commandments with particular emphasis on the first commandment.
4. Deposit in temple – the testimony of the covenant deposited in the ark. The two tables of stone.
5. List of witnesses (Deuteronomy 32:1, Isaiah 1;2)
6. Blessing and curse formula (Deuteronomy 27)

Other scholars have also written on the Covenant and its Ancient Near Eastern context. They compare the Mosaic Covenant to the covenants of the Hittite kings.

A summary of their outline stands as follows:

1. Preamble. The great king gives his name and the titles of his sovereignty.
2. Historical prologue. Rehearsal of deeds of benevolence as reason for obligation.
3. Stipulations imposed on the vassal. There is a loyalty oath and vow for aid in time of need especially war.
4. Sanctions. Blessings are on condition of obedience and so are the curses on disobedience (Flanders & Crapps 1988:175)

The covenant between Yahweh and Israel is not a parity treaty between equals. The preamble and historical prologue show that Yahweh is the king and Israel is the vassal. Yahweh has performed mighty acts on behalf of Israel which Israel could not do for herself. The Sinai Covenant has all the characteristics of the definitions of the word 'berit.' It has the 'binlu' (Middle Assyrian noun) characteristic of a fetter. Israel is fettered to Yahweh. Berit has the 'baru'

(Akkaddian verb) characteristic of binding. It also has the 'barah' (eat) because it is sealed by eating covenant meal.

Israel's response, 'All that the Lord says we will do' (Ex 19:8) shows that Israel has a choice whether to enter the Covenant relationship or not. The choice to enter into the Covenant relationship with Yahweh bound Israel into an exclusive relationship in which Israel would carry out the express will of Yahweh. Agreeing to the Covenant put Israel under obligation to carry out the express will of Yahweh. The Covenant relationship had ties like that of a marriage.

The Covenant in many instances has been illustrated by the marriage metaphor. Israel is regarded as Yahweh's wife. Her dealings with other deities are described as adultery. This is best illustrated by the prophet Hosea's marriage to Gomer, 'When the Lord first spoke to Hosea, the Lord said to Hosea, "Go take yourself a wife of harlotry and have children of harlotry; for the land commits flagrant harlotry forsaking the Lord" (Hosea 1:2). The marriage metaphor continues in chapter 3:1-3, 'Then the Lord said to me, "Go again, and love a woman who is loved by her husband, yet an adulteress, even as the Lord loves the sons of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love raisin cakes. So I bought her for myself for fifteen shekels of silver and a homer and half of barley. Then I said to her, You shall stay with me for many days. You shall not play the harlot, nor shall you have a man; I will be also toward you.' This metaphor would alert Israel to a full understanding of the seriousness of the obligation. The marriage relationship was something that was well understood in terms of its binding nature on the parties involved. In the story of Hosea and Gomer, Yahweh reveals the unfaithfulness of Israel and how He has treated her with compassion. It is a passionate attempt to arouse a sense of remorse and gratitude which may yield recommitment.

The language shows how exclusive the Covenant relationship was between Yahweh and Israel. The violation of the intimacy was as grievous as the violation

of the marriage intimacy particularly on the part of the woman. Culturally, in the Ancient Near East a man would have more than one wife. Polygamy was a common practice. Polyandry was however, a punishable offence, usually by death. It was only temple prostitutes who were permitted to have encounters with more than one man. Some scholars have observed that the covenant relationship provides the love and commitment of Yahweh to Israel with a dimension of durability. Yahweh's love for the people is not a sudden burst of emotion or temporary affair but a long lasting commitment. It's a commitment that stretches back into the past and out into the future. The notion of partnership therefore provides prospects and expectations for the future. On the whole, the Covenant setting of the notion of love and marriage indicates that the love and engagement of Yahweh to Israel should not be understood only as emotions but also as acts that confirm and fill out Yahweh's commitment to Israel (Mumby 2006:27).

The marriage metaphor or the marriage –like intimacy that exists between Yahweh and Israel is not usually employed in the worship of other deities. In the Ancient Near Eastern religions, the gods are not regarded as husbands of their subjects. Loyalty does exist but not with the intensity of a marriage relationship (this will be dealt with in the chapter on the fertility cult). Deities like Baal, El, and Dagan have consorts with whom they mate to produce other gods. The people as it were are free to worship as many gods as desired. This was partly due to the functional nature of the gods. They would only provide part of the needs of the community. Exclusive intimacy would not be practical in such a context. On the other hand Yahweh is deemed omnipotent and omnipresent. He is not a local deity limited to a sphere of influence of power. Mumby (2006:27) further traces the development of the marriage between Yahweh and Israel saying, 'Every stage in Israel's history corresponds to a stage in the marriage between Yahweh and Israel. The growing love during the time of youth, the engagement and the bridal time in the wilderness and married life in the land with its concomitant

deceptions and nadirs all fit, within the scheme of the covenant history as the biography of marriage.'

The history of progressive bonding between Yahweh and Israel is not very evident in the religions of most Ancient Near Eastern societies. The Covenant relationship elevated and refined Israel's worship far above the rituals of other peoples. It is generally acknowledged that the worship of Israel was not crude like the rest. Pertinent to this relationship were the ethical demands inbuilt there in.

Frymer-Kensky (1992:53) comments that Deuteronomy uses metaphors drawn from family life to express Israel's relationship with God saying but, 'Jealousy, is even more specific. It is marriage language and expresses the attitude of the one whose prerogatives have been undermined: the husband whose wife owes him exclusive loyalty; and God who people owe the same exclusive fidelity..' This marriage relationship introduces the language of 'harlotry,' 'whoredom,' or 'zanah.' Israel's relationship with other deities is best described as harlotry because she is the 'wife' of Yahweh. Frymer-Kensky (1992:53) points out that the other side of jealousy is inconsistency, unfaithfulness or whoring (zanah). The term *zonah* is used to describe a spouse or wife who does not remain faithful to her husband. The word is also used for apostasy from God (Deut 31:16; Num 15:39). This terminology would not be prevalent among people of plural religious practice. Because the deities are many, there prevails an atmosphere of tolerance and accommodation.

5.4 The Ethical Demands of the Sinai Covenant

The core of Sinai Covenant was the exclusive worship of Yahweh. Some scholars have observed that the moral or ethical code as seen in the Ten Commandments is not exclusive to Israel. Some of the cultures in the Ancient Near East had highly developed notions of law and morality, like the code of Hammurabi.

Comparing these codes and the moral code of Israel, Kauffman (1972:233) notes the difference when he says, 'The novelty was in the very giving, for the first time morality was represented as a prophetic revelation, an expression of the supreme moral will of God. God revealed Himself, not to a visionary, a priest or a sage, but to a whole people. Men heard the command from the mouth of God. Morality was thus transferred from the realm of wisdom to the realm of the absolute divine command.' It is the command 'I am Yahweh your God' that created a new moral subject, Israel. From henceforth Israel would be a community that knows Yahweh and distinct from the rest of the peoples around (Kauffman1972: 234).

It is appropriate to conclude that the Promised Land was inhabited by people, referred to as the Canaanites, who did not have a covenant relationship with their deities. They worshipped multiple deities and did not have strong moral and ethical standards. Their deities were not universal but had realms of function which were hinged on productivity and meeting human needs. Each particular god performed a specific function. They were not omnipotent like Yahweh. They could do one thing and not the other. It was therefore expedient to serve many gods. The notion of exclusivity was not functional in the Promised Land. Their cultic practice and social relations did not have moral parameters as outlined in the Decalogue. These deities appeared to function because the land of Canaan was – and is rich with food. Their rain and fertility gods 'the Baals' seemed competent in blessing their people.

On the other hand, Israel was a nation born in the desert. They were not accustomed to agriculture; they had never seen such a beautiful land except Joshua and Caleb. When Israel would enquire about the source of all these 'blessings,' the Canaanites would point to the Baal.

Would Israel resist the temptation to play the harlot and be a recipient of these 'blessings?' The Canaanites knew about Yahweh's command that they should be exterminated. Would they sit back and wait for the sword? Or would they seek to subvert the command by winning Israel to their side. What avenue would they use to infiltrate, corrupt and disarm Israel? The sword was not an option because Yahweh would always fight for Israel, 'Be sure to observe what I am commanding you this day because I am going to drive out the Amorite before you, and the Canaanite, the Hittite and the Jebusite' (Ex 34:11).

The strategy would be to seek to separate Yahweh from His people. This would mean to induce Israel to violate the Covenant relationship and create a chasm between Yahweh and His people.

Israel was distinguished by her moral monotheism in that her covenant relationship with Yahweh had a very high moral content (Ex 20:1-17). Those who wished to corrupt Israel would use the avenue of moral corruption. This is what the Canaanites offered Israel. Who would resist worshipping a god without any moral obligation and receive all the blessings while doing one's pleasure? The combination of moral or carnal freedom and abundant blessing was a deadly weapon against Israel. Baal worship proved to be a serious challenge to Israel, 'Then the sons of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and served the Baals, and they forsook the Lord the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt and followed the other gods from among the gods of the people who were around them, and bowed themselves down to them; thus they provoked the Lord to anger. So they forsook the Lord and served Baal and Ashteroth' (Judg 2:11-13). Who was Baal? How was Baal worshipped? What aspects of Baal worship appealed to Israel? These are the issues addressed in the following two chapters.

CHAPTER 6

BAAL THE CONTENDER

6. Baal

This chapter will focus on the emergency, identity and development of Baal the Canaanite god. The Hebrew Bible shows that the Ancient Near Eastern peoples worshipped myriads of gods. Some are mentioned in relation to their contact with Israel. Among the many that are mentioned, Baal was one of the forces to reckon with. Israel was lured by many deities, like Astarte the goddess of the Zidonians, Chemosh the god of the Moabites, Milcom the god of the children of Amon (1Kin 11:33), but none corrupted and threatened Yahweh's covenant relationship with Israel than Baal the god of the Canaanites. Baal worship was a constant threat and menace to the covenant people. An understanding of the deity Baal would shed light on understanding what led the Covenant people to sink in the quagmire of syncretism and vacillation between two opinions. Elijah's question to the people is a graphic portrayal of the state of affairs in Israel's attachment to Baal worship as seen in 1 Kings 18:21, 'And Elijah came to the people and said, how long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, then follow Him: But if Baal then follow him. And the people answered him not a word.' The identity of Baal and the potential threats to the Covenant is the focus of this chapter.

In Yahweh's preamble to the Ten Commandments, at Mount Sinai, the record says, 'And all the people answered together and said, "All that the Lord says we will do," And Moses brought back the words of the people to the Lord (Ex 19:8). This response in the affirmative seems to be a characteristic response to the command and demands of Yahweh. This is repeated in Exodus 24:3, 9 when Israel responds to affirm the covenant. But when Elijah challenged Israel to show their allegiance either to Yahweh or Baal, the people could not answer (1Kin 18:21). Was the silence indicative of the adoration of Baal? Who was Baal that he would sway the fidelity of the covenant people?

6.1 Etymology of Baal

The name Baal is imported into the Hebrew Bible. It may have a Hebrew spelling and meaning but it is not original in the Hebrew language as a name for a deity because Israel was prohibited from the mention of the names of idols. The name could not be original with Israel as it was an abominable and detested idol. Baal was a foreign deity who infiltrated the worship practice of Israel. Day (1988:545) points out that, 'This deity is first attested in the Ebla texts from the second half of the second millennium BC where he appears as 'ada and in Egyptian execration texts about 1800 BC. But it is Ugarit mythological texts which shed light on him. Israel came to know Baal when they came into contact with the Baal worshippers, the Canaanites.'

The name Baal is prevalent in the Hebrew Bible and in extra biblical circles. Cundall (1976, 1:431) states that the name Baal means owner, master, lord or husband. The Nichol (1979, 8:104) defines Baal as (Heb) "Lord," "possessor," "husband." Akkadian, "Belu." In Ugaritic and Phoenician b'l. In Egyptian (13th cent BC on) as b'r. Greek Baal. Baal is a Semitic god. The name Baal is:

1. a designation of a local god in terms of "lord" as in Baal – gad, Baal – peor, Baal – hermon.
2. The name of a Canaanite god. The Canaanites believed that the Baals dwelt in holy trees, springs and mountain summits, rocks (etc).' From the etymological meaning of the name it becomes quite apparent that it is a rather fluid name that can be applied to any being deemed worthy of reverence. It is a name that has potential to overshadow and override original titles. The fact that it can be applied to any 'supreme' being poses a danger of the gradual transference of the attributes of the god Baal to another deity. This would lead to subtle syncretism with any deity worshipped by any other people apart from the Canaanites. Kaiser Jr (1973:51) observes that, 'The term appears in Ugaritic texts as a generic term about forty times, but in approximately one hundred and forty times it signifies the god Hadad according to Oldenburg. .' He also concurs to say, 'The name Baal is a common semitic name found in Hebrew – *ba'al*, Akkadian, *belu*, Ethiopic *ba-el*,

and Arabic *baʿl*. The name is usually connected with the same consonants meaning the Lord, to rule or to own' (Kaiser Jr 1973:52).

The definition of the name encompasses some of the attributes of Yahweh. Yahweh is Lord. Yahweh is the ruler and the owner (Ps 24:1, 2), 'The earth is the Lord's and all that it contains, the world and those who dwell in it. For He has founded it upon the seas and, and established upon the rivers.' These attributes of Baal could without resistance, be used for Yahweh as well. Yahweh could easily be referred to as the Baal of Israel. Kapelrud (1965:31) also observes that, 'The term *baʿal* was applied to anyone of those beings who were associated with springs, trees, graves and particularly fertile places. Each of them ruled over his own little region; and in this use Baal is not a proper noun but a generic term,'

This is a pertinent observation because the term Baal is actually a functional and positional description. The gods of the Canaanites could have had proper names but are all referred to as Baals. This name could, as mentioned in the previous paragraphs, be easily associated to any being in position of authority and ownership. Kapelrud (1965:31) also mentions that, 'The word Baal was extended to apply to anyone who had special skill in a particular activity as when Joseph is called "baal haʿlomot, a master of dreams" (Genesis 37:19).

It may not be very clear as to whether the Canaanites had one specific deity known as Baal like Israel had Yahweh. They had many Baals as the sources seem to indicate. But the Baal who performed the fertility function could have been more prominent. This could be because the survival of the Canaanites was dependent on the fruitfulness of the land watered by rain. Baal was not prominent because of creative power but because of the much needed water that he could provide. The generic use of the term Baal rules out the practice of monotheism. The generic use of the name further suggests that no supreme being controlled all the spheres of life in the Canaanites society. Different spheres had different deities.

The localization of the names as in Baal–hamon (place of multitude), Baal–hanan (Baal is gracious), Baal–peor (a Moabite god worshipped on Mount Peor) (Nichol 1979, 8: 106) points strongly to support the idea that Baal may not have been a single specific god. Of the many Baals that were worshipped by the Canaanites there was a prominent one. Day (1988:547) says that, 'The discovering of the Ugaritic texts show that there was one great Canaanite storm fertility deity of cosmic stature.'

6.2 Titles of Baal

Much as the term Baal is used as a generic name, there is a specific deity who bears it as a name. This deity has other titles which identify him as a specific god who performs specific functions. It is important to note that Baal does not bear the title of creator of heaven and earth. Habel (1964:57) concurs that Baal does not create heaven and earth here, either ex-nihilo or from chaos (Yam). Rather he introduces something new into the world to demonstrate his life giving creative power as the lord of the cosmos. He further notes that the pertinent line in the text reads, 'I will create lightning which the heavens do not know, thunder that mankind does not know, nor do the multitudes of the earth understand' (Habel1964:57). This is already an indication that whatever powers Baal claims to have, they are secondary in the eyes of Yahweh and the knowledge of Israel. He is not, and cannot be a supreme god. For Israel to go after Baal was a serious affront to Yahweh. If Baal cannot create ex-nihilo, he is but a creature himself. The powers of Baal were limited to the manipulation of what already existed.

The Canaanite deity is distinguished by a specific name. Habel (1964:73) says, 'Hadad is the Baal of Canaan. Baal stands erect as a vigorous young warrior god, brandishing a club in one hand and holding a lightning flash which culminates in a huge spear head in the other. Beneath the feet of Baal it seems are turbulent waves which represent the sea or flood over which Baal is victorious.' Baal has to engage in battle with the elements nature in order to rule

over them. He gains his power through conflict in particular with the sea. Baal as the maker of rain does not seem to control the flood which he begins as rain. He is both powerful and powerless. This combination of power and weakness is the opposite of Yahweh who is omnipotent. Israel is lured by a deity whose very title reveals his in-built weaknesses. Yahweh's name reveals that He is the prime cause and does not have the limitations of Baal. Baal is known as the storm-god of Canaan. Kaiser Jr. (1973:51) says that, 'Baal is an appellative for the storm-god which developed into a proper name. It is almost used exclusively for Hadad in Ugaritic texts by virtue of the fact that he was 'lord and ruler par excellence in the Ugaritic pantheon.'

Baal is known to create thunder and lightning, and because of that he is known as the 'rider of the clouds.' Habel (1964:74) notes that, 'As the storm-god, Baal bears the exclusive name "rider of the clouds" (*rkb*, 'rpt). This colourful expression underscores the Canaanite belief that the presence of Baal was evident from the advent of the nimbus in the heavens. These are the chariots of Baal.' Baal was associated with life giving rain. This made him very dear to the Canaanites. They were compelled to worship him. Though Yahweh is not specifically known as a storm-god, the Hebrew Bible records a storm and a flood caused by Yahweh in Genesis 6:17, 'And behold, I even I am bringing the flood of water upon the earth to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life from under the heaven; everything that is on earth shall perish.' The Hebrew Bible portrays Yahweh as the God who causes water to come from beneath and from above. Apparently Noah's flood is the first time that the earth experienced rain. In the narrative, Yahweh is in total control. He brings the flood and dries up the waters as well. He does not use the rain and the flood as credentials of His creative power. It is part of His natural elements which He puts to use.

Ancient Near Eastern Societies in many instances attached divine intervention to natural events and cycles that were beyond their comprehension. It could be that the phenomenon of rain induced them to conclude that there was a divine force

that moved the natural elements to create rain. This could imply that the deity Baal was a mental projection of the Canaanite to explain the mystery of rain. He was made into images to actualize his presence. Bronner (1968:65) notes that, 'The important role rain played in influencing the thoughts and actions of man in the land of Canaan (Palestine) is apparent from the pages of Scripture. It is quite understandable that that in an agricultural society, the supply of rain should greatly influence man's behaviour and thought. On sufficient supply of rain depended the growth and failure of the crops and consequently an abundance or scarcity of food. Famine was due to failure of rain.'

Contextually it can be deduced that nature (to a large extent) determined the type of god that would be uppermost in the mind of the Canaanites. The god that provides the means of survival that are beyond human control deserves worship and reverence. In the case of the land of Canaan, and because of the dependence on rain, the god Baal was relevant in the land of Canaan. He met the dire need of rain. It can also be surmised that the Canaanite gods were identified or created based on the provision of the survival needs of the people. In my view question might be, did they really exist or were they just mental projections to explain the seemingly supernatural cycles of nature? These are unsubstantiated thoughts but worth pondering.

There is a marked contrast between the gods of the Canaanites and the gods of the Egyptians. The land of Egypt is not nourished by rain but is solely dependent on the river Nile. Kitchen (1976, 2:225) describes the rainfall in Egypt saying, 'The rainfall in Egypt is of the slightest: about seven and one half inch at Alexandria, an inch at Cairo, nil at Aswan apart from very occasional showers and cloud bursts.' From the weather pattern of Egypt it would be unnecessary to have a rain god or goddess because he or she would be dysfunctional. The rain god or goddess is not needed because rain is not the source of Egyptian livelihood. Among the lists of the many Egyptian gods there might be a rain god but would not be prominent. Amun represented the hidden powers of nature (not

explicit about rain which is natural). Min of Coptos embodied fertility and virility of mainly animals and humans. Sokar governed death and new life together with Osiris. There is also Ra who is associated with kingship (Kitchen1976, 2:251). The Egyptians were not passionate about rain and their gods had other credentials apart from making rain. Their gods did not even engage in battle with the cosmic waters. [Hp://www.Ancientegypt.co.uk/gods/home.html](http://www.Ancientegypt.co.uk/gods/home.html): *The gods and goddesses of Ancient Egypt*, 'The Ancient Egyptians believed in many gods and goddesses. Each one had their own role to play in maintaining peace and harmony across the land. Some gods and goddesses took part in creation, some brought the flood every year, some offered protection and some took care of the people when they died. Others were either local gods who represented towns or gods who represented plants or animals but none is a storm god or a rain maker.' The water resources of Egypt are not rain dependent but river. The river Nile itself is one of the gods of the Egyptians. If there was a rain god, that god would have to be resident at the source of the Nile where there is abundant rain. Then that god would no longer be an Egyptian rain god.

The nature and existence of the Canaanite gods was largely dictated by the natural context prevailing in the land. The Canaanites knew no other gods who could supply them with rain. On the other hand Israel came out of the land of Egypt, a land without rain. They wandered forty years in the desert where there is no rain.

From the natural context of departure, it can be seen that there would be a clash of worship between Israel and the Canaanites. The Canaanites might marvel at Yahweh's power to sustain Israel for forty years in the desert while Israel would wonder at the miracle of rain and the prosperity of the inhabitants. It can further be noted that Israel would be prone to adopt the Canaanite worship practice in order to survive in the Promised Land. However, Israel knowing that Yahweh is the creator of the heavens and the earth would not need to worship a god who performs wonders from Yahweh's creation.

In the Canaanite pantheon Baal is the lord, owner and master provider of Canaanite life subsistence. His worship was central to Canaanite existence. Robinson (1966:175) notes that, 'If his worship was not properly carried out, he can withhold these things, and in an extreme case he may yet go further and bring on the erring community more disasters, foreign enemies or wild beasts.'

The belief that Baal was capable of withholding rain and bring disasters should have made the Canaanites worship him with dreaded fear. Baal, in other words also operated on the blessing and curse motif like Yahweh. In the Hebrew Bible, Yahweh can also bring the same disasters on the erring people. Some of the curses of breaking the Covenant involved the withholding of rain, 'And the heaven which is over your head shall be bronze, and the earth which is under you, iron. The Lord will make the rain of your land powder and dust. From heaven it shall come down upon you until you are destroyed' (Deut 28:23, 24). Note that the blessing of rain is limited to life in the land of Canaan. During the wandering in the desert such a condition would not be applicable. Baal is not mentioned and is not a threat because the sky is already bronze. Life in the desert is not subject to the cycle of the seasons. On the other hand Yahweh is depicted as a storm-god par excellence. In Judges 5:4, 5, Yahweh is also described in storm imagery, 'Lord when thou didst go out from Seir, When thou didst march from the field of Edom, The earth quaked and the heavens also dripped, even the clouds dripped water. The mountains quaked at the presence of the Lord, This is Sinai; at the presence of the Lord, God of Israel.'

Much as Baal wields a lot of power and control over the natural forces, he is one of the lesser gods. How did he ascend to power? Did he overthrow the supreme deity of the Canaanite pantheon?

6.3 The Conflict Motif in the Baal Tradition

The ascension of Baal follows the Ancient Near Eastern conflict motif. Baal is also known as 'aliyan Baal' – the victorious one Kaiser Jr (1973:53). Baal's victory may imply that he is not original in the Canaanite pantheon. He is not the original head of the gods of Canaan. Cundall (1976,1:432) states that, 'El was doubtless the head of the Canaanite gods, but Baal is not described as the son of El but the son of Dagan, another Amorite deity probably a vegetation or rain god. Temples to both Baal and Dagan have been discovered at Ras Shamra (the site of Ancient Ugarit), but not one dedicated to El himself. In the Ugaritic texts, El is the "father of year" who dwells at the source of the "Two Deeps" and conveys his messages by messengers suggesting his age and remoteness.'

Baal is evidently venerated for his procreative powers. His fertility powers sustain the Canaanite economy. El is not worshipped as the fertility god. Commenting on El, Miller (1967:418) says, 'And the fact remains that in the Ugaritic texts, El is not a fertility god, Baal is the fertility god and proves his powers even as El fails to prove his. He goes on to say that El is identified as the god of the patriarchs who had prestige and power. This is the god with whom Yahweh was identified with (Miller 1967:430).

It is not however, mentioned as to whether Baal had conflict with El for him to become prominent in the pantheon. He could have been one of the messengers of El to carryout his instructions. If El is the creator of the cosmo, then Baal would have to seek authorization to use El's raw material. Perhaps Baal was a mediator between El and his people and gradually became more prominent. L' Heurreux (1979:5) does mention that, 'Accordingly, El may be understood as the ultimate authority in the cosmos. His decree is necessary in important affairs, but leaves the management of the cosmos to young executive deities, intervening in their struggles when absolutely necessary.' Unlike Baal, Yahweh does not have a host of gods who do His bidding. He does not head a pantheon whose struggles for supremacy He has to quell from time to time. Baal's name 'aliyan Baal' is not

earned in battle with Yahweh. Habel (1964:51) expands on the title *aliyan* Baal saying, 'The hero of the Canaanite pantheon is "Aliyan Baal," a name which defines the character of the fertility god par excellence. But Baal is not the lord of nature by divine right but by divine power. Baal is *aliyan*, he is as the name implies the "victorious one, the valiant warrior or conquering hero." This divine power is nowhere mentioned to have subdued Yahweh.

Baal's title is earned because he has conquered some lesser gods. The conflict motif seems to apply to 'secondary gods,' the gods who struggle to control natural forces to assert their authority and providential powers. They are secondary gods in a sense that they use what the supreme gods have created. Habel (1964:53) states that, 'By the conquest of Yam, Baal establishes an eternal dominion over the cosmic waters with which he fertilizes the earth.' The fact that Baal has to conquer Yam, implies that the waters are not a product of Baal or else they would not be in rebellion. Yam is actually a god who through conquest has been enslaved by Baal. Yahweh does not seem to exercise dominion because of conquest. The emphasis is on His creative power although some writers like Cundall (1976, 1:432) note that, 'Some scholars would equate Prince Sea with Lotan "the twisting Serpent, the Leviathan of the OT.'

Baal is depicted as a warrior and a victor. He has defeated the other deities. These deities are the natural forces or are gods who control nature. One thing observable is that Baal lives in constant conflict because his enemies, the natural forces are recurring processes. Yahweh is also recorded to have defeated the sea. In His debate with Job, Yahweh says, 'Who enclosed the sea with doors, when bursting forth it went out from the womb; when I made a cloud its garment and thick darkness its swaddling band and I placed boundaries on it, And I set a bolt and doors, And I said, "Thus far you shall come but no farther; and here shall your proud waves stop" (Job 38:8-10). Yahweh has total control over the natural forces because He created them. He does not contend with them as gods. On the other hand Baal fights Yam as a god.

6.4 Similarities between Baal and Yahweh

There are some obvious similarities between Baal and Yahweh. As noted previously, the name Baal is generic and can be used for Yahweh as well. This generic characteristic of the name Baal gives occasion to gradual syncretism. The interchangeability of the title between Baal and Yahweh proved to be a snare to Israel.

6.4.1 Dwellers of Mount Zaphon

The Anchor Bible Dictionary (1992:545) comments that, 'According to the Ugaritic texts Baal's dwelling is *sfn* (Zaphon). The mountain in Hittite is Hazzi.' Kaiser (1973:63) concurs to say, 'Baal's palace was built upon Mt Saphon (Ugaritic Sapan). He refers to himself as the "god of Saphon" in the midst of his mountain. He is known as "Baal of the heights of Sapan." Similarly Yahweh also dwells in a mountain in the North as seen in Psalm 48:1, 2, 'Great is the Lord and Great to be praised. In the city of our God, His holy mountain. Beautiful in elevation, the joy of the whole earth, Is mount Zion in the far North, The city of the Great King.' Other texts also refer to Zion as the Holy Mountain of Yahweh (Ps 2:3; 87:1, Mic 4:1; Isa 2:3). It may not be easy to establish who copied from the other. It is probable that each ethnic group would strive for deity supremacy. If Mount Sapan is the most prominent, then each deity would claim the mountain. As mentioned earlier Baal would claim as a conqueror but Yahweh as the creator.

Mountains seem to be common dwelling places for the gods. This could be because they are symbols of strength. They are a symbol of security and permanence. In Yahwism, the mountains are Yahweh's platform for issuing instructions to His subjects. In Exodus 19 and 20, Yahweh gives or makes a covenant with Israel on Mount Sinai. Notably the mountain is not His credential. It becomes holy because of His presence. Yahweh's credentials are constant. It is His creative power and the deliverance of Israel from the Egyptian bondage. Kapelrud (1965:52) comments, 'What distinguishes Yahweh from Baal is His

intimate association with history. He was not bound to the cycle of the seasons but guided His people through towards a goal. The decisive event was not the victory over the primeval dragon but the victory over the Egyptians when Yahweh led His people out of the house of bondage across the Red Sea into the Promised Land.’ He further observes that the sexual conduct of the gods is recorded in a rather licentious tone or perspective. Their behaviour with the divine consorts does not reflect the strict regulation of sexual behaviour that is portrayed in the Hebrew Bible. Yahweh, unlike Baal, never had a divine consort and does not seem to induce His subjects to sexual engagements. Sex is part of the natural processes and not necessarily a divine activity. In Israel’s religion goddesses were always felt to be manifestly alien and abominable because their function is mainly war and sex. Yahweh Himself is transcendent and above nature. He does not die and resurrect according to the rhythm of the seasons (Kapelrud 1965:52).

The evidence in the Ras Shamra shows that Baal lived in Mount Saphon in the North. The Hebrew Bible refers to Yahweh dwelling in the mountain of the North. Could it be that both gods lived in one mountain? This similarity can either be cause for conflict or syncretism.

6.4.2 Similar Temple Design

Another aspect of similarity is the temple of Baal. There may be other deities who had structures that would resemble that of Baal and Yahweh, however, this study is limited to the similarity between Yahweh and Baal. Commenting on the temple of Baal, Kapelrud (1965:8) points out a similarity saying,

Both temples have a large in most room, the holy of holies where images of the gods were set up. Outside it there was another room, the holy place, which in the temple of Baal was open towards the fore court where the remains of an alter were found. When the cultic acts were carried out, it was there in the court that the people were assembled and the sacrifices were offered. Thus the plan of the temple was very similar to the one

adopted by King Solomon in Jerusalem centuries later.’ Solomon’s temple had an inner sanctuary and the nave in front of the sanctuary (1Kin 6:17-19).

It is not clear as to why Solomon’s temple had the same pattern as that of Baal. Did Solomon copy Baal’s temple in honour of Baal? Was it a sign that Baal was venerated in Israel? Or did he adopt it as a superior piece of architecture seeing that the Canaanites were city dwellers endowed with city planning? It is unlikely that Solomon’s temple was similar to that of Baal for above mentioned reasons. Yahweh’s temple from inception had a clearly defined structure as the tabernacle shown to Moses in Exodus 25. It had an inner sanctuary known as the ‘holy of holies’ and the ‘holy place.’ The ‘holy of holies’ was a sacred place for the Ark of the Covenant. Unlike the ‘holy of holies’ in Baal’s temple, there were no images of the gods in Yahweh’s temple. The Ark of the Covenant contained the Ten Commandments, the law of Yahweh’s government. Yahweh could not be reduced to an image. It would therefore not be far fetched to maintain that Solomon’s temple was patterned after the wilderness tabernacle of Exodus 25.

The epithets of Baal have close similarities with those of Yahweh. The place of abode for Baal is almost the same as that of Yahweh; they both live in the mountain of the North. They have the same enemy, the Sea. The temple structures are very similar. There arises the question as to who copied the other? Did the Hebrew historians redact the accounts of Baal and make them look like Yahweh’s story. There are times when stark contrasts serve as a deterrent of syncretism because the gap may be too wide to bridge. There are times too when things are too close to distinguish that the people may despair and regard everything the same. Israel could have given up on attempts to maintain a distinctive difference between Yahweh and Baal, and worship without much questioning. It may not be possible to clearly identify who copied from the other but it is possible to affirm that there are areas of close and almost indistinguishable similarities.

6.4.3 Riders of the Clouds

The scenario unfolding in the epithets of Baal is that of Baal as a 'rider of the clouds.' On the other hand there are several texts in the Hebrew Bible which portray Yahweh as the "rider of the clouds par excellence." In the times of bondage in Egypt, Israel did not know Yahweh in terms of presence. Moses' first encounter with Yahweh is the burning bush. This is the opposite of clouds and water. Perhaps the imagery of clouds would not carry the correct message in an arid land where clouds do not bring fertility to the land. Notably, however, is the fact that when Yahweh introduces himself to Israel and leads them across the desert, He comes as a pillar of a cloud, 'And the Lord was going before them as a pillar of a cloud by day to lead them on the way and a pillar of fire by night to give them light so that they may travel by day and by night' (Ex 13:21). The sight of the pillar of the cloud was the sight of Yahweh. The Bible further says, 'And the angel of God who had been going before the camp moved and went behind them; and the pillar of the cloud moved from before them and stood behind them' (Ex 14:19). The cloud served as a symbol of the visible presence of the angel of the Covenant. This would be etched in the memory of Israel that Yahweh is a rider of the clouds (Kaiser Jr. 1990, 12:389). Ashley (1993:189) comments on Numbers 9:15-21 saying, 'The cloud symbolized the divine presence of Yahweh and further communicates the act of obedience.' The cloud determines the sight of the camp and the duration of the camp. Israel was being conditioned to obey the cloud symbolism. This could have posed a challenge in Canaan where Baal was a rider of the cloud. Being used to the cloud symbol of divine presence Israel could have easily equated Baal to Yahweh. The cloud must have been a supernatural cloud because it kept moving changing positions to shield Israel. Clouds are not known for and changing positions in relation to human movement and activities. In Numbers 9:15-21, there is an elaborate description of the presence and function of the cloud,

'Now on the day that the tabernacle was erected, the cloud covered the tabernacle the tent of the testimony and in the evening it was like the appearance of fire until morning. So it was continuously the cloud would

cover it by day and the pillar of fire by night. And whenever the cloud was lifted from over the tent, and afterward the children of Israel would then set out, and in the place where the cloud settled down, there the sons of Israel would camp....If sometimes the cloud remained over the tabernacle, according to the command of the Lord, they remained camped. Then according to the command of the Lord, they set out. If for some time the cloud remained from evening until morning, when the cloud was lifted up in the morning; they would move out; or if it remained in the day time and at night whenever the cloud was lifted, they moved out.

During the desert wanderings, Yahweh's presence was symbolized by the cloud. Yahweh was the "rider of the cloud." The absence of the cloud meant the absence of Yahweh. It meant the absence of His protection as well. It could be that when Israel learned that Baal was the rider of the clouds, she assumed that it was a common practice of the gods to ride the clouds. If Baal could ride the clouds, then Baal was strong as well or that Baal was the Canaanite name for Yahweh.

However, the most impactful imagery of Yahweh as the rider of the clouds is seen when Yahweh asserts His authority at Mount Sinai. The making or giving of the Covenant is accompanied by clouds. The Exodus account says, 'And the Lord said to Moses, "Behold, I shall come to you in a thick cloud, in order that the people may hear when I speak with you and may also believe in you forever." Then Moses told the words of the people to the Lord' (Ex 19:9). The Covenant imagery and memory would be that of clouds. Each time Israel would remember the Covenant ceremony at Mount Sinai, they would recall the thick clouds that veiled Yahweh.

Another, very significant cloud imagery is when the temple is dedicated by King Solomon. Yahweh's acceptance of the temple was symbolized by cloud, 'And it came about when the priests came from the Holy Place, that the cloud filled the house of the Lord.....Then Solomon said, "The Lord has said that he would dwell in the thick cloud" (1Kin 8:10, 12).

The cloud riding epithet of Yahweh was a problematic imagery to Israel in comparison to the epithet of Baal as cloud rider too. If Baal could ride the clouds, then Baal was as strong as Yahweh. The God of the Covenant was the God of the clouds. It was the presence of the clouds that led them in the wilderness; it was the presence of the cloud that announced the presence of Yahweh at Mount Sinai. Yahweh signalled His acceptance of the temple by a cloud that “filled the house of the Lord.”

In the Promised Land, the cloud could have been regarded as the symbol of Baal to bring the life giving water. The rain clouds of the Mediterranean could be a fitting weather pattern for such a concept. Life in the Promised Land was dependent on the cloud in the sky. Robinson (1966:175) comments to say, ‘Apart from his help, there is no hope of success in the production of annual crops. He controls the rain (an especially important function in Palestine – no big rivers – dependency on rain) and causes the seed to germinate. To his bounty are due the products of the soil especially those three most necessary means of civilized livelihood, corn, wine, oil.’

Baal worship was a complex affair that may not be taken at surface level. The intricacies of Baal worship and the close similarity to Yahwism were a real threat to the covenant relationship between Yahweh and Israel. It would be enticing to transfer the attributes of Yahweh to Baal or even worship Baal in the guise of Yahweh.

Some of the common similarities between Yahweh and Baal are:

1. Yahweh and Baal are both pictured as storm deities Job 38, Psalm 29.
2. Both are warriors who ride the clouds Psalm 18:10; 2Sam 22:11, Psalm 77:18.
3. The two share common enemies – Leviathan Job 3:8; 41:1, Psalm 74:14.
Sea Monster Job 7:12; Psalm 74:13; Isaiah 59:9, Yamim Psalm 89:9.

A careful look at these similarities reveals that they all have to do with water, its control and its supply. These are not essential attributes inherent in the being of the deities. They are attributes assigned to the deities by the subjects. The attributes are linked to the critical need of water. It could be that these attributes are influenced by the geography and climate of the land of Canaan. It is therefore plausible to suggest if the climate of the land of Canaan were to change, these attributes would change as well. Comparatively, it is Baal who is tied and limited to these attributes. He is impotent to function in the desert as Yahweh has done. All climates and landscapes are under the control of Yahweh. Israel does not worship Yahweh because he can function in a particular environment. Yahweh is worshipped as the God of the universe.

CHAPTER 7

THE BAAL FERTILITY CULT

7. The Fertility Cult Motif

In this chapter I will outline the origin and meaning of the fertility cult, its practice among the Canaanites and the areas of conflict with the Covenant. The religion of the Ancient Near Eastern people was more practical than theoretical. The gods of the peoples were practical participants in the daily lives of the worshippers. They were not far removed from the everyday lives and needs of the people. Hence they were visible images who could be consulted and summoned in the times of need. The Ancient Near Eastern peoples' world view was that of survival today and now. They had concepts of the after life but the present day needs were more paramount in their religious psyche than what happens after death. Being dependent on the product of the land for survival, their religion was fertility and produce driven. This we know because the means of earning a living at our disposal today were not known then. The lack of good agricultural produce was synonymous with the curse of the gods. However, one should not take a simplistic view of the Baal fertility cult.

The fertility cult had deep rooted origins in paganism. Paganism is a belief that the gods are not the absolute forces. There is a realm in which there is no absolute being but universal forces. These forces are the origins of the gods through the universal womb of fertility. The womb of fertility birthed the gods (cosmogony). In most Ancient Near Eastern tales of creation the gods have sexes and also reproduce. Hence the earth's life, in their world view, revolves on the concept of fertility. The worship is based on the fertility cult. The cult itself is a series of rituals (Kauffmann 1972:21)

Harowitz (2005:5) commenting on the creation story of Enuma Elish remarks that, 'So for instance the notion of the creation of the gods and the world by sexual intercourse and birth is already found in the Sumerian sources.' The fertility concept is a belief system which a modern reader may frown at because it

does not make sense in an empirical society like ours. However, to the Ancient people it was the very process of life. It was an essential activity which could not be abdicated. This practice was so ingrained in the Eastern people that to dismantle it would be tantamount to dismantling their existence. The fertility concept was hinged on seeking divine intervention of the gods to stimulating or induce nature to produce, be it humans, animals or crops. The gods themselves had to be stimulated by the subjects through sympathetic magic: the subjects would perform before the gods to excite them.

The Ancient Near Eastern People clung to these practices, horrible as they may appear for their very existence. Dever (2005:3) comments on how survival was the ultimate concern. He says,

Existing under extraordinarily difficult conditions in a marginal economy, they (ANE people) knew existentially that they lived in a mysterious, unpredictable perilous world (which we would call nature). In the midst of all uncertainty and anxiety, they faced ultimate threat: extinction. This would be death by famine, disease, or natural and man-made disasters but the possibility of obliteration of one's self, one's family one's family and posterity....the threat derived from that the universe is not "friendly." It was disordered chaotic and fundamentally dangerous if not wicked. Even the gods could kill for no apparent reason. To appease the gods, the people would go all the way in performing all the deemed sacred acts.

In contrast to the fertility cult, Yahweh is an absolute being. There is no primordial realm in Yahwism. Yahweh is not a cosmic product. There is no cosmogony. When He created Adam and Eve He commanded the whole creation to be 'fruitful and multiply' (Genesis 1:28). This was not the introduction of a fertility cult. Yahweh would not be worshipped as a fertility god of vegetation and human procreation. This would be tantamount to reducing Him to a local deity. Yahweh would be worshipped as the absolute being through obedience. In paganism there is no absolute transcendent being. The gods are not creators ex nihilo. They are rooted in the universal realm and are subject to its laws. They do

not govern the world of men. They head pantheons and are maintainers of the cosmos. The primordial realm with its independent pre-existent forces transcends them. (Kauffman 1972:22)

The Canaanite worship of Baal would be classified as a pagan practice. Baal does not claim creative powers nor does he project himself as an absolute being. He submits to the primordial realm. On the other hand Yahweh is absolute and cannot be subservient to any autonomous universal force. All forces are subject to Him for He set them in motion. He created without the aid of primordial forces. He created ex-nihilo. The very points of departure of Baal worship and Yahwism have fundamental irreconcilable differences. Kauffman (1972:22) further mentions that the gods are of a product of a primordial substance generated by its boundless fertility.

The primordial realm is pre-existent when the gods come into being. Its inherent forces supersede the will of the gods. The gods themselves are born from the womb of fertility. They then transmit it to the human beings. If the concept of fertility pre-exists the gods, then it governs their actions. They have limited power to control it much as they can transmit it to the worshippers. Kauffman (1972:23) is right when he says, 'Corresponding to the birth of the gods through natural forces is their subjection to sexual conditions. All pagan religions have male and female deities who desire to mate with each other. The cycles of nature are commonly conceived as the perennial mating of the gods. Thus the gods are subject by their nature to sexual needs.' The mates of the gods are known as consorts, leaning more on the companion aspect than the strict wife.

It is interesting to note that in the Epic of Gilgamesh, man is made from clay by the mother goddess. He roams with wild animals. He is savage and wild. This is contrary to the man created by Yahweh who is sane and rules and names the animals as seen in the story of Eden in Genesis 1 & 2. The man created by the mother goddess is savage. He is tamed and civilized by through the seductive

charms of a harlot. His name is Enkidu and becomes the close friend of Gilgamesh (Livingston 1974:90).

Livingston (1974:90) brings out an interesting matter when he says, 'In the Epic of Gilgamesh we are told that the mother goddess made from clay a man who roamed with the wild beasts, savage and wild. He was tamed and civilized through the seductive charms of a harlot and became a close friend of Gilgamesh. His name was Enkidu.'

It is interesting to note that the man is tamed by a harlot. This implies the veneration of harlotry and further suggesting that harlotry was a noble profession. It should therefore have been a desirable, a noble practice among some Ancient Near Eastern societies. On the other hand, the word harlot is used with serious negativity in Yahwism. The word *zanah* is frequently used to describe Israel's breach of the covenant relationship with Yahweh.

The word *zona (qal)* (Hall 1997, 1:1123) means prostitute, harlot, (*zenut*), *nom*. Prostitution, unfaithfulness. *Zanah* is a broad term for unfaithfulness including adultery and may at time be synonymous with adultery. It further says, 'The common and most important use of the word *zanah* is metaphorical. Since, it referred to illicit sex, especially in violation of the covenantal relationship (betrothal or marriage), it could be used to refer to covenantal unfaithfulness on the part of Israel, since this covenant came to be viewed as a marriage' (Hosea 2). The veneration of sex under the rubric of the fertility cult goes against the grain of the Covenant relationship between Yahweh and Israel. The relationship between the Covenant and the Baal fertility cult would not be that of cross pollination but cross pollution. The fertility cult was a belief system of a people that had been settled for centuries. Israel was a nation in formation as a Covenant people. They still had questions about Yahweh and His attributes. They would not be a match with the Canaanites. They would not engage the Canaanites without letting go of the Covenant demands. Hence Yahweh banned

them from associating with the Canaanites. He would drive out the Canaanites and exterminate them.

The fertility cult was also practiced in Egypt. Yamauchi (1976, 2:531) states that, 'In Egypt Osiris was killed by his brother Seth, but was revived by his wife Isis. From the Egyptian Empire to the Ptolemaic period, Osiris was associated with germinating grain.' Egyptian records have proved to be a valuable source of information about the lives and practices of the Ancient Near Eastern people. If the fertility concept was prevalent in Egypt, then it was a generally accepted belief system in many kingdoms and settlements of the Ancient Near East. The fertility system is also evident in many Ancient Near Eastern creation stories. Water seems to be the major component of cult. Livingston (1974:88) comments to say, 'Briefly the story is that originally there was a male fresh water ocean and a female salt water ocean that mated and produced a multitude of lesser deities which were various aspects of nature.' In other creation accounts the sea Yam, is an enemy of the gods. The gods cannot have dominion until they have overcome the sea. Is the desire to subdue Yam fuelled by the fact that you cannot control fertility without mastering Yam because Yam is the source of rain?

The sea has always been and is a formidable force. It is therefore logical that no divinity would be considered omnipotent without having subdued the sea. The subjects themselves would not have implicit trust in a deity whose powers over the sea are questionable. The sea in other words was the ultimate test for any deity.

The creation of man in the Ancient Near Eastern accounts implies the sexual activity of the gods. This is in contrast to the creation account of the Pentateuch. In the Genesis account, man is made from clay. He is given the breath of life, 'Then the Lord God formed man out the dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life ; and man became a living being' (Gen 2:7). In the Ancient Near Eastern mythology man is a product of the mating gods. Yahweh, even if He is referred to in masculine term, does not have a consort. There is no

sexual activity on the part of Yahweh when He is creating the heavens and the earth. Yahweh creates ex-nihilo.

7.1 Baal and the Fertility Cult

In the fertility cult concept, Baal, the Canaanite god is the most active. Gray (1962:1) refers to Baal as, 'Baal (master). The god Hadad, the fertility god par excellence, of Canaan.' In the livelihood of the Canaanites, all fertility is the work of Baal. Antonelli (1995:424) states that, 'Baal in Hebrew means "*fructifier*." Bet Baal, a house of Baal means "a field efficiently watered by rain and requiring no artificial irrigation." Baal is a "rider of the clouds" in the epics because he rules the sky forces responsible for crop growth, sun, rain and clouds, hence thunder, lightning and dew as well.' The symbolism of Baal's presence was the rain clouds. This imagery is an inescapable reminder that all depended on Baal. It must not only have been an overwhelming presence but threatening and intimidating to anyone who would doubt the existence of Baal. Baal appears in a providential circumstance. He appears to provide the much needed rain. The imagery of raiding rain clouds could have been one of the most significant signs of Baal's care for his people. It was assumed that each time the clouds appear in the sky, Baal was at work for his people to bring fertility and rain. The thunder and lightning are part of his parade (Kaizer 1973:56). These are forces that are not only beyond human control but can be very threatening and even destructive to human life. Lightning and thunder belong to the realm of the gods. However, Baal's control of lightning and thunder is an achieved feat. They are not forces subject to him by creation. The forces are independent as it were. The attribute of bringing rain and fertility to the land would be very difficult for Israel to resist in the sense that it would be a theophany that had been going on for centuries before their advent. They would conclude that the land of milk and honey was the work of Baal.

7.2 The Cultic Practice

From the above observation of scholars, it can be seen that the fertility concept is rooted in the very philosophy of the origins of the universe. It is manifested in the sexuality of the gods and goddesses as seen in the previous chapter. Unlike the Hebrew God and the Hebrew culture, the Ancient Near Eastern deities are sexual beings who are referred to as male and female. In the Hebrew Bible male and female belong to the human realm and not the divine. The Ancient Near Eastern deities seem to indulge in sexual activity as a means of fertilizing the earth and procreation among the inhabitants. Yahweh is not a sexual being. Sex is not His means of creation and blessing. Yahweh does not create by mating with some consort or divine being. The process of potential stimulation is not operative in the Hebrew Scripture. He is not subject to sexual passion. The divinization and sacralisation of sex in the fertility cult is a serious threat to the covenant relationship of Yahweh and Israel. The very acts and objects that are detestable and abominable in Yahwism, are the means of worship in the fertility cult.

The Canaanites who practiced this kind of worship were more advanced in civilized living than the Israelites for they lived in walled cities. It came as a surprise to Israel to see a heathen people so endowed with wealth and the fruit of the land particularly northern Israel and as seen by the fruits gathered by the twelve spies in Numbers 13:27. How could they be so vile and be so blessed? How could a religion so contrary and abominable to the Yahweh be appealing to any God? Perhaps Yahweh's demands of high moral standards were unfounded? Perhaps Yahweh was not the only true God? May be Yahweh was one of the deities. This apparent and contradictory reality in Canaan would shake the foundations of the covenant. Would they honour the covenant stipulations or go the easy passionate way and enjoy the fruit of the land? The cultic practice of the Canaanites would test their fidelity Yahweh. Robinson (1966:187) commenting on the cultic practice says,

There is still a greater charge to be brought against the religion of the Ancient Palestine. It was not merely indifferent to the claims of simple ethics; it even condoned and authorized direct violation of the moral law. No one could justify murders in civil life, yet there were times, rare it is true, when human sacrifice was practiced. Sexual irregularity was condemned by the common feeling of the western, but sacramental fornication was a regular feature of religious life, clearly appearing at other times as well as the autumn festival.

The practices regarded as highly immoral among the Covenant people, were a regular feature among the Canaanites. They were a means of appeasement to the Canaanite deities. Robinson (1966:18) further observes that, 'Indeed it may well be that this vice was practically confined to the high places. And the great festivals, especially that of autumn seems to have been times when riotous licence, when free rein was given to human passion.' Even from the surface it can be seen that religions of the Ancient Palestine would not function side by side with Hebrew monotheism. There would be perpetual conflict between those governed by the moral law of Sinai and those governed by the Baals of the Canaanites. The Canaanites would not easily give up their century's old way of worship knowing that if they did so, they would lose wealth and life. Hence Yahweh drove them out of the land. The sense of right and wrong was blurring in the Canaanite religion. It is notable that in the Ugaritic materials, sin is rarely mentioned. The cultic practice climaxed during the worship festivals. Livingston (1974:109) mentions that, 'A year's festival is noted as the time when a holy marriage took place between the king representing the god Dumuzi, and one of the priestesses who represented Inanna. The act was to effect fertility and prosperity; hence it had sympathetic and magical meaning.'

It is important at this juncture to have a brief overview of the Hebrew cultic rituals or worship system. This will help to note the areas of irreconcilable conflict between Baal and Yahweh. The worshippers of Yahweh were also active

participants in the worship system. The cultic rituals were also numerous and were centred on the sanctuary.

7.2.1 Offerings

Israel's worship system had offerings that were regularly brought to Yahweh. These were offerings of gratitude, peace, penance or acts of affirming the sovereignty and providence of Yahweh. One of the first incidences of offerings that Israel gave as a nation is found in Exodus 25. Israel had just come out of Egypt and they needed to welcome the abiding presence of Yahweh among them by building Him sanctuary. The Hebrew Bible records, 'The Lord spoke to Moses saying, "Tell the sons of Israel to raise a contribution (terumah-offering) for me; from every man whose heart moves him you shall raise My contribution. "And this is the contribution you are to raise from them: gold, silver and bronze, blue, purple and scarlet material, fine linen, goat hair, ram skins dyed red, porpoise skins, acacia wood, oil for lighting, spices for anointing oil and for the fragrant incense, onyx stones and setting stones for the ephod and for the breastplate. "And let them construct a sanctuary for me that I may dwell among them" (Exodus 25:1-8). This is the first offering that Israel made as a nation. There is no hint of magic. It was used to construct a visible physical structure. Israel was also to bring an offering of first fruits, 'As an offering for the first fruits, you shall bring them to the Lord, but they shall not ascend for a soothing aroma on the alter.' "Every grain offering of yours moreover, you shall season with salt, so that the salt of the covenant of your God shall not be lacking from your grain offering; with all your offerings you shall offer salt" (Lev 2:12, 13). Of significance is the mention of the covenant in the offering. The offerings were intended to cement the bond between Yahweh and His people. Each time these offerings were presented to Yahweh Israel pledged her allegiance to the covenant. This Covenant stipulated the worship of Yahweh only and the keeping of the Ten Commandments which were of very high ethical values. There was no room for magic and divination.

7.2.2 Sacrifices

Another aspect of Israel's cultic practice was the sacrificial system. The Temple was the centre of the ritual of the sacrifices. It is important to note that one of the core reasons for leaving Egypt was to go and sacrifice to the Lord in the desert, 'And they will pay heed to what you say; and you with the elders of Israel will come to the king of Egypt; and you will say to him, the Lord, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us. So now please, let us go three days journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God' (Exodus 3:18). When Pharaoh released the children of Israel, he let them go on the basis that they were going to sacrifice to the Lord in the desert. The sacrifices of Israel were not food for Yahweh like in some religions. Rainey (1976, 5:196) says, 'The dependence of the deities upon food provided by man is further illustrated by a narrative description of the sacrifice offered by the flood hero Utnapishtim, after his escape from the deluge: "I poured out a libation on top the mountain. Seven and seven cult vessels I set up; upon their pot stands I heaped cane, cedar wood and myrtle. The gods smelled the savor, the gods crowded like flies about the sacrifice" (ANET 95a). He further says, 'This picture of the gods famished by hunger because mankind was destroyed and was longer providing their meals, swarming around like flies may reveal a touch of humour but it also brings home the pathos of Mesopotamian religion' (Rainey 1976, 5:196).

The idea of man being the provider of food for Yahweh is not the foundation of the Hebrew sacrificial system. Rather, sacrifices are offered to prepare man to stand before a holy God. Holbrook (1996:74) describes the sacrifices saying, 'Two categories of sacrifices were made each day:

1. The public offerings, better known as "the morning and evening sacrifices," (or, "the daily");
2. And the private offerings of the people.

Additional public offerings were made in connection with the Sabbath, new moon feasts and annual festivals. The public, daily burnt offering sacrificed morning and evening was the sanctuary's centre piece (Ex 29:38-42).

The crucial element of these offerings was the blood of the sacrifice. Since the sacrifices were substitutionary in nature, the blood of the sacrifice was important as a substitute for the blood of the person making the sacrifice. The burnt sacrifice which the sinner made in privacy could atone/expiate for sin. The expiation for sin was very strongly emphasized, 'For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the alter to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement' (Lev 17:11). This aspect of moral purity would be severely tested by the Canaanite rituals which had no emphasis on moral purity. Rainey (1976, 5:196) comments to say,

Although animals were habitually slaughtered, no evidence has been produced for any special attention being paid for the blood as an element of the ritual. The beast itself was food for the deity, but its blood was evidently allowed to return to the earth....Of special significance however, was the use made of the entrails. The lungs, the intestines and above all, the inner were utilized in the determination of oracles. There was even a special set of oracular conditions that could be determined by the behaviour of the sacrificed lamb in the death throes.

This magical approach to the sacrifice would be contrary to the Hebrew sacrificial system. In the Hebrew system there was no essential efficacy in the flesh and blood of the sacrifice except for its symbolism. The oracular conditions would be tantamount to divination which was prohibited in Yahwism. Furthermore, the sacrifices were not an end in themselves. They were a means to a holy and nobler life in harmony with the demands of the covenant. This can be seen in the fact that the Ark of the Covenant was the centre piece of the temple. The Ark of the Covenant contained the moral law of the Ten Commandments. This provided the worshippers with an insight into the character of God in addition to stipulating

the His righteous requirements (Holbrook 1996:120). Yahweh demanded righteousness to His law above the sacrifices as seen in 1Samuel 15:22, 'And Samuel said, "Has the Lord so much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, As in obeying the voice of the Lord?" Behold to obey is better than sacrifice and to heed better than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of divination and insubordination as the sin of idolatry.' These words were spoken to Saul who disobeyed Yahweh. He had been instructed to utterly destroy the Amalekites but chose not to do so. This is a demonstration that Yahweh could not be appeased by mere sacrifice like the local deities.

7.3 Divinization and Sacralisation of Sex in the Fertility Cult.

On the other hand the cultic practice of Baal worship was more passionate and sensual in nature. The concept of the expiation of sin was not prominent. The participation of the worshippers was mainly as feeders and sustainers of the gods. The worshippers were also agents of stimulation to active the gods. Kapelrud (1965:65) notes that, 'The supreme cultic occasion was the great festival which lasted for several days and which was celebrated just as the autumn rain was beginning. The drought of the summer was at an end; and a new year could begin.' Apparently this was a celebration of the resurrection of Baal who had been taken into the underworld by Mot the god of death. Yamauchi (1976, 2: 531) comments to say, 'It is widely held that the fertility cults promote the fertility of man, animals and crops by celebrating the myth of a dying and rising god, with rites of mourning and later jubilation. The god was believed to typify the death and renewal of vegetation. A "sacred marriage" between the god represented by the king and the goddess represented by the hierodule, also was believed to promote the fertility of the land. The sacred prostitution of Astarte and Aphrodite also was directed to this end.'

In these celebrations, the Canaanites held festivals marking the transition from the dry to the wet season. Wine was consumed in large quantities. This could

explain the wild and sensual nature of the rites performed in the course of the festivals (Demoor 1972:12).

The presence of wine in festivities could have been to the effect that it was the most precious drink or it functioned as a stimulant to induce the worshippers into a festive mood.

Wine is also a feature in the Hebrew religion. It is taken to the temple as an offering (Ex 29:40). Wine forms part of the tithes that are brought to Yahweh (Deut 12:17). However, the effects of strong wine are mentioned so that it does not function as a stimulant in the temple services. The story of Noah in Genesis 9:21–24 shows that wine does not go with sobriety, a quality highly required in the worship of Yahweh. Men who were dedicated to the service of Yahweh were prohibited from consuming wine. This regulation is spelled out in Numbers 6: 1-4. The connotation is that if he drank strong wine, his mind would be clouded and his passions aroused making him unfit to discern the will of God. He would not be in position to comprehend the instructions from Yahweh. Sobriety was a prized quality of those who were part of the temple service or prophetic ministry. This was a clear point of conflict with the Canaanites who produced wine from the abundance of grapes.

The feasts of Yahweh, namely the feast of tabernacles and the feast of the first fruits also lasted for several days. The focus was on Yahweh's act of delivering them from Egypt, and His providential sustenance life from bountiful harvests. The feasts had nothing to do with cultic sex and fertility. They were held in line with the covenant ethics. In these festivals there were no libations of wine and blood poured into the ground to increase its fertility.

Among the Canaanites the focus of the cultic practice was on sexual stimulation to set the powers of fertility in action. Livingston (1974:111) comments, 'The major festivals, especially the new year feast focussed on sexual activity. Prominent in each of the Ancient Near Eastern religions were hosts of male and female prostitutes, who were the integral part of the temple personnel.' Scholars

like Davidson (2007:85) elaborate to say, 'In contrast with the Israelite conception of sexuality as a creation ordinance of a monotheistic God beyond the polarity of sexuality, Mesopotamian religions abounded with both male and female deities, and their myths often described creation and continuing fertility as occurring by means of sex among the gods.' With such a world view and perspective of life, the Canaanites were culturally and religiously positioned as arch enemies of the covenant. The fertility cult seems to have been so fundamental to Canaanite existence that its eradication and replacement by the Yahwistic covenant would be perceived as an extinction threat.

The Canaanites, as mentioned earlier, were more advanced both in agriculture and city settlement than the Israelites (they had walled cities). This means that their practices were not crude. They must have had a refined culture which they developed over the years. One of these refined practices was divine and sacred sex, as mentioned above, which was an integral part of the worship ritual. Sex had been transformed to be a divine and sacred ritual because it was part of the realm of the gods. It was the trigger of the fertility cult. Davidson (2007:87) points out that, 'According to the Sumerian theology, the fertility of the land was set in action by sexual action especially by the annual hieros gamos or sacred marriage rite. The core of this New Year ritual was sexual intercourse between the king- who was ritually transformed into the god Dumuzi and human female partner (probably a priestess) representing the goddess Inanna.' Davidson (2007:87) further mentions that the practice of sacred sex was also indulged in Egypt.

From the understanding of status and role of the ancient Egyptians in the Ancient Near East, it is quite clear that any Near Eastern practice that was prevalent in Egypt was surely a wide spread practice and norm. The prominence of Egypt in the Ancient Near Eastern region is a well-known fact. Their civilization is attested by the Pyramids, the Hieroglyphics and the irrigation system. We have seen earlier on that they had more records on the Canaanites than the Canaanites themselves and that they were one of the first to espouse monotheism. This is

because Egypt may be regarded as one of the first world nations of the Middle East. The Egyptians were regarded as civilized and custodians of civilizations of other nations as seen in the records of other kingdoms that can only be obtained from Egyptian writings.

The Baal fertility cult followed the seasons. Baal would descend under the earth during the dry season. At this time the worshippers would weep and lament. Towards the onset of the rains Baal, having defeated his enemies, would return triumphantly. The climax came with Baal being enthroned. There would be a great sacrificial feast at which there was uncontrolled festivity with abundant wine consumption, the whole ending in unrestrained debauchery when the god's marriage was celebrated (Kapelrud 1965:66).

One may even think of some of the fertility narratives that are found in the Hebrew Bible like that of Hannah. Is it a polemic against the Baal fertility cult? Could it be that Hannah had gone to the cultic temple for cultic prostitution? Was the Babylonian practice of compelling women to go to the temple once in a year also prevalent in Israel? There is however, no record that Hannah could have gone for such a ritual. She had gone to petition Yahweh. It should be noted that the petition was for fertility. It was an Ancient Near Eastern belief that barrenness was not a natural inability to have children but that God had closed the womb. Hence the ultimate solution was to call on the name of your God to miraculously open the open the womb. Whereas the Canaanites would turn to their abominable rituals, the chosen people were required to turn to Yahweh the creator of the universe.

The behaviour of Elis' sons has led some to believe that cultic prostitution was practiced in the temple of Yahweh. 1Samuel 2:22, states that, 'Now Eli was very old and he heard all that his sons were doing to all Israel and how they lay with the women who served at the doorway of the tent of meeting.' Everhart (2004:51) commenting on 1Samuel 2:22, says that, 'The next and only other time 'serving

women' appear in the Hebrew Bible, the mirrors have disappeared and the women are assumed to be prostitutes.'

In many religions the worship does not end in the mere slaughter of animals and the giving of gifts to appease the gods. There is a point at which the worshipper may physically actualize and experience the worship. Davidson (2007:93, 94) comments on the experience of the Baal worshippers saying,

In the Baal cult this (incestuous) sexual relationship is between the storm god Hadad (Baal) who dominates the Canaanite pantheon and his sister, usually described as Anat (or Baal's consort Asherah). Since the land is fertilized by the sperm (rain) of Baal, it is crucial that his sexual activity is stimulated. According to the Canaanite fertility cult theology, when the divine sex activity of the gods is emulated at the earthly high place (a place of worship usually set on a high hill or large alter), that same activity is further stimulated by sympathetic magic. Thus there appeared the office of the 'holy man' (qades) and 'holy woman' (qedesa) male and female personnel who among many functions engaged in sacred prostitution – sex for hire – at least ritual sex. Worshippers were encouraged to engage in ritual intercourse with shrine devotees in order to emulate and stimulate the sex activities of the gods.

The above quotation describes a dangerous concoction and combination of sexual immorality and sacredness. That, which is clearly polarized in the Hebrew Bible and Hebrew religion, is hereby synchronized in the Baal fertility cult. The sex ritual is performed in the sacred place at the sacred time of worship. It is not performed in holy matrimony but in a random immoral manner. It could be that in many occasions, there was no devotion to Baal at all but the sex ritual was an end in itself, done in the name of Baal. Such state of affairs would not be permitted and exist in the worship of Yahweh. Through the prophets, Yahweh demanded complete obedience and devotion from His subjects. He would not be short changed with a myriad of rituals and sacrifices.

Jeremiah was one of the prophets who strongly advocated the Sinai Covenant. He called for complete devotion and obedience to the covenant terms. In chapters 29:12, 13, he says, 'Then you will call upon me and pray to Me and come and pray to Me and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me when you seek Me with all your heart.' Jeremiah's use of the word heart (*lebab*) is a double emphasis of Yahweh's demand of undivided devotion. Luc (1997, 2:749) defines the use of the term in the OT saying, 'The OT terms *leb* and *lebab* are generally translated as "heart" "mind" and in some instances as "chest" and "conscience." In the OT the words have a dominant metaphorical use in reference to the centre of human physical and spiritual life, to the entire inner life of a person.' Isaiah (29:13) echoes Yahweh's sentiments on devotion when he says 'Then the Lord said, "Because this people draw near with their words And honour me with lip service, But they remove their hearts from Me and, And their reverence of Me consists of tradition learned by rote...'

The thrust is that the prophets guarded against sensuality. Yahweh would not be honoured by sympathetic magic that is a by product of rituals neither would He be physically stimulated. It is quite evident that Baal worship was heavily sensual. It was as it were from organ to organ and not from heart to heart. There, no doubt would be tension between the Baal fertility cult and Covenant rationalism. The temple sex cult would go against Yahweh's order of creation and the definition of sexuality and its context of practice.

7.4. Cultic Sex Personnel

The cultic personnel of Baal worship that Davidson mentions above are the direct opposite of Yahweh's temple workers. Davidson (2007:93, 94) mentions male and female cult prostitutes. The Hebrew Bible mentions them but from a polemic point of view. Harlotry was a profane practice in Israel. The Hebrew Bible in Leviticus 19:29 states that, 'Do not profane your daughter by making her a harlot so that the land may not fall to harlotry, and then become full of lewdness.' The prohibition in Deuteronomy 23:17, 18 is more explicit saying, 'None of the

daughters of Israel shall be a cult prostitute, nor shall any of the sons of Israel be a cult prostitute. You shall not bring the hire of a harlot nor the wages of a dog into the house of the Lord your God for a votive offering, for both of these are an abomination to the Lord your God.'

The reference to cult prostitution is a fore warning against the practices of the Canaanites. Israel as a covenant people was in danger of being trapped in the cults of the Canaanites. Israel should not profane her daughters and allow them to engage in harlotry. One of the reasons Yahweh dispossessed the Canaanites of the land was because of their defiled and defiling practices. The inclusion of sex rituals in worship had seared the consciences of the Canaanites such that they saw nothing wrong. Covenant morality would be totally foreign to the Canaanite. This can be seen from the elaborate warning in Leviticus 18:24-28:

Do not defile yourselves by any of these things for by all these, the nations by which I am casting out before you have become defiled. The land has become defiled therefore I have visited its punishment upon it so that the land has spewed its inhabitants. But as for you, you are to keep My judgements and My statutes, and shall not do any of these abominations, neither the native nor the alien who sojourns among you. (for the men of the land who have been before you have done all these things); so that the land may not spew you out should you defile it, as it has spewed out the nation which has been before you.

The defilement mentioned is from the Covenant perspective. To the Canaanites, their worship practice had made the land, 'a land of milk and honey.' Baal, through the fertility cult and its rituals had given the land its bounties and prosperity as evident in the agricultural prosperity. This apparent prosperity would be a snare to the Covenant people to abandon their God and go whoring after Baal.

Unlike the immoral rituals of Baal worship, the temple services in Yahwism were morally aligned to the Covenant ethical demands. Purity was one of the virtues of

the temple personnel. In fact, the priests would not enter the temple unless they themselves had been purified and forgiven of their sins. This is seen in the Levitical regulations (Lev 16:1-6) where the Hebrew Bible states that, 'And the Lord said to Moses, "Tell your brother Aaron that he shall not enter at any time in the holy place inside the veil, before the mercy seat which is on the ark lest he die; For I will appear in the cloud over the mercy seat. Aaron shall enter the holy place with this: with a bull for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering." In verse 6 Aaron is instructed to offer a sacrifice for himself so that he can later minister on behalf of Israel. The instruction says, 'Then Aaron shall offer the bull for a sin offering which is for him that he may make atonement for himself and for his household.'

There is a clear irreconcilable difference between the status and practice of the Yahwistic temple cult and the Baal fertility cult. In the Baal fertility cult the male and female cultic prostitutes, even though termed holy, are not required to be pure. There is no atonement for their sins before they serve. Their definition of holiness and purity is not compatible with the Yahwistic definition. In the Hebrew temple services, females are conspicuously excluded. It is not clear whether the exclusion of women was a protection against sexual misconduct among the priesthood. What is clear is the demand for moral and physical purity. The difference in the moral approach and the personnel goes against the suggestion that the Hebrew sanctuary and worship practice could have been copied from the Canaanites. The moral gap is too prohibitive.

7.4.1 The *Zonah*, *Qedesha*, and *Qadesh*.

It would be appropriate to closely examine the cult prostitute of the Baal fertility cult. Oswalt (1976, 4:910) gives a definition in broader terms saying, 'The Bible uses three words to denote the prostitute. The most common OT word is *zanah* harlot. This word describes the secular prostitute who offers herself for money. In certain instances it appears to be a more general term encompassing the cult prostitute, as well. There is, however, a distinct term for the religious or cult

prostitute. This is *qedesha* whore (KJV), a cult prostitute (RSV). The root is *qadesh* which means “set apart for the use of the deity,” i.e., “holy.” The above feminine form has a masculine counterpart, sodomite (KJV) cult prostitute (RSV).’

The above definition of holiness in relation to cult prostitutes implies that holiness is not synonymous with purity. It simply means set apart for the use of a deity. What that holiness means is entirely up to that particular deity. The temple prostitutes were therefore holy as they were set apart for Baal. The connotation of holiness in the Hebrew Bible is not only being set apart but being morally pure as well. This can be seen in the use of the word *qadowsh* meaning ‘sacred (ceremonially or morally); selected, pure, holy, consecrated, pious’ (Zodhiates 1990:1769).

Already there is an apparent conflict of terminology. The Canaanite use of the term holy would certainly disorient Israel. It would be an irresistible recipe for syncretism. Why should Israel resist temple prostitution because it is holy and more appealing to the senses than the mere offering of sacrifices? The sympathetic magic with the use of the holy ones would be tangible way of ensuring a prosperous future for Israel. Oswalt (1976, 4:912) gives the core of this behaviour saying,

Ancient man viewed the universe a closed system, where the actions of man, nature and deity were totally interlocked. Thus if a man wished a deity to perform certain actions, he would ensure that they would do so if he performed those actions himself in a cultic setting. The most important natural cycle for man’s immediate life was the reproductive cycle. If one’s animals or crops did not reproduce themselves, starvation resulted. If such did occur, it was because the respective deities had not copulated. From this point of view, man’s most important act in the year could be his copulation with a dedicated prostitute, for this would produce the desired divine result and thus the desired natural result.’

This ancient practice can be compared to similar rituals among some indigenous African tribes. A case in point is my own people, the Tonga people of Zambia. From my personal experience, if a Tonga man wanted to own a large herd of cattle (which is their measure of wealth) or if he wants his fields to produce a hundred fold, he would have to get 'isambwe.' This is magic performed on him or that he must perform. It is usually something regarded as a taboo or something out of the norms. He may be required to copulate with one of his blood relatives or one of the beasts of his flock. Sometimes it may even be a ritual killing of one of the next of kin, even his offspring. All this is intended to induce the deities or ancestors or even the universal forces to act or move his favour. This practice has been going on for centuries to ensure the balanced rhythm of the natural cycles because mankind is depended upon them.

Another cultural practice that is sympathetic in nature is the rain maker dance. This is intended to perform rain making magic. This magic will move the universal forces and cause rainfall. The dire need for rain for crop production has created the position and role of the rain maker. The rain-maker designates certain spots on the landscape as sacred. In some cases a dam or a pond is declared sacred. Shrines are erected where rituals for rains are performed. I personally have participated in some rain rituals. The elders of the community would initiate the process. They will meet the rain-maker and then appoint a day for the ceremony. The rain-maker prepares himself and the shrine. On that appointed day, no one is allowed to work in the fields. Early in the morning the sound of drums is heard to summon the community. The drums have a peculiar tune that is never played anywhere else except for such occasions as this. A trumpet is played with a tune that says, 'Birds prepare, heavy rains are rumbling.' At the shrine the rainmaker, dressed in traditional regalia slaughters a white chicken and sprinkles the blood on the shrine. He sips some traditional beer known as 'gankata' or 'bukandi' and spits it on the shrine uttering incantations and invocations summoning the ancestors into action to provide the much needed rain. The chicken is roasted and eaten without salt. If the shrine is a water body, a pond or a small dam, the rain-maker will dive into the pond and emerge with a cob of green maize or

pumpkin as a sign of the impending bumper harvest. After the ritual, the people are urged to hurry home as if running away from a gathering storm.

This illustrates that it is true that man's immediate concern of life is the reproductive cycle. His life is dependent on it. There may be variation in the rituals, but the goal is the same and that is to induce and ensure that the deities maintain the rhythmic cycles of reproduction. The core of these natural cycles is rain. Rain played and still plays a crucial role in the growth of vegetation upon which animals, both domestic and wild are dependent. Man in turn is dependent on his livestock and the increase there of. This dependence is augmented by the fact that the Ancient Near Eastern societies were mostly pastoral and agrarian.

It is in the context of the concern for man's immediate life that Baal worship found its relevance and attraction among the Covenant people. The land they came to occupy was the land of milk and honey. That land, had an abundance of milk, which implies the abundance of cattle meaning there was an abundance of rain hence the abundance vegetation. The provider of this core ingredient, in the eyes of the Canaanites, was Baal. So his worship was a matter of survival.

The very fact of worshipping Baal, the manner in which he was worshipped, was an abomination among the Covenant people. Most offensive was the cultic prostitution. The Oswalt (1976, 4:912) states that, 'Even more abominable from the Bible's point of view, was male cult prostitution, since this practice involved the twin horrors of paganism and homosexuality. One means of expressing this abhorrence was by calling the male cult prostitute a dog.' Deuteronomy 23:18, after prohibiting male and female cult prostitution in Israel the Bible further stipulates that neither the wages of a harlot or a "dog" may be offered in the temple.' Even the modern man would regard this as barbaric paganism. It does not look like the covenant people would have been able to resist this temptation in view of the fact that those who indulged in the practice were healthy and wealthy. More so, the people who carried out the services were referred in sacred terminology. Nichol (1979, 8:252) mentions that, 'The persons were

known as *qadesh* (male) and *qedesha* (female). They were devotees of various gods and served those who came to worship the gods. Such worship involved gross immorality.’

The root word *qds* (*qal*) means be holy, with held from ordinary use, treated with special care, belonging to the sanctuary; (*niphal*) prove oneself holy, be treated as holy; (*piel*) put something into a state of holiness, treat according to the procedures of worship, dedicate for use by God.... Naude (1997, 3:877). The use of holy terminology for something gross (in covenant terms) would numb the senses of Israel. It would distort Yahweh’s holiness which vehemently excluded all these strange practices of the Canaanites.

7.5 Feminist Reaction to bias Against Women

The interpretation of Canaanite temple practices have not received wholesome acceptance and it would be unfair to portray such a picture. Some feminist theologians have reacted to the identity of the temple prostitutes ‘qedesha’ as women. They criticize the fact that the Hebrew Bible was written in a male centred culture in which women are insignificant. They point out that there is an over glorification of the male gender. Bergemann (2007:668) comments, ‘The female characteristics of weakness and inactivity so defined by the male centred cultures are always implied.’ The marital metaphor used by prophets like Hosea (1, 2, 3), Jeremiah (3), and Ezekiel 16 to mention a few is viewed by some as bias against the female gender. Mumby (2006:275) calls it a compelling and disturbing subject lying within the Hebrew Bible’s most celebrated prophetic books.

This has led to the questioning of the authority of the Old Testament. The perception is that the Bible seems to be at the core of the abuse and disrespect of the female gender. Many feminist theologians and human rights groups have come to view the Bible not as a book of equality but a source of oppression. They prefer the rights ingrained in the national constitutions to the moral values in the

Bible. Some have demonised the whole Old Testament as a redaction of Hebrew writers.

Coetzee (2005:521) makes a comment from a feminist perspective on Psalm 139. He says, 'In Psalm 139 a glimpse into the womb is given. Yahweh is depicted as dedicating Himself to the creation of the male body deep inside this exclusive work place of His. The pregnant woman is silenced by the glorification of the male embryo/baby and his male creator.' Though it may sound rather extreme, it shows the discontentment of the feminist theologians with the way the Hebrew Bible portrays women. One may not comment whether Coetzee has done justice to the text or not. However, his feminist reaction is very evident.

Commenting on the matter of women serving as temple prostitutes, Dever (2005:216) says, 'There is no etymological, cultural nor historical evidence to support these notions. And among the excellent scholars who have helped to demolish such misreading of the biblical texts are women who have written perceptively on ancient Israelite religions (such as Ackerman, Bird and Frymer-Kensky).' It is true that these women have written quite substantially but it is more in defence of the female gender against the patriarchal depiction of females in the Hebrew Bible. The subject of temple prostitution is discussed as one of the 'Canaanite practices' which Israel was to avoid. It is an alien culture to the 'Covenant culture.' Many scholars like Bronner, Kapelrud, and Richardson et cetera et cetera; have unveiled substantial evidence that the Baal fertility cult of the Canaanites employed sympathetic magic to arouse the gods.

It is true that some ancient practices are unfathomable in our day and age. They sound gruesome and dehumanizing. This is because of our high level of self-consciousness and self-determination. The Ancient Near Eastern cultures may be alien to our psyche; however, this should not lead us to deny the fact that they did practice their worship rituals. That would be tantamount to forcing them into world view. The interpretive community should not compromise its objectivity by using ancient cultures to settle modern gender imbalances. The Ancient Near

Eastern people were in constant search for harmony with their gods. Their practices were intended to appease the gods. They also believed that the gods approved these practices hence they were regarded as moral.

7.6 The Fertility Cult and Sympathetic Magic

In the Hebrew system those who served in the temple performed holy duties, but they were not necessarily holy themselves. Holiness remained an attribute of Yahweh. The Levites were appointed to serve in the tabernacle. They were in charge of the tabernacle, the ark of the testimony, its furnishings and all that belonged to it (Numbers 1:50). In chapter 3:12, a much clearer declaration is made saying, 'Now behold I have taken the Levites from among the children of Israel, instead of the first born, the first issue of the womb among the sons of Israel. So the Levites are mine.' There is no designation or description of holiness. They were to perform divine duties, but were not necessarily regarded as holy men. This is in contrast to the *qadesh* and *qedesha* of the Baal fertility cult. Frymer-Kensky (1992:59) describing the *qedesha* says, 'Two women stand outside the family circle, the *qedesha* and the *zonah*. The *zonah* is a prostitute who has sex for a price. The *qedesha* was probably a sacred prostitute that is someone who has sex as part of her temple duties.' This is an indirect recognition of the existence of this female function in the temple even though Frymer-Kensky makes it probable. Ortlund (1996:33) summarizes the conflict well when he says,

First, the theology of the Canaanite peoples evidences a pre-occupation with fertility, lifting up before the worshippers a vision of various gods and goddesses as being sexually active. Secondly, the ritual out working of this theology reflected its vision of deities. By contrast, classical Yahwistic theology nowhere presents Him as a sexual being calling for sexual participation in worship. His creation of human sexuality finds its lawful outlet in the union of marriage as defined in Genesis 2:23, 24.

The prohibition in Deuteronomy 23:18 states that, 'You shall not bring the hire of a harlot or the wages of a dog into the house of the Lord your God as a votive offering, for these are a an abomination to the Lord your God.' The text implies that there could have been people who owned prostitutes for hire for the practice of sacred prostitution. Some worshippers could have owned brothels around the temple area. It could be that they felt obliged to return the tithes and offerings which are actually integral to the temple services. It is not known whether tithes and offerings were part of Baal worship. It is highly possible that the Canaanites used to offer the proceeds of temple prostitution as offerings to their god Baal. The prohibition could be in the context of this Canaanite practice. Vawter (1961:107) comments, 'The Israel of this day as we can see was corrupted by their contact with the fertility ritual of Canaan and Yahweh was often confused by the unthinking Israel with the agriculture deity Baal. The fertility ritual was one of sympathetic magic in which the 'qedeshoth' holy woman functioned as surrogates of the deity prostituting themselves to effect the fertility of the soil.'

Vawter (1961:107) further notes that, because of this contamination, Israel was now ascribing the fecundity of the soil and the good things of the earth to the Canaanite Baals.

From the evidence presented above, it is clear that the two religions would not share the same landscape as two distinct faiths. One would have to succumb to the other and that would not be the Canaanites given their standing and ethnicity in the land. They were firmly established in the land. They would not be eager to experiment with the Covenant religion because they had evidence that Baal worship was functional. Their wealth and the natural endowment of the land testified (in their perspective) that their religion was functional. On the other hand, Israel, being new comers, without roots and ethnicity, would be subject to the hospitality and orientation by the Canaanites. Baal worship would be one area in which the Canaanites would introduce the new settlers. Hence Yahweh drove out the Canaanites to prohibit and prevent any mingling. The Covenant people would need a new start in the new land.

CHAPTER 8

IMPACT OF THE FERTILITY CULT ON THE COVENANT RELATIONSHIP

8. Background to the Book of Numbers

The Hebrew Bible is dotted with warnings against idol worship. Some of the warnings are given in a preventive approach but others are rebukes for engaging in idolatry. There are also narratives of what actually happened between the Covenant people and the heathen nations. The book of Numbers records the first encounter between the Covenant people and the worshippers of Baal the Moabites. What happened at Moab gives a glimpse of the spiritual life of Israel in the land of milk and honey. It shows the power of the lure of Baal the fertility cult. It is therefore important to closely look at what actually transpired. This chapter will attempt to outline and examine some of the incidents where Israel came into contact with Baal worship, and how Baal worship directly impacted on the Covenant relationship with Yahweh. Did Israel succumb to the Baal fertility cult? How did Yahweh respond to the Israel's rebellion? Did He spew Israel out as He did spew the Canaanites?

The story of the Covenant people flows logically and chronologically in the Pentateuch. It begins in Genesis 12 with the call of Abram who enters into a covenant with Yahweh not only as an individual but with his descendants as well. The book of Exodus gives an account of their slavery and the ultimate deliverance by Yahweh. The book of Numbers is the fourth book of the Pentateuch. It is narrative that spans forty years of Israel's journey from Sinai to Moab, the threshold of the Promised Land (Martens, 1997, 4:985). The book is named Numbers because of the census that takes place in chapters 1 and 26. The book is also known as the *bemidbar* (in the wilderness). Some scholars have outlined the structure of the book in three sections – Section 1 at Mt Sinai (1:1-10:10); section II at and around Kadesh Barnea (10:11-19:22) and section III on the plains of Moab (20:-36:13) (Ashley 1992:2). There may be other literary arrangements that may be deduced from the book but the focus is on what

transpired at Moab and not necessarily on the structure of the book of Numbers and the challenges there of.

8.1 The Generation of the Book of Numbers

The book of Numbers is a book of generational transition. The old generation that came out of Egypt and met Yahweh at Sinai were to perish in the wilderness. They were to perish because of the rebellion on the shores of the river Jordan. The first Exodus generation is sentenced to perish in chapter 14:22, 23, 33, & 34 saying, 'Surely all the men who have seen My glory and My signs, which I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness and yet have put Me to test these ten times and have not listened to My voice, shall by no means see the land which I swore to their fathers nor shall any of those who spurned Me see it.' In verse 33 and 34 the death sentence is passed saying, 'And your sons shall be shepherds for forty years in the wilderness, and they shall suffer for your unfaithfulness, until your corpses lie in the wilderness. According to the number of days you spied out the land, forty days, for every day you shall bear your guilt a year, even forty years and you shall know My opposition.' Could this have been the failure of the first Exodus?

It is in the book of Numbers that the Covenant people have a first encounter with Baal. It is at this moment important to analyze the demographic and social factors in order to contextualize the type of people that met Baal. Could there be predisposing factors that could have weakened their resilience? Was it outright rebellion in the face of the undeniable providence of Yahweh?

According to the biblical account, I can deduce that the larger portion of the generation that encountered Baal worship at Baal-Peor did not see Egypt. They did not experience the plagues of Exodus 7-11. They did not participate in the miraculous deliverance and the plunder of the Egyptians. This generation only heard the oral recount of the parting of the Red Sea (Ex 14:21) for their forefathers to pass. The perishing of the Egyptian army was a story to them. They could sing the song of Moses (Ex 15) but only because they heard others

singing. The most critical experience that the 'wilderness generation' could have missed was the Sinai Covenant experience. The Hebrew Bible records that, 'In the third month after the sons of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on that very day they came into the wilderness of Sinai' (Ex 19:1). If any children could have been born between Sinai and Egypt, they could only have been three months old by the time of the giving of the covenant at Sinai. So they were as good as absent. Hence it cannot be far-fetched to suggest that the generation that encountered Baal at Baal-Peor did not have an eyewitness experience of the Sinai Covenant theophany. Their ethics were not backed up by a visual testimony of the awesomeness of Yahweh as demonstrated at Sinai.

Their experience lacked the visible demonstration of the Yahweh's credentials of deliverance, 'I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery' (Ex 20:2). However, the absence of visual experience of the above mentioned acts cannot be used as an excuse for their slide into immoral behaviour at Baal-Peor. The fact that Yahweh had such a large number of people in a place where there is no rain, crop plantation and no shelter, was evidence enough of Yahweh's ability to sustain life. The test of the ability to sustain life is not in the times of abundance but in the times of scarcity. He that can provide in the time of scarcity can with ease provide in the time of abundance.

8.2 The Encounter at Shittim

The experience at Shittim as recorded in Numbers 25 is preceded by Balak's attempt to have Israel cursed by Balaam. In Numbers chapter 22 to 24 Balak persuades, induces, and bribes Balaam to curse Israel. He feared that Israel would overrun Moab, 'Now Balak the son of Zippor saw what Israel had done to the Ammorites. So Moab was in great fear because the people were numerous' (Num 22:2, 3). His plea was that Israel be cursed so that he can defeat her (Num 6). It is interesting to note that Balak does not engage in war with Israel before they are cursed. He is aware that spiritual warfare is more effective with the

covenant people than the bear sword. This of course Balaam fails to do them. Military may not work against Israel without a weakening moral attack.

As stated in the opening chapter of this dissertation, the danger or greatest threat to Israel was not with the sword of the enemy, but with a moral fall. If Israel imitated the practices of the heathen nations, Yahweh would remove His protection and leave them to the plunder of the enemy. Nichol (1979, 8:803) sums it up well when saying, 'Israel is now camped on the steppes of Moab east of the Jordan, and in chapters 22 to 24 Balak king of Moab, seeks through Balaam vainly to curse Israel, but through immorality and idolatry is successful in subverting several thousands of Israel' (ch 25). In Numbers 25 the Bible says,

'While Israel remained at Shittim, the people began to play the harlot with the daughters of Moab. For they invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. So the people joined themselves to Baal of Peor and the Lord was angry with Israel and the Lord said to Moses, "Take all the leaders of the people and execute them in brought daylight before the Lord so that the fierce anger of the Lord may turn away from Israel" (verses 1-4).

This incident has key observable elements. One element is the statement, 'The people began to play the harlot. The word harlot *zanah* is defined by Hall (1997, 1: 1122) as qal. Commit fornication, act as a harlot, have illicit intercourse; pu. Be solicited for prostitution; hi.cause to commit prostitution or fornication.' The phrase play the harlot can have several meanings:

1. The sons of Israel had literal sexual relations with Moabite women.
2. They played the harlot in that they broke the numinal marriage with Yahweh and worshipped Baal. Hall (1997, 1:1122) lends the following support, 'The most common and important use of the root *znh* is metaphorical. Since it referred to illicit sex, especially in violation of the covenant relationship (betrothal or

marriage), it could be used to refer to covenantal unfaithfulness on Israel's part, since the covenant came to be viewed as a marriage' (Hosea 2).

The mention of the daughters of Moab deserves a comment. The Moabites are regarded in the Hebrew Bible as descendants of Lot. The Bible says, 'Thus both the daughters of Lot were with child by their father. And the first born bore a son and called his name Moab; he is the father of the Moabites to this day. And as for the young, she also bore a son a called his name Ben-ammi, he is the father of the sons of Ammon to this day' (Gen 19:37, 38). Judging from the circumstances surrounding the birth of Moab the patriarch of the Moabites, the obvious conclusion could be that they were not worshippers of Yahweh. The background of the daughters of Lot implies that they had adopted the incestuous practices from the Sodomites. This could have eroded the inhibitions such that they could conceive by their own father.

It could be that the Moabites initiated the seduction of Israel. It is unlikely that Israel, with the covenant ethics, could openly violate the ethical code. Further more, it is highly plausible that it was Israel's succumbing to the allurements of Baal worship that led to the harlotry that took place. Nichol (1979, 1:913) suggests that, 'Literal whoredom was followed by its counter part – the worship of idols. If the first step had not been taken, the second would probably not have followed.'

In view of the serious or rather life threatening consequences of violating the covenant, it is not likely that Israel could have initiated the adulterous affair. The most probable scenario is that the Moabites could have invited the sons of Israel to participate in their fertility cult rituals. This could have lowered Israel's guard against the practices. The fact that Baal is a fertility deity, the Moabites could have lured Israel into illicit sex in the name of worship. The word *shachah* to bow down is used in relation to a superior being (Zodhiates1990:1783). This could mean it was out of reverence for Baal that the sons of Israel could have engaged in a practice that was totally incompatible with the covenant terms. The

statement, 'So Israel joined themselves to the Baal of Peor and the Lord was angry with Israel' (Numbers 25) shows Israel made a voluntary response of attraction to Baal worship. They were not treated as vassals worshipping the god of their captors. There was some kind of 'conversion' to Baal.

The brazen act of Zimri to bring a Moabite woman in the sight of all Israel could mean that Israel had fully accepted the practices of Baal worship. What Israel had all along regarded as immoral, the Moabites had proved otherwise. Maybe Zimri brought a 'holy woman' a *qedesha* to the tent. He saw nothing wrong as it was in the context of holiness and worship. Davidson (2007:100) points out that, 'Sexual immorality linked with the pagan fertility cult rituals, formed an integral part of the sin of Baal-Peor as with the worship of the golden calf.' The pagan fertility rituals actually appealed to human sexual nature which is almost instinctive. There is no self-denial in engaging in such activities. The fact that it was an integral part of worship implies that it was not a burden to the conscience. This was in stark contrast to Covenant ethics. Wiseman (1981:165) mentions that, 'Baal was the great fertility god whose worship Israel always found alluring (e.g. Judge 2:13; 1Kings 18; 2Kings 17:16; Jeremiah 2:8, etc). By participating in the act Israel had yoked or coupled himself to Baal of Peor. In so doing they flagrantly repudiated the essential heart of the Covenant, total and exclusive allegiance to the Lord and a severe plague broke out killing twenty four thousand people' (Num 25:9;cf Ex 32:35). Budd (1984, 5:279) comments on the phrase 'So Israel yoked himself,' saying, 'The yoke could be sexual rites – on the other hand service of the gods could be considered slavery.'

The scenario or context of the Baal-Peor incident strongly suggests that it was a cult setting which could have overwhelmed Israel. It is suggested that the actions of these Israelite men and the Medianite women were also cultic. Their behaviour was acts of worship. Had it been an episode of mere intermarriage it would not be disturbing. It is the cultic aspects of this act that is potentially threatening to the cult of Yahweh (Organ 2001:208). It is possible that Zimri could have done this in the context of worship. If it was an act of worship, then he would have the

courage to justify such an act within the realm of holiness. It should be noted that this was not only a highly sensational experience but was also completely new. Never had they experienced such worship before, worship that appeared unrestricting and free of moral hedges. Davidson (2007:101) is more explicit when he says, 'Numbers 25:2 continues to emphasize the linkage between the sexual enticements the Moabite women and the worship of Baal. These (fmpl) invited the people to the sacrifices of their (fmpl) gods and the people ate and bowed down to their (fmpl) gods. A picture unfolds of Israel's fall into sin: sexual liaisons with pagan women, including the attendance of fertility cult festivals and finally resulting in full participation in the degrading sexual rites of Baal worship.'

8.3 What Led to the Shittim Encounter?

Israel had been isolated in the wilderness for quite some time with little interaction with other people. The excitement of meeting new people could have triggered a strong desire for affinity and social interaction that made them ignore the Covenantal boundaries. Coupled with curiosity, the euphoria of meeting other 'friendly' people could have been blinding. The encounter at Shittim became as it were a viral infection that would affect Israel for many years to come. After the conquest of the land, and the death of Joshua, Israel descended into Baal worship. The injunction to drive out the Canaanites was not carried out to the letter. The book of Judges gives an account of compromise by the tribes of Manasseh, Ephraim, Zebulan, Asher and Naphtali. The Bible records in Judges 1:27-33 that,

Manasseh did not take possession of Beth-Shean and its villages...so the Canaanites persisted living in the land. And it came about that when Israel became strong, they put the Canaanites to forced labour, but they did not drive them out completely. Neither did Ephraim drive out the Canaanites who were living in Gezer; so the Canaanites lived in Gezer among them. Zebulan did not drive out the inhabitants of Kitron or the inhabitants of Nahalol; so the Canaanites lived among them.

Asher and Naphtali also did not drive out the Canaanites completely. It is not clear whether they preserved them purely for forced labour or they kept them for their attractive practices. One thing clear however, is the result of the presence of the Canaanites in the midst of the covenant people. Yahweh was swift to condemn the laxity of Israel saying, 'I will not drive them before you, but they shall become as thorns in your sides and their gods shall be a snare to you' (Judg 2:3, 10). The most graphic description of what followed is captured in verse 10 saying, 'And all that generation were also gathered to their fathers; and their arose a generation after them that did not know the Lord nor yet the work which He had done for Israel.'

What happened at Baal-Peor was a precursor of what life would be across the Jordan. Perhaps the incident of Baal-Peor had left an indelible mark on the psyche of Israel to an extent that they did not see the urgency of expelling the Canaanites as per instruction of Yahweh. There may be several factors and forces in the land of milk and honey that could have led to the erasure of the knowledge of Yahweh. Throughout the desert wanderings, the presence of Yahweh was a visible reality through the cloud and the pillar of fire not to mention the manna. There was no competing deity except for the incident of the golden calf. But now the manna had ceased. The cloud was no longer a sure sign of Yahweh's presence. Baal the competitor was also a rider of the clouds. The pillar of fire no longer illumined the skies at night. The record of what followed is explicit, 'The the sons of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land and followed other gods, from among the gods of the people who were around them.....So they forsook the Lord and saved Baal and Ashtoreth.'

The Canaanites were indeed a thorn in the flesh of the Covenant people. But it looks like it was a thorn that Israel did not associate with pain but pleasure. A close examination of the life of Israel reveals that Baal worship left an indelible mark on the life, culture and religious practice of Israel. Skinner (1961:59) makes the following pertinent remark when he says, 'The occupation of Palestine by the

Hebrew tribes brought about a particular 'polarity' in their religious attitude. They found themselves confronted by a religion hitherto unknown, but one which had a strong fascination for the sensuous side of their Semitic nature.'

Throughout the Hebrew Bible it is evident that Baal worship was a force that Israel struggled to resist. This is seen in the frequent relapse to Baal worship from the time they entered the land to the time they were carried into exile. During the time of Ahab and his headstrong Tyrian wife Jezebel, Baal worship almost supplanted Yahweh in the kingdom of Israel. The religion of Baal was almost established as the legitimate mode of worship (Nichol1979, 8:105).

8.4 Some of the Notable Areas of Syncretism

There are some notable areas on which Baal worship had measurable influence. Some of which I have already mentioned in the preceding chapters. Festivals are one of the areas. The Canaanites lived a life of festivity throughout the year, much of which was dictated by their religious practice and closely linked to the rhythm of the seasons. This seems to be the general understanding as seen in the writings of scholars like Kapelrud (1972) and Bronner (1968). Some have speculated that the New Festival of Israel (Ex 23:16) seems to have been borrowed from the Canaanites. The striking points of similarity are that both festivals begin with a night vigil on the night of the New Moon of the month on which the equinox fell. Both festivals lasted for seven days and both festivals are harvest festivals and are committed to the production of new wine (Demoor 1972:29).

This similarity in the cultic practice of the Canaanites and Israel has raised a question of the origins of these ANE peoples. There is a belief that the two share a common origin. The Iron Age material suggests that the Israelite culture overlapped and derived from, the Canaanite culture. Israelite culture could be an outgrowth of the Canaanite culture (Smith 1990: xxii). If this be the case then it could explain the close affinity between Israel and the Canaanite despite the strong prohibition. These closer ties could have developed because of the strong

ancestral bond between Shem and Ham. In the genealogies of these patriarchs there is Canaan who is the offspring of Ham. Abraham according to the patriarchal genealogy is in the line of Shem. Canaan is the native of the land of Canaan (Gen 10; 11) Abraham who is of the lineage of Shem comes to dwell in the land of Canaan (Gen 12).

The close cultural affinity could have been developed when Abraham dwelt among the Canaanites. There is no record of serious tension between Abraham and the Canaanites. Neither is Abraham commanded to exterminate the Canaanites. He is not even warned against the contamination that would come because of the close association. The Hebrew Bible simply says, 'Now the Canaanite was in the land, (Gen 12:7). It is therefore probable that before the sojourn into Egypt, Israel had already embraced the Canaanite culture. This could have continued to develop in Egypt without dilution since the Egyptians would not mingle with the Israelites. It is also possible that the 400 years could have erased the all that was Canaanitish among the Hebrew people leaving them to develop a distinct culture and identity. Bearing in mind that the generation that that conquered the land were desert born, we can then assume that the Canaanites could have influenced the festivals of Israel to a certain degree because they had been settled for centuries before the advent of Israel. In this context Smith (1990:xiii) could be right when he says, 'Baal and Asherah were part of Israel's heritage and the process of the emergence of Israelite monolatry was an issue of Israel's breaking with its own past and not simply of one of avoiding Canaanite neighbours.'

Whatever the case may be, the Canaanite culture did significantly impact the Israel's cultural and religious identity. It may not be viewed as Israel picking up her old religion but that the Baal fertility cult offered an attractive release from the ethical covenantal obligations on the part of Israel. Israel was set free from the conditions of the covenant while enjoying the blessings and abundance of the Promised Land, something which could only be enjoyed if they maintained

Covenant fidelity. They could have even questioned Yahweh's ability to provide if Baal could do so as well.

One other aspect of influence on Israel can be seen in some of the names of the chosen people. Some of the names had Baal as a theophoric element. Names such as Jerubaal, Ishbaal, and Meribaal have been put forward as evidence that Israel once viewed Baal worship as a legitimate practice. This notion, though it sounds credible, has been doubted by some. It does not have substantial evidence in that there are no personal names with Baal as a theophoric element that are extant from Judah (Smith 1990:41).

The names may not be extant due to deliberate omission by the Hebrew copyists because the names were a shame to the Covenant. Some of the names had such meanings as Abibaal – Baal is my father, Baal-zamar – Baal sings, Baal-zakar – Baal remembers, Baal ma ani – Baal is my answer and Meribaal – my Lord is Baal (Nichol 1979, 8:105). The above mentioned names have a cultic tone of dependence and loyalty to Baal. The name Baal ma' ani alludes to Baal's function as the provider of whatever the subjects may petition for. These attributes of Baal reflected in the names affirm the dominance of Baal worship in Israel. The climax of this dominance is seen during the reign of Ahab and Jezebel. Smith (1990:44) comments, 'Ahab and Jezebel represented a theophoric vision in continuity with the traditional compatibility of Yahweh and Baal. Up to this time Yahweh and Baal had temples in the Northern Kingdom. Whereas Yahweh was the main god of the Northern Kingdom and divine patron of the royal dynasty in the North, Baal also enjoyed cultic devotion.' This was contested compatibility. It looked unified in the royal house between Jezebel and Ahab. However, it was not so among the prophets of Yahweh and Baal. To the prophets of Yahweh this was apostasy of the worst vile. The contest at Mount Carmel was a polemic to prove that Yahweh is the provider of rain and the fertility of the land. The contest is preceded by a severe drought caused by Yahweh. The period of the drought is also a testing time for the prophets of Baal who is known as the storm god. Baal fails to end the drought which has been decreed

by Yahweh. He fails to send a storm to quench the parched earth. Yahweh wins the contest and is vindicated as the true God and provider of the fertility of the land (1Kin 17-18).

One of the challenges which predisposed Israel to contamination to this impure religion was the fact that the desert faith and upbringing of Israel made no provision for the worship exercises suitable for the needs of an agricultural community. They had been worshippers of a God who provides manna and water from rocks. The language of rain and crops did not form part of their devotional life. Yahweh was known as the God of the desert, the god of bareness. He was not apprehended as the God of the land and the giver of good gifts, corn and wine and oil which the natives of the soil had gratefully ascribed to Baal (Skinner 1961:59).

When Israel settled in the land, she found that indeed the land was flowing with milk and honey. These bounties were not ascribed to Yahweh but Baal. Much as the land flowed with milk and honey it also flowed with other anti-covenant practices such as sacred prostitution and fertility festivals. The Canaanites indulged in all these while seemingly enjoying prosperity. Conspicuously absent were the terms upon which the blessings could be enjoyed. The Canaanites lived in the land of milk and honey oblivious of any moral restrictions or need for obedience akin to that of the Yahwistic Covenant. When Israel saw all this they broke loose from the covenant obligations.

CHAPTER 9

EXILED FOR BREAKING THE COVENANT

9. Exile as a Climatic Consequence of Baal Worship.

The Exile is one of the climatic consequences or evidence of the impact of rejecting Yahweh the God of the Covenant and following after Baal. The negative impact outlined in the previous chapter is seen in the Exile. Israel broke the Covenant and according to Jeremiah, she was no longer fit to live in the Promised Land. I am aware that the Exile is a hotly debated issue. I will not delve into the pros and cons of the matter but will limit the discussion to how Baal worship led to the breaking of the Covenant and ultimately the deportation into Babylonian Exile. In order to create a context for the Exile it is appropriate to briefly outline the geo-socio-political tempo of the times. The geographical position of the Syria-Palestine zone placed it high on the agenda of the superpowers. Syria-Palestine was where the small states, including Judah were located. This was the strategic zone of the Fertile Crescent. The crescent begins in the Persian Gulf, running through the valleys of the Tigris and Euphrates (Mesopotamia) to the eastern Seaboard of the Mediterranean (Syria-Palestine) and into the Nile valley. (MacKay 2004:35). This Syria-Palestine zone is what has come to be known as the 'land of milk and honey.' Yahweh had placed the chosen people on the chosen land as it were. One could also think that by the very geographical position the deportation was in the offing. Israel then had to abide by the terms and conditions of occupation because the risk of ejection was very high. The death of Josiah in 609 BC at Megiddo by Necho II triggered a succession of tragic events that culminated in the deportation. Jehoahaz became king after the death of Josiah. He was later summoned to Riblah by Necho II and replaced by Jehoiakim. After the defeated of Egypt by Nebuchadnezzar, Jehoiakim rebelled against Egypt and joined Nebuchadnezzar, then later rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar to join Egypt. Nebuchadnezzar punished him by attacking the city and carrying some into Exile (Bright 1978: xxvii). It is further observed that between 639 – 609 BC, the Judahite kings changed loyalties which could have led to the death of Josiah and the destruction of the Temple in

587BC. In this year Judah ceased to be an independent state. It should be noted that the Exile is the dominant and shaping event of the Old Testament. Sometimes it may be regarded as the reversal of the Exodus (Brueggemann 1989:3).

One would ask as to why Jeremiah? Moses is the man of the Exodus out of Egypt to the Promised Land. The entry and occupation of the land is governed by the terms and conditions stipulated in the Sinai Covenant. The movement into the Covenant and the land is through Moses. The violation of and movement out of the Covenant which culminates into the eviction out of the land is cautioned and protested by Jeremiah. Moses is the man of the Covenant and occupation. Jeremiah is the man of the broken covenant and the Exile. Jeremiah witnessed the slow demise of his country. Commencing his career when Assyria was relaxing grip on the former holdings, Jeremiah witnessed his country passing through a brief period of independence. He saw it fall to the imperial ambitions of Egypt and then Babylon before finally destroying itself with Babylon (Bright 1978: xxii).

9.1 Preamble: Developing into a People

When Jacob sojourned into Egypt, it was at the invitation of his long lost son Joseph. It was a providential move to save Israel from the ravaging famine that had enveloped the land of Canaan. It had been prophesied to Abram after Yahweh had settled him in the land of Canaan. The Hebrew Bible says, 'And God said to Abram, "know for certain that your descendants shall be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be oppressed and enslaved for four hundred years (Gen 15:13). Notably this oppression though it was slavery was not a result of a war situation or wrong doing on the part of Israel. Yahweh had taken Israel into bondage to preserve and develop them into a people. When Israel cried unto Yahweh for deliverance, He heard them and set them free.

Unlike the Exodus, the Exile was a result of Israel's infidelity. Israel cried unto Yahweh but he refused to hear. He instead delivered Israel into bondage as a punishment for failing to heed the Covenant terms. The terms of the Covenant were the conditions of dwelling in the land of milk and honey. They had to 'dwell' in the Covenant in order to 'dwell' in the land. In the life experience of the chosen people, the Covenant determined reality. Rejection of the Covenant meant ejection out of the land. It is observable that there are two major movements in the life of the chosen people and all are hinged on the Covenant. The Exodus is movement out of bondage into freedom. Moses was the Yahweh's chosen instrument for the task. This was a movement of hope.

The Exile on the other hand was a movement of dejection and despair, a movement from freedom into bondage. The prophet Jeremiah was the man of the moment. Jeremiah warned, cautioned and counselled the house of Judah about the impending doom. He was known as the weeping prophet. He lamented saying, 'Oh that my head were waters and my eyes a fountain of tears, That I might weep for the slain of the daughter of my people' (Jer 9:1). Jeremiah's lament was because of the intensity of the impending crisis. Of the many crises that befell Israel none was more devastating than the Babylonian Exile. Egyptian persecutions had somewhat achieved the unification of the people. The sense of destiny for the Promised Land overshadowed the internal divisions hence there existed general unity. There seems to be no breakaway group that returned to Egypt. Even though they had no nationhood they were a unified people. The Exile however, challenged the core of their faith. The Exile meant that Yahweh had failed. He had fought for them during the conquest of the land but it seemed the Babylonians were too strong for Him so it appeared. Ancient Near Eastern people thought that battle among nations reflected a parallel warfare among the gods (Pfeiffer 1962:50). I will now examine the cause of the Exile, the role of the prophet Jeremiah, his call and his message.

9.2 The Cause of the Exile According to Jeremiah

The Covenant relationship was anchored on the *hesed* of Yahweh and Israel's obedience. Israel as a chosen people was bound to Covenant obedience. Flanders & Crapps (1988:176) comments, 'If Israel was to be Yahweh's people, it had to take upon itself the sacred obligation to the Covenant. As Yahweh's people it correctly responded to the divine redemptive activity by pledging obedience to Yahweh's covenant law.' The essence of the Covenant obligation demanded by Yahweh has its core in the Ten Commandments or commonly known by the Hebrews as the "ten words." In here are the core basic statements of the ethical claims that Yahweh as the God of holiness makes upon the chosen people (Flanders & Crapps 1988:176). Contrary to this strict demand for ethical obedience, Baal worship offered release from obedience. Israel could enjoy the bestowing of blessings and prosperity of the Promised Land without obligation to Covenant obedience. In the Baal fertility cult, the terms and conditions of the Yahwistic Covenant were not binding. Baal offered rain, fertility of vegetation, fertility of livestock and that of humans. The agricultural prosperity of Canaan was attributed to Baal. This meant that all the blessings were perceived to be a result of the Baal fertility cult. The cultic practice of Baal worship as stated in chapter 7 on the Fertility Cult, involved festivals and feasts, sexual orgies and temple prostitution. All which were abominations to Yahweh. On these, Israel stumbled and fell and they were ejected out of the land. Jeremiah points to Baal worship as the cause of the exile (Jer 32:29,30).

In an attempt to avert disaster and save His people from the ejection into Exile, Yahweh sent the prophet Jeremiah to warn His people Israel. The chosen people needed a conscience sensitive to moral evil around them. It was an essential part of their existence (Skinner 1961:54).

9.3 Overview of the Challenges of the Book of Jeremiah

There are issues and questions that cannot be ignored when working with the book of Jeremiah. Was Jeremiah called to warn about the enemy from the North

or did he perform a task that was circumstantially thrust upon him? There are challenges that needed noting about the book of Jeremiah before dealing with the prophet and his message. The book of Jeremiah occupies a critical position in the Old Testament and records an important episode in the life drama of the chosen people. Some have suggested that the book of Jeremiah is a window into the Old Testament. Much as the book plays an important role, scholars have not overlooked the many challenges that plague the book. There are questions about his call to ministry. His view and relationship to the Deuteronomic reform is still a matter of debate. Did he correctly identify the enemy from the North? The matter of length and textual differences between the MT and the LXX does not yet have a conclusion.

9.3.1 The Name of Jeremiah

The name of Jeremiah may raise questions as well. In Hebrew the name of Jeremiah is 'Yirmaya or Yirmeyahu' which means 'Yahweh is exulted or Yahweh strikes' (Horn 1979:565). The meaning 'Yahweh strikes' may imply that Jeremiah is a post-exilic figure who is named after the event. It may mean that Jeremiah is an ideological construction who is given a name to match what he proclaimed. This has led some to question his existence. Scholars like Carroll have denied the historical Jeremiah and have suggested that the book may be a creation of many editing techniques. This may mean that the story of Jeremiah represents the construction of the traditionists during and after the Exile (Carroll 1981:9).

9.3.2 The Historical Jeremiah

Others have made an outright rejection that Jeremiah did not exist before the Exile. He is a post-exilic figure (Curtis and Renner1997:35). Despite these challenges, the book of Jeremiah still holds a significant place in the Old Testament canon. Scholars have come up with a working phrase known as the 'Jeremiah tradition.' The phrase, 'Jeremiah tradition' is used as a neutral phrase to avoid an outright declaration that Jeremiah did or did not exist. However some Scholars have been bold enough to say there almost certainly was a person

called Jeremiah and that something can be known about him (McKeating 1999:14). Others are in agreement with the Hebrew Bible that Jeremiah is of priestly decent born three miles north-east of Jerusalem. His father being named Hilkiah, was from the village of Anathoth (Thompson 1980:95).

9.3.3 The Authorship of the book of Jeremiah

The debate on the existence of the prophet Jeremiah also poses the challenge of authorship. If his existence is in question then there is no certainty that he wrote the book of Jeremiah. There is also the issue of the involvement of Baruch, Jeremiah's amanuensis or secretary. Did he write as an observer or was he dictated to (Mweemba 2006:12). Brueggemann (1998:338) has come up with what is known as the Baruch document and that is Jeremiah 36:1-45. Holladay (1984:244) commenting on Baruch says, 'It is very possible, indeed probable, that Baruch had a major hand in the compilation and editing of the original work extending from 1:1 – 45:5.' Whatever the debate, there is one prominent character in the book and that is Jeremiah. He is the core of the drama in book. It would not be far-fetched to suggest that the book is more about the prophet Jeremiah than to conclude that the book is his work (Wessels 1987:114).

The arguments for and against the book of Jeremiah have not cast serious doubt on the book of Jeremiah or the 'Jeremiah tradition' to such an extent that it is no longer worth studying. The historical events that Jeremiah is linked to, events like the Deuteronomic reform of Josiah and the Exile make it difficult to totally disregard the historicity and work of Jeremiah. Jeremiah is further linked to the collapse of the Assyrian empire and its displacement by the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar. These aggressive political ambitions could have lent credence to the call and ministry of Jeremiah (Brueggemann 1998:1). The date of his call is estimated to be 626/627 BC when the last king of the Assyrian empire Ashurbanipal died (Eaton 1997:100). On the date of the call of Jeremiah some have taken a simplistic view by drawing a chronology of events about Jeremiah which stands as follows:

Born 639 BC

Josiah's reforms 628 BC

Jeremiah called 627 BC

Book found – late 622 BC

Battle of Megiddo – death of Josiah 609 BC (MacKay 2004:51).

The date of 627 BC has been questioned by some stating that there are certain prophetic activities that are missing from the ministry of Jeremiah. The silence of Jeremiah during the reforms of Josiah is conspicuous. Jeremiah relates to Jehoiakim (Jeremiah 36:1,9) and Zedekiah (Jeremiah 28:1; 32:1).

9.4 The Covenant in Jeremiah

Even though Jeremiah was aware of the political imperialistic ambitions of Babylon versus Assyria, he attributed the deportation into Exile to the breaking of the Covenant. Israel followed other gods, and Yahweh could not defend her. Instead Yahweh turned against Israel. He allowed the curses of Deuteronomy to apply. One of the curses in Deuteronomy 28:49,50 says, 'The Lord will bring a foreign nation from far, from the end of the earth, as the Eagle swoops down, a nation whose language you shall not understand, a nation whose countenance is fierce, who shall have no respect for the young or older.' To Jeremiah, what happens in the political world is of no consequence for the continuity of the Covenant people. As long as Israel maintains Covenant fidelity Yahweh will shield her from the political ambitions of the surrounding nations. On the other hand, if Israel proved unfaithful, Yahweh would steer the other nations against her. What is critical is covenantal fidelity. Brueggemann (1989:3) comments that, 'When the events of 587 BC are read in the light of the claims of the covenant, the Babylonian invasion and deportation is understood as the means of implementing the harsh sanctions (covenant curses) as stipulated in the Sinai Covenant.'

Geopolitically, the deportation can be explained away as a result of the Neo-Babylonian conflict with Egypt on the control of the Levant. Babylon defeated

Egypt at Carchemish in 605 BC. This power struggle caught Judah in between. Judah's shifting loyalty with Egypt, Babylon and Assyria placed her on the war path with these nations. The events that followed led to the death of Josiah and of later to the deportation (Middlemas 2007:10). To Jeremiah, the judgement is not political. It is covenantal and irrevocable because the people have broken the terms of the Yahwistic Covenant and have rejected the prophetic messenger of the word (Middlemas 2007:72).

One of the curses that would befall Israel if they did not obey the terms of the Covenant would be ejection out of the land. Their stay in the land was conditional. The Deuteronomic reform of Josiah in 2 Kings 22; 23, influenced by the book of the Law found in the Temple, could have shaped Jeremiah's vision and mission. He then could have seen himself as Moses. Brueggemann (1998:3) observes that, 'The governing paradigm in the Jeremiah tradition is Israel's covenant with Yahweh rooted in the memories and mandate of the Sinai tradition.' The Covenant language used by Jeremiah reflects heavy indebtedness to the Northern prophet Hosea. Hosea portrays the idea that the Covenant is like a familial bond between a husband and a wife or between father and son. To Hosea the lack of knowledge of Yahweh is the root of sin. The breach of the Covenant is synonymous with religious adultery or harlotry. His talk of knowledge of Yahweh is about compliance or obedience to Covenant stipulations (Lundbom 1999:143).

Jeremiah had to contend with the Davidic Ideology found in 2 Samuel 7:8-17. There is a promise in verse 16 that the throne of David will endure forever. The ideology that the house of David would endure every crisis made the royal house almost invincible. Jeremiah's preaching of the Sinai Covenant made him a prophet of doom who seemingly was against the royal house. His message would therefore not be very effective in view of the fact that changes in the religious cult were effected by the king as seen in the reforms of Josiah.

Jeremiah knew that the rejection of the Covenant would mean disaster for the people. He pursued his mission as defender of the Covenant while heralding war if it is violated (Villancourt 1980: 38).

Jeremiah uses the word Covenant 24 times (Strong 1990: 229). His reference is that of the Sinai Covenant. In chapter 11:3 and 4, he refers to Sinai Covenant as seen in the mention of the land of Egypt and the iron furnace. There is a curse for the man who does not heed the Covenant. The mention of curses is a direct link to the Deuteronomy which has Sinaitic curses and blessings. The Covenant is broken because Judah has gone after other gods. One of the gods explicitly mentioned is Baal (11:13). Flanders & Crapps (1988:201) point out that, 'Its sin was the rejection of Yahweh for the gods of Canaan combined with the acts of social injustice. Israel had to choose between the worship of the Lord of history and Baal nature cults. To its shame Israel chose the latter.'

9.5 Baal Worship and Covenant Violation in the Book of Jeremiah

The choice of Baal was the choice of removal from the land. If they would not be loyal to the covenantal monotheistic relationship, Yahweh would bring disaster upon them as a fulfilment of His vows (Jer 11:11). The Exile was a physical displacement. It was a result of a moral, theological fracture (Brueggemann 1998:117). It is significant to note that Jeremiah points to Baal worship as the cause of the violation of the Covenant. To Jeremiah, Israel has broken the Covenant because of Baal and his fertility cult. The name of the deity Baal is mentioned in Jeremiah 2:8; 7:9; 11:3; 11:7; 12:16; 19:5; 23:13; (etc). Of note is chapter 23:13 where the prophets are accused of leading Israel astray because of prophesying in the name of Baal. The indictment against Baal worship can be seen in chapter 32: 29 and 30, 'And the Chaldeans who are fighting against this city shall enter and set this city on fire and burn it, with the houses where people have offered incense to Baal on their roofs and offered libations to other gods to provoke me to anger.' The burning of incense on the roof tops is indicative of the fact that Baal worship had become personalized and deep rooted. Baal was now

the guardian of every house in Judah. It was a practice of personal religion. Yahweh had little room in the daily lives of the Covenant people (Longman III 2008:219).

9.6 Jeremiah's Repent and Return Theology.

Jeremiah uses the word return 47 times (Strong 1990:875). He appeals to Israel to return/repent and come to Yahweh and His covenant. To Jeremiah, returning to the Covenant was the only way of avoiding the impending doom. Israel is beckoned to return to Yahweh as a faithless wife should return to her husband (Jeremiah 3:1). The word *swb* means repent, return, go change one's mind, bring back, restore. The word occurs in the Old Testament with a concentration in the book of Jeremiah. A common use of *swb* occurs in the context of spiritual and moral lapses (Thompson & Martens 1997:57, 58). The call to return to Yahweh formed the core of Jeremiah's theology. As a defender of the Covenant, Jeremiah was sharply aware of the threat of Baal to the Covenant. He condemned the worship of Baal and implored Israel to return to Yahweh her covenantal husband. Wessels (1987:147) summarises the theology of Jeremiah saying,

A characteristic element of Jeremiah's preaching is his call to repentance and return to the Lord (Jer 3:1,4; 8:4-7; 15:19; 36:7). He addresses the people about their apostasy, unfaithfulness and lack of knowledge of God's law. He calls them to turn back to the Lord and live in obedience to his laws (Jer 3:12-14; 4:1-4; 18:11; 31:18-19). However, Israel does not obey. Thus God's judgement upon their sins is inevitable and has to be carried out. This is fulfilled in the Exile of 586 BC.

In Jeremiah's view there was a possibility of restoration if the people responded positively. Jeremiah uses the word 'Return,' that is a return from the ways the people had chosen for themselves to the ways the Lord had mandated (MacKay 2004:78). In the final days of Jerusalem, Jeremiah resorted to counselling king Zedekiah to return and submit to the Babylonians. At this time the destruction of

the city could not be avoided, but submission could mitigate the slaughter of much people (Jer 21:1-7, 8-10; 27:11, 13). It must also be noted that in Deuteronomistic history, the Exile is viewed from an apologetic perspective. Israel's admission that the Exile is a consequence of breaking the Covenant is an act of apportioning blame on her failure to keep the Covenant rather than cast a shadow of failure on the part of Yahweh. It is Israel the human partner who has failed to live up to the Covenant obligations.

Biblical evidence shows that the people had turned away from the God of the Covenant and followed after other gods, particularly Baal. The sin of idol worship could not be eliminated without eliminating them. Just as Moses delivered Israel out of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, Jeremiah delivered them into the hands of the Babylonian so that by comparison, they may learn and understand the importance of adhering to the Covenant. In Jeremiah we find the anti-climax of the Exodus. Just as the cup of iniquity was full for the inhabitants of Canaan, the cup of iniquity was full for the chosen people. Just as the Canaanites had to be driven out of their land, the chosen people had to be driven out of the Promised Land because the lure of the Baal fertility cult had led them to abandon covenantal obedience. They had come to the point where they assimilated the Canaanite culture so much so that they set the Covenant obligations aside. Yahweh had demonstrated his *hesed* to Israel but her impunity had become brazen. Thompson (1980:594) comments to say, 'Jerusalem would be captured and burned by the Chaldeans. In the holocaust the houses where pagan worship was conducted would also be destroyed and thus the provocation of the past centuries would cease.'

The people had gone too far in idolatry and judgement was inevitable. Nebuchadnezzar's capture of Jerusalem was simply because Yahweh had withdrawn His *ichabod* from the Covenant people. They had turned their God given homes into Baal worship strong holds. The idol worship was so brazen that

it was carried out on house tops in utter defiance (Feinberg 1990, 6:585). The worship of Baal had threatened Israel down through the monarch.

CHAPTER 10

CONCLUSION

10.1 Purpose of the Work

At the beginning of this work I set out to examine the Baal fertility cult and how it impacted on the Covenant of Yahweh and Israel. I formulated a hypothesis that the Baal fertility cult negatively affected the Covenant because Baal worship did not impose obedience to strict ethical standards as found in the Covenant. Baal worship offered fertility and prosperity with less or no moral conditions as those demanded by the Covenant. Further that Baal worship had strong sensual rituals as the core of its cultic practice, and Israel could not resist this emotive worship. The Canaanite Baal worship was a disorienting contradiction to Israel in that the Canaanites did all that Yahweh prohibited but were prosperous.

10.2 Methodology and Core Issues

I am now convinced that I have sufficiently argued that my hypothesis has substantial theological content. My methodology has adequately handled the subject matter because it allowed me to trace the historicity of the Canaanites and their Baal fertility cult (this is not to imply that other peoples did not practice the fertility cult but only that it was much stronger among the Canaanites). The method allowed me to document the historical development of the Covenant people and their monotheistic relationship to Yahweh and their movement from Egypt to the Promised Land. I was able to analyse how the Covenant made them unique among other ANE peoples and how their covenant relationship to Yahweh was seriously challenged by the Baal fertility cult in the land of Canaan.

10.3 Major Areas of Focus and Findings

In this experiment I have discovered that it is not possible to cover all other related areas. Much more can be done in the area of the development of Yahwism in Israel and how the whole ethical code of the Covenant developed but I have considered that out of my scope for now. My experiment engaged specific steps and process some of which are outlined as chapters below:

- The Canaanites and the Canaanite problem
- Monotheism
- The Covenant
- Baal and the Fertility cult
- Impact of the fertility cult on the Covenant
- Exiled for Breaking the Covenant

The above outlined areas of study I regarded as sufficient coverage to prove my hypothesis. I will now recap the major aspects of the thesis.

10.3.1 The Canaanites

The Hebrew Bible uses the word Canaan and its derivatives more than 160 times (Strong 1990:173). This repetitive use may be indicative of the prominence of the Canaanites as a people in the Ancient Near East. The frequency indicates the importance of the land which they occupied. It is clear that in the story of the Bible lands and its people, the Canaanites have a significant role to play. There are many other Ancient Near Eastern peoples mentioned in the Hebrew Bible, but the main antagonists to the plot of the narrative are the Canaanites. To remove the Canaanites from the story would render the Hebrew Bible incomplete and incomprehensible. The word Canaan is used to describe the Promised Land which was known as the land of Canaan. Sometimes it is used to identify the inhabitants of the land and of course polemically to warn Israel and against the Canaanite practices.

A comparative count of the use of the word Israel reveals that the Old Testament uses the word Israel more than 2500 times (Strong 1990:543-551). One may deduce that the Canaanites though far less mentioned had such a profound impact on the story of Israel. The story of Israel is also better understood when read in the context of the land of Canaan or the Canaanites. It may be difficult to establish with precision the ethnicity of the Canaanites but there is no dispute as to their existence. According to the Hebrew Bible the Canaanites are descendants of Ham (Gen 9:18, 22; 10:19, 20). Many scholars like Killebrew,

Wiseman do agree that the Canaanites indeed did exist. Nichol (1979, 8:177) comments that, 'The heathen inhabitants of the Land of Canaan, called Canaanites were descended from Ham of the sons of Noah. The Canaanites spoke a Semitic language close to Hebrew. They were indigenous in the days of Abraham.'

Not only were the Canaanites the indigenous and owners of the Land of Canaan but they were also the biggest threat to the Covenant people. It is not the military prowess of the Canaanites that was a threat to the Covenant. It was their religiosity of Baal worship and of other gods that would disorient the monotheism encapsulated in the Sinai Covenant. The discovery of Ras Shamra has shed much light on Canaanite mythology with gods like El, Baal, Asherah, Anath, the chief of these being Baal. The Canaanites as mentioned earlier on in the research were the anti-elect who had to be driven out of the land. There are three main models of occupation that have been proposed by scholars; the Conquest model, the Revolution model, and the Infiltration model (Flanders and Crapp 1988: 204). These models are still a matter of debate and there is no consensus yet and I did not pursue them in detail. The Revolution and Infiltration models are not what the Hebrew Bible records. Israel was instructed to intentionally drive out the Canaanites as an act of claiming their inheritance of the Promised Land (Exodus 34:11-13). This was to remove the potential danger of syncretism and covenant disobedience. The Revolution model and the Infiltration model imply that there was no Exodus. The whole concept of the election, covenant, and Promised Land would be rendered irrelevant if we adopt the Revolution and Infiltration model.

10.3.2 Incompatibility with Monotheism

The Canaanite worship of many gods was not compatible with the Israel's religious practice because Israel was a monotheistic nation or was required to be. The Covenant required Israel to worship Yahweh, the God who delivered them from Egypt, from the house of bondage. This is the core of Yahweh's

credentials. The First Commandment in the terms of the Covenant explicitly states that, 'Thou shalt have no other gods before me' (Ex 20:3). The plurality of the Canaanite deities would not be compatible with the Covenant. There are some who have suggested that the religion of Israel was not something peculiar to the Ancient Near Eastern cults prevalent in Palestine. Israel was engaged in a continuous process of differentiation to maintain her identity. Israel's displacement of Baal from her national cult distinguished her religion from that of her neighbours. Israel's apologetic claim and insistence on one deity set her apart from and against her neighbours (Smith 2001:157).

It is probable that when the ancestors of Israel entered Canaan, they could have acknowledged El the highest god of the Canaanite pantheon and worshipped at his shrines. Tradition says El lived like a king in a palace and was surrounded by a court of other gods. He was regarded as master of the world who did not intervene in human history. It is likely that the patriarchs could have recognized his sacred power; they could have interpreted the Canaanite god in terms of their God and in terms of their understanding of Yahweh (Flanders and Crapp 1988:145). The Hebrew Bible is insistent on maintaining the that Israel was a monotheistic nation or was obliged to be as seen in the credo of Deuteronomy 6:4, 5 which states that, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord: and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and all thy soul, and with all thy might.'

The Hebrew Bible does not ignore the presence or existence of other deities as they are part and parcel of the other people groups. But they are regarded as the work of human hands and should be destroyed from existence and memory. This was the task of the prophets like Jeremiah (2:11, 23, 24) who condemned Israel for trading her glory for that which is not (the gods) and for being polluted by the Baalim. The loyalty of the Kings was measured in proportion to their ability to eradicate idol worship from among the Covenant people. Some of the rulers of Israel became the very custodians of the prohibited worship. Ahab and his Tyrian

wife Jezebel were condemned by the prophet Elijah for establishing the worship of Baal (1Kin 17:18). Many of the Kings of Israel encountered a challenge when it came to idol worship. Solomon (though he started well), Jeroboam, Manasseh, Jehoahaz are all declared to have done that which was evil in the sight of the Lord. This does not mean Israel's monotheism had been changed. It was the kings' failure to live according to the expectations and obligations. Hebrew monotheism could not share the same landscape with the Baal fertility cult. In order to protect monotheism, the Canaanites had to be expelled and clear the land of these polluting influences.

10.3.3 The Covenant as Israel's Life Axis.

It is general knowledge that the Covenant (*berith*) is the dominant theme of the Old Testament. In the research I have established that Israel's Covenant relationship with Yahweh was her identity. The life of Israel was governed by this binding relationship regardless of who surrounded her. The existence of Israel as a people was because of the Covenant. Her movements, the Exodus and the Exile were the result of either Covenant obedience or Covenant violation. The Covenant was the axis or the hub on which the life of Israel revolved. There may be other covenant traditions similar to that of Israel and Yahweh. Some have even suggested that Israel could have emulated the treaty traditions of the Hittites. But there are some observable differences. The ethical code encapsulated in the Covenant is one feature not so prevalent in other covenant traditions or treaties (Mendenhall 1954:50). Even though the status of Israel could be that of a vassal, Israel was not a vassal in the sense of conquest. Yahweh had not conquered Israel. Israel was to respond to the self-revelation of Yahweh in the salvation acts which He performed on behalf of Israel. That response was total obedience to the Covenant stipulations (Flanders and Crapps 1988:176).

It is upon the condition of total obedience that Israel would receive blessings. In the Land of Canaan, Israel would get a cultural and religious shock. They would

find a people whose religious cult was contrary to the demands of the Covenant but looking prosperous and at ease. These contradictions led Israel to question the need for obedience if those that lived in the Promised Land did not observe the Covenant but were prosperous. In view of the fact that the land had been prosperous for centuries even before the advent of the Covenant people one could conclude that this reality would overwhelm Israel. They would be tempted to honour the god of the land and that is Baal.

10.3.4 Baal Fertility Cult Impact on Israel

There is abundant evidence biblically and extra biblical to the fact that Baal was the most intimidating and menacing deity to the Covenant people. Baal was the possessor of the land of milk and honey. This land was the prime land of the Ancient Near East because of its fertility and strategic geographical location. It was a land desired even by the super powers of Assyria, Egypt and Babylon. Its natural wealth was ascribed to the providence of Baal. The Hebrew Bible uses the word Baal about 50 times. Most of this use has to do with warning against Baal worship or condemnation for following after Baal (Strong 1990:94). There were many other deities worshipped by other peoples who came into contact with Israel, but Baal proved to be the most attractive and a serious threat to the Covenant because of the fertility cult. The practice of the fertility cult was the very opposite of the dictates of the Covenant. Israel would be blessed if they upheld the holiness prescribed in the terms of the Covenant, 'Now it shall be if you diligently obey the Lord your God, being careful to do all His commandments which I command you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all nations of the earth. And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, if you will obey the Lord your God (Deut 28:1, 2). In the land of Canaan they found a different formula of worship that would guarantee blessing without the condition of obedience.

The Canaanites engaged in that which was an abomination in the Covenant regulations. The shrine devotees engaged in sexual orgies with a belief that they

would encourage and stimulate the gods and the goddesses to do the same. The blessing would be the granting of the person's desire for increase in herds and fields as well as in his or her own family (Davidson 2007:94). This would be one of the deadly unholy influences that the Canaanites would exert on devout Israel. If Israel was a non-worshipping people, it would have been a bit difficult to corrupt them. But now, all it would take would be to twist the holy Yahwistic practice. Davidson (2007:108) makes a pertinent observation when he says,

The polemic against the divinization in the fertility cults appears to be at least part of the divine rationale that the priests clothing be designed so that they do not expose their nakedness (Exodus 28:42-43), and that the priests 'not go up the steps to my alter, so that their nakedness may not be exposed on it' (20:26). Pictorial representations in the Near East reveal that in the fertility cults of surrounding religions, 'the priests were often performing their duties' and they officiated naked because sexual involvement was implied in their office.

10.4 Concluding Summary

The story of Israel as a peculiar people has been a subject of serious study and debate for many centuries. The Hebrew Bible has received a lot of criticism and even outright rejection. It has however, held its central place in the life of the community of faith. It has also remained unrivalled in the study of the Ancient Near Eastern people, their land, lives and religious practice. The nucleus of the story of Israel is her covenant relationship with her God Yahweh. Israel, as chosen race is delivered from the land of Egypt, the house of slavery and is led to the Promised Land, the land of Canaan. The covenant relationship with Yahweh defines who Israel is and how she should order her life in the Promised Land. The Covenant demands an exclusive monotheistic bond between Yahweh and her people. The Promised Land is occupied by the Canaanites. A people deemed the anti-elect because of their religious orientation, the worship of Baal the fertility god.

Jeremiah implored Israel to return to the Covenant because that's where her life and identity was. In the Covenant was the promise of land that would make her a people and a nation. However, the geographical contrast between the land of Egypt and the land of Canaan would pose a challenge to their faith. Egypt had the bounties of food but did not have a threat to their faith. The Egyptians did not seem to care about the religion of the slaves. They were interested in their labour. The generation entering the land of Canaan did not enjoy the leeks and onions of Egypt. They were not accustomed to grown foods. In the land of milk and honey they would experience a cultural shock.

The desert wanderings did not prepare them for the religious cult ahead. In the wilderness, they learned to trust Yahweh implicitly and followed him as a Covenant people. They looked forward to being ushered into the land flowing with milk and honey. In the Promised Land they would meet the Canaanites whose religious practices were the opposite of Yahwism and the dictates of the Covenant. That which Yahweh prohibited, the Canaanites indulged with unbridled sensuality.

The wealth of the land did not point to Yahweh. It pointed to Baal the god of the Canaanites. To make matters more tempting to Israel, Baal was not worshipped with strict ethical demands. This made obedience unnecessary thus rendering the blessings and curses of Deuteronomy ineffective. Coming from the desert where no planting and harvest took place, made them dependent on the anti-elect who should be driven out of the land. In the process of orienting Israel to life in the land, the Canaanites would point them to the source of their wealth, and that would not be Yahweh.

These factors created circumstances that predisposed Israel to violate Covenant obedience. Coupled with sensual cultic practice, Israel felt released from Covenant obedience and followed Baal.

The Exile to Babylon did not utterly destroy the Covenant relationship between Yahweh and Israel. The Exile was a calculated and measurable period of eviction from the Promised Land for Israel to learn lessons which they failed to learn in the land of Canaan. The Exile would create an appreciation and a longing for life in the land of Canaan and obedience to the terms of the Covenant. There are several texts which show that the Covenant was violated but not terminated. Jeremiah in chapter 25:11 referring to the Exile says, 'And this whole land shall be desolation and a horror, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years.' This implies that the period of servitude would expire after seventy years. In chapter 30:3, there is another declaration the Yahweh would bring His people back to the land of their forefathers. The prophet Daniel in chapter 9:2, makes reference to Jeremiah when points out that the desolation of Jerusalem would last for seventy years.

10.5 Recommendation

In view of the above findings, I would like to recommend that the study of Israel and her relations with other Ancient Near Eastern peoples should be done within the context of the demands of the Covenant upon Israel. This will give context to Israel's rather militant and isolationistic way of dealing with her neighbours. And further that the Covenant with Yahweh was Israel's identity and reason for existence as a nation. To fail to do so would reduce Israel to a militant marauding horde of tribes.

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