ELLEN WHITE

Yahweh's Council

Mohr Siebeck

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Its Structure and Membership

Mohr Siebeck

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For my Father who always believed I could do it,
but didn't live long enough to see it
and my Mother who suffered through the process.

For James Calhoun King, who showed me what it means
to live well in this world.

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Abbreviations

AASF	Annales Academiae Scientiarum Fennicae
AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	*The Anchor Bible Dictionary*. Edited by D. N. Freedman (6 vols.; New York: Doubleday, 1992)
AOTC	Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries
ARM	Archives royales de Mari
ATANT	Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments
AzTh	Arbeiten zur Theologie
BA	*Biblical Archaeologist*
BAR	*Biblical Archaeology Review*
BASORSup	Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research Supplementary Studies
BAT	Die Botschaft des Alten Testaments
BBR	*Bulletin for Biblical Research*
BDB	F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907)
BEATAJ	Beiträge zur Erforschung des Alten Testaments und des antiken Judentums
BETL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium
BEvT	Beiträge zur evangelischen Theologie
BHS	Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia
Bib	*Biblica*
BibInt	*Biblical Interpretation*
BibLeb	*Bibel und Leben*
BibOr	Biblia et orientalia
BN	*Biblische Notizen*
BSac	*Bibliotheca Sacra*
BST	The Bible Speaks Today
BWM	Bibelwissenschaftliche Monographien
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CAT	Commentaire de l'Ancien Testament
CBC	Cambridge Bible Commentary
CBET	Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology
CBQMS	Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series
CC	Continental Commentary
ConBOT	Coniectanea Biblica: Old Testament Series
CTU	*The Cuneiform Alphabetic Texts from Ugarit, Ras Ibn Hani, and Other Places*. Edited by Manfried Dietrich, Oswald Loretz and Joaquín Sanmartín (2nd enlarged ed.; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1995)

DDD	*Dictionary of Deities and Demons*. Edited by K. van der Toorn, P. W. van der Horst, and B. Becking (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999)
EBH	Early Biblical Hebrew
EBib	Etudes bibliques
EgT	*Église et théologie*
EstBib	*Estudios Biblicos*
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
FOTL	Forms of the Old Testament Literature
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
GBS	Guides to Biblical Scholarship
HAR	*Harvard Annual Review*
HAT	Handbuch zum Alten Testament
HBS	Herders biblische Studien
HTR	*Harvard Theological Review*
HUCA	*Hebrew Union College Annual*
IB	*Interpreter's Bible*. Edited by G. A. Buttrick et al. (12 vols.; New York: Abingdon, 1951–1957)
ITC	International Theological Commentary
JAOS	*Journal of the American Oriental Society*
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JBQ	*Jewish Bible Quarterly*
JETS	*Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*
JJS	*Journal of Jewish Studies*
JNES	*Journal of Near Eastern Studies*
JQR	*Jewish Quarterly Review*
JSOT	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplementary Series
JSS	*Journal of Semitic Studies*
JTSA	*Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*
KAI	*Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften*. Edited by H. Donner and W. Röllig (3 vols.; 2nd ed.; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1964–1968)
LBH	Late Biblical Hebrew
NBD	*New Bible Dictionary*. Edited by I. H. Marshall, A. R. Millard, J. I. Packer, and D. J. Wiseman (3rd ed.; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1996)
NCBC	New Century Bible Commentary
NIB	*The New Interpreter's Bible*. Edited by Leander E. Keck. Nashville: Abingdon, 1996
NIBC	New International Biblical Commentary
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIDOTE	*New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*. Edited by W. A. van Gemeren (5 vols.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997)
OBO	Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis
Or	*Orientalia*
OTE	*Old Testament Essays*
OTL	Old Testament Library
OTM	Old Testament Message
OTSt	*Old Testament Studies*
PEQ	*Palestine Exploration Quarterly*
PRS	*Perspectives in Religious Studies*

RB	*Revue biblique*
RE	*Review and Expositor*
RHPR	*Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses*
RHR	*Revue de l'histoire des religions*
SBLMS	Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
SBLSP	*Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers*
SBLWAW	Society of Biblical Literature Writings from the Ancient World
ScEs	*Science et Esprit*
SJOT	*Scottish Journal of Theology*
SSN	Studia Semitica Neerlandica
SSS	Semitic Study Series
SWBA	Social World of Biblical Antiquity
TBC	Torch Bible Commentaries
TDNT	*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Edited by G. Kittel and G. Friedrich. Translated by G. W. Bromiley (10 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–1976)
TLZ	*Theologische Literaturzeitung*
TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries
TP	*Theologie und Philosophie*
TS	*Theological Studies*
TSAJ	Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism
TynBul	*Tyndale Bulletin*
UBL	Ugaritisch-biblische Literatur
UF	*Ugarit-Forschungen*
VT	*Vetus Testamentum*
VTSup	Vetus Testamentum Supplements
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
WTJ	*Westminster Theological Journal*
ZAH	*Zeitschrift für Althebraistik*
ZAW	*Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*

Defining the Divine Council and the Parameters of the Study

1.1. Introduction

This study explores the membership and structure of the Council of Yahweh, as represented in biblical examples of this type-scene. The phrase "divine council" is used to describe the government or royal court of the supreme deity. In order to justify a new study on this topic, one must question the underlying assumptions of divine council studies, including the way in which comparative study is usually conducted.[1] In their books, most scholars develop a model based on the texts found at Ugarit or Mesopotamia, and then explore the material in the Hebrew Bible in order to determine how it fits with the other religions. This approach has led to certain assumptions and even results that cannot be confirmed through the Hebrew Bible. Therefore, one purpose of this study is to question those assumptions. In doing so, I will develop the following points: firstly, there are multiple councils in the Hebrew Bible and not all of them belong to Yahweh; secondly, the Council of Yahweh negates a claim for radical monotheism but can reveal insight into the development from polytheism towards monotheism; and finally, there are textual strands that experiment with human membership on various levels within the council.

1.2. History of Scholarship

Research on the divine council is not new. Early studies by Frank Moore Cross, Edwin C. Kingsbury, Norbert Lohfink, Johannes Pedersen, H. Wheeler

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[1] I first became interested in the divine council while researching my Th.M. thesis on השטן, as it was the setting for this character in Job 1–2 and Zechariah 3. E. White, "The Purpose and Portrayal of the *śāṭān* in the Old Testament" (Th.M. Thesis, Tyndale Seminary, 2004). This earlier study has significantly influenced this project in relationship to Job 1–2, Zechariah 3, Joshua, and the character of השטן. Portions of that original study have been used throughout this current work. The pieces from the earlier thesis included in this project contain mostly factual information or interpretations that have not changed with further study.

Robinson, and Matitiahu Tsevat are helpful but most of them are neither detailed nor extensive.[2] Moreover, most studies have either focused on one passage[3] or one member[4] of the council.[5]

While these studies are helpful in gaining insight into the details regarding aspects of the council, they are not extensive enough to provide a picture of the Council of Yahweh type-scene. Other full-length studies focus on the deity in general or the characteristics/attributes of God.[6] While these

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[2] G. Couturier, "La vision du Conseil divin: Étude d'une forme commune au prophétisme et à l'apocalyptique," *ScEs* XXXVI (1984): 5–43; F. M. Cross, "The Council of Yahweh in Second Isaiah," *JNES* 22 (1953): 274–77; L. Dequeker, "La cour céleste de Yahvé," *Collectanea Mechliniensia* 52 (1967): 131–40; E. C. Kingsbury, "The Prophets and the Council of Yahweh," *JBL* 83 (1964): 279–86; N. Lohfink, "Gott und die Götter im Alten Testament," *Theologische Akademie* 6 (1969): 50–71; J. Pedersen, "Canaanite and Israelite Cultus," *AcOr* 18 (1939): 1–14; H. W. Robinson, "The Council of Yahweh," *JTS* 45 (1944): 151–57; M. Tsevat, "God and the Gods in Assembly: An Interpretation of Psalm 82," *HUCA* XL–XLI (1969–1970): 123–37.

[3] For literature on Gen 6:1–4, see below, p. 42, n. 94; on Psalm 82, see below, p. 24, n. 3.

[4] For literature on השטן, see below, p. 109, n. 7; on השרפים, p. 121, n. 54; on המלאכים, p. 124, n. 78.

[5] On the divine council in prophetic books see D. E. Bokovoy, "שמעו והעידו בבית יעקב: Invoking the Council as Witnesses in Amos 3:13," *JBL* 127 (2008): 37–51; Cross, "The Council of Yahweh in Second Isaiah"; R. P. Gordon, "Standing in the Council: When Prophets Encounter God," in *The God of Israel* (R. P. Gordon, ed.; University of Cambridge Oriental Press Publications 64; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 190–204; F. Hartenstein, *Die Unzugänglichkeit Gottes im Heiligtum: Jesaja 6 und der Wohnort Jahwes in der Jerusalemer Kulttradition* (WMANT 75; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1997); Kingsbury, "The Prophets and the Council of Yahweh"; P. D. Miller, "The Divine Council and the Prophetic Call to War," *VT* 18 (1968): 100–107; M. Nissinen, "Prophets and the Divine Council," in *Kein Land für sich allein: Studien zum Kulturkontakt in Kanaan, Israel/Palästina und Ebirnâri für Manfred Weippert zum 65. Geburtstag* (U. Hübner and E. A. Knauf, eds.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002), 4–19; M. E. Polley, "The Call and Commission of the Hebrew Prophets in the Council of Yahweh, Examined in Its Ancient Near Eastern Setting," in *Scripture in Context: Essays on the Comparative Method* (C. D. Evans, W. W. Hallo, and J. B. White, eds.; PTMS 34; Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1980), 141–56; C. R. Seitz, "The Divine Council: Temporal Transition and New Prophecy in the Book of Isaiah," *JBL* 109 (1990): 229–47.

[6] S. Y. Cho, *Lesser Deities in the Ugaritic Texts and the Hebrew Bible: A Comparative Study in Their Nature and Roles* (Deities and Angels of the Ancient World 2; Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2008); E. J. Hamori, *"When Gods Were Men": The Embodied God in Biblical and Near Eastern Literature* (BZAW 384; Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2008); A. R. Johnson, *The One and the Many in the Israelite Conception of God* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1961); O. Keel and C. Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God* (trans. T. H. Trapp; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998); K. Koch, *Der Gott Israels und die Götter des Orients: Religionsgeschichtliche Studien II. Zum 80. Geburtstag von Klaus Koch* (F. Hartenstein and M. Rösel, eds.; FRLANT 216; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007); idem, "Ugaritic Polytheism and Hebrew Monotheism in Isaiah 40–55," in *The God of Israel* (R. P. Gordon, ed.; University of Cambridge

studies provide insight into the nature and identity of the deity, they do not focus on the council or the deity's role in the council as it is depicted in the council type-scenes. In addition, Marjo Christina Annette Korpel makes this statement regarding methodology: "Because the size of the Ugaritic corpus is much smaller than that of the Old Testament we made the Ugaritic usage the standard to establish the degree of correspondence."[7] Taking the Ugaritic material as backdrop has been the typical approach to understanding the council.[8] This, in and of itself, is not problematic, as it does provide insight and a means of comparison. However, if one's main interest lies in Israelite concepts, then the primary focus needs to be on Israelite material. John J. Collins says, "When a Canaanite myth is used in the Hebrew Bible, it is inevitably torn from its original context and given a new meaning."[9] Thus, only after an exploration of biblical understandings is undertaken can true comparative work be done.[10] Yet, as can be seen

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Oriental Publications 64; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 205–28; M. C. A. Korpel, *A Rift in the Cloud: Ugaritic and Hebrew Descriptions of the Divine* (UBL 8; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1990); Lohfink, "Gott und die Götter im Alten Testament"; O. Loretz, "Die Einzigkeit eines Gottes im Polytheismus von Ugarit: Zur Levante als Ursprungsort des biblischen Monotheismus," in *Polytheismus und Monotheismus in den Religionen des Vorderen Orients* (M. Krebernik and J. van Oorschot, eds.; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2002), 71–89; B. N. Porter, ed., *One God or Many? Concepts of Divinity in the Ancient World* (Chebeague Island: Casco Bay Assyriological Institute, 2000).

   [7] Korpel, *A Rift in the Cloud*, 619.

   [8] Cho, *Lesser Deities*, 4–7; E. T. Mullen, *The Assembly of the Gods: The Divine Council in Canaanite and Early Hebrew Literature* (HSM 24; Chico: Scholars Press, 1980), 115. This idea is reflected in the methodology of Handy and Smith: L. K. Handy, *Among the Host of Heaven: The Syro-Palestinian Pantheon as Bureaucracy* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1994); M. S. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel's Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

   [9] J. J. Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 286.

   [10] The Ugaritic material naturally is an important comparison for biblical material and this study should not be seen as an argument against utilizing material from other ancient Near Eastern cultures. This is especially true since the other material is older and likely provides insight into the foundations of Israelite religion, based on the theories of origins stemming from scholars such as Mendenhall (G. E. Mendenhall, "The Hebrew Conquest of Palestine," *BA* 17 [1962]: 50–76) and Gottwald (N. K. Gottwald, *The Tribe of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel, 1250–1050 B.C.E.* [Maryknoll: Orbis, 1979].) These theories diverge on many levels, but agree on the theory that the majority of Israelites were originally Canaanites and therefore, Yahwism evolves out of Canaanite polytheism. For recent scholarship on this theory see W. G. Dever, B. Halpern, P. K. McCarter, and H. Shanks, eds., *The Rise of Ancient Israel: Symposium of the Smithsonian Institute, Sponsored by the Resident Associate Program* (Washington: Biblical Archaeology Society, 1993); W. G. Dever, *Who Were the Early Israelites and Where Did They Come From?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003); I. Finkelstein, "Searching for Israelite Origins," *BAR* 14 (1988): 34–45; idem, "A Great United Monarchy? Archaeological and

from the creation and flood parallels, Israel would often operate within traditional categories, but do so in such a way that they express their unique theologies. So to begin with a structure from outside Israel and then search for it within the Hebrew Bible can cause one to over-emphasize the similarities and to minimize the differences. Thus, it is important to begin with the Israelite material and then use the external data to help refine the theory and enter into a proper dialogue. This study is an attempt to provide the first piece in this process.

A few studies have attempted a detailed overview of the divine council concept. The first full-length book on the subject was E. Theodore Mullen's revision of his Harvard doctoral dissertation.[11] Mullen begins with an exploration of the Ugaritic myths and pays close attention to the relationship among the members of the divine council in these texts, particularly El and Baal. The critique given to his work on the Hebrew Bible is that he reads through a Ugaritic lens.[12] His major contribution for the purposes of this study of the Council of Yahweh is in exposing the unique role the prophets played in this council.[13] However, he omits the scenes in the prologue of Job, and he does not attempt to establish the structure of either the Ugaritic or Hebrew Bible council.

Mark S. Smith advanced the discussion and is the first to introduce the discussion of structure with a very short article outlining four tiers within the divine council;[14] this was followed by Lowell K. Handy's mono-

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Historical Perspectives," in *One God – One Cult – One Nation: Archaeological and Biblical Perspectives* (R. G. Kratz and H. Spieckermann, eds.; BZAW 405; Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2010), 3–28; idem and A. Mazar, *The Quest for the Historical Israel: Debating Archaeology and the History of Early Israel* (B. B. Schmidt, ed.; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007); V. Fritz and P. Davies, eds., *The Origins of the Ancient Israelite States* (JSOTSup 228; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996); N. P. Lemche, "The Origin of the Israelite State: A Copenhagen Perspective on the Emergence of Critical Historical Studies of Ancient Israel in Recent Times," *SJOT* 12 (1998): 44–63; A. Mazar, "Archaeology and the Biblical Narrative: The Case of the United Monarchy," in *One God – One Cult – One Nation: Archaeological and Biblical Perspectives* (R. G. Kratz and H. Spieckermann, eds.; BZAW 405; Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 2010), 29–58; H. R. Page, "Myth, Meta-narrative, and Historical Reconstruction: Rethinking the Nature of Scholarship on Israelite Origins," in *Studies in the Hebrew Bible, Qumran, and the Septuagint Presented to Eugene Ulrich* (P. Flint, E. Tov, and J. VanderKam, eds.; VTSup 101; Boston: Brill, 2006), 1–20; Z. Safrai and A. Faust, "Salvage Excavations as a Source for Reconstructing Settlement History in Ancient History," *PEQ* 137 (2005): 139–58; M. Weinfeld, "Historic Facts Behind the Israelite Settlement Pattern," *VT* 38 (1988): 324–33.

[11] Mullen, *Assembly of the Gods*, 111–243.

[12] J. J. M. Roberts, "Review of *The Assembly of the Gods: The Divine Council in Canaanite and Early Hebrew Literature*," *JBL* 102 (1983): 623.

[13] Mullen, *Assembly of the Gods*, 209–25.

[14] Mark S. Smith, "Divine Travel as a Token of Divine Rank," *UF* 16 (1984): 359.

graph,[15] with Smith's book about monotheism following a little over five years later.[16] Handy uses the metaphor of bureaucracy to explain the structure observed in the various pantheons. Smith on the other hand uses the terminology of family, which derives from language used in the texts themselves. Despite this linguistic difference, Smith and Handy have concluded that there is a four-tier divine council throughout the ancient Near East. It is important to note, Handy's focus is on the pantheon and that frames his comments regarding the council and Smith's writing sometimes focuses on the pantheon in general rather than the council exclusively. This means that not everything in their books can be applied to the council specifically. For example, Handy discusses the cherubim in his chapter on messenger deities, but these divine beings are not found in any council passages.[17] Regardless, these tiers do not correlate with the evidence from divine council texts in the Hebrew Bible, which will be explored below. Therefore, new understandings of the council's structure from the perspective of the Hebrew Bible are needed to form a basis for further comparative studies.

Smith and Handy may to have very different positions on the structure of the divine council. However, their different terminology is a result of their different purposes more than the actual results.[18] In fact, since their conclusions are so similar and no alternatives have been put forward to date, one might conclude that this should be the definitive structural understanding of divine councils.[19]

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[15] Handy, *Among the Host of Heaven*.

[16] M. S. Smith, *Origins of Biblical Monotheism*, esp. 41–66.

[17] Handy, *Among the Host of Heaven*, 156.

[18] Handy's terminology and purpose come out of his desire to use an existing model (bureaucracy) as a metaphor through which he explains the structure observed in the various pantheons. Smith on the other hand bases his terminology and purpose on the language used in the texts themselves. Despite this linguistic difference, the structure is remarkably similar.

[19] This structure will be sketched briefly using Smith's model, but when Handy differs that will be noted. The assertion that this has become definitive refers to the modern theories. Prior to the publications of Handy and Smith in particular there was a tri-level hypothesis at work based on *CTU* 1.15 II 2–7 and its use of *ṯlṯh* specifically. The debate did not question the *ṯlṯh* of the pantheon but rather the language used to express this "reality" of three (i.e., trinity of gods, threefold, three categories, etc.). One form of that hypothesis is proposed by J. C. de Moor and K. Spronk, *A Cuneiform Anthology of Religious Texts from Ugarit: Autographed Texts and Glossaries* (SSS N.S. 6; Leiden: Brill, 1987), 205; T. H. Gaster, "The Canaanite Epic of Keret," *JQR* 37 (1947): 285–93; H. L. Ginsberg, *The Legend of King Keret: A Canaanite Epic of the Bronze Age* (BASORSup 2/3; New Haven: American Schools of Oriental Research, 1946), 22; J. Gray, *The Canaanites* (Ancient Peoples and Places 36; New York: Praeger, 1964), 58; C. Virolleaud, *Légendes de Babylone et de Canaan* (Paris: Maisonneuve, 1949), 143. The more recent interpretations of this passage view it as describing the way that the retinues arrived (i.e.,

On the top tier is the chief god of the land. At Ugarit this tier was populated by El, who has the authority to issue commands and rule over the assembly, and Athirat (Asherah) because she is his spouse and has influence over him.[20] On tier two, one finds the great gods, which at Ugarit would be the seventy children of El and Athirat. This is the level where most of the "combat and conflict" arise and for that matter are solved.[21] The third tier is more complex. It comprises deities who are more powerful or more important than the lesser deities, and yet they are not part of El's actual family.[22] An example of a god at this level is Kothar-wa-Hasis, a foreign god, as is evident from his homes in Egypt and Crete (*CTU* 1.3 VI 12–20). However, the greater gods need him, and at times he is depicted as knowing more than they (e.g., *CTU* 1.1 III; 1.2 III; 1.2 IV; 1.4 V–VII). Smith, therefore, defines this tier as the "middle" ground between the greater gods and the lesser gods.[23] The lesser deities comprise the final tier.[24] Here one finds the messenger gods, the major deities' military retinue, and the divine workers or staff members. This is contrary to what Mullen wrote as he did not include these divine figures as part of the council.[25] However, the latter theories of both Handy and Smith include this tier within the divine council.[26]

The main difference between Smith and Handy arises with respect to the Israelite material. When examining the Hebrew Bible, both begin with the four tiers and then examine the biblical text in line with them. This is precisely the methodological issue with their interpretations and the reason for a new study. Smith concludes that tier one is present in the person of

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that each group arrived in threes). Svi Rin and Nicholas Wyatt suggest a military connection rather than a "three" understanding; see S. Rin, *Acts of the Gods: The Ugaritic Epic Poetry* (Jerusalem: Israel Society for Biblical Research, 1968), xli; N. Wyatt, *Religious Texts from Ugarit* (The Biblical Seminar 53; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 212. For a good discussion of these theories see Cho, *Lesser Deities*, 22–31.

[20] M. S. Smith, *Origins of Biblical Monotheism*, 45.

[21] M. S. Smith, *Origins of Biblical Monotheism*, 45.

[22] This is the most complicated level of the theory to understand. Handy himself even says that the lines between these deities and those above are "not clearly defined"; Handy, *Among the Host of Heaven*, 131. It is helpful to think of this as the tradeworkers of construction and the higher level as the general contractor. The tradeworkers take orders from the general contractor, but the general contractor cannot complete the project without the specialized work of the tradeworkers.

[23] M. S. Smith, *Origins of Biblical Monotheism*, 26.

[24] This distinction is challenged by Cho who claims that there is very little difference between tier three and tier four and thus considers the deities in both tiers in his analysis of lesser deities: Cho, *Lesser Deities*, 32. Despite this critique, Cho continues to refer to four tiers and adopts Handy's structure and terminology.

[25] Mullen, *Assembly of the Gods*, 282.

[26] Handy, *Among the Host of Heaven*, 149; M. S. Smith, *Origins of Biblical Monotheism*, 46.

Yahweh, which can certainly be supported by the texts. His didactic approach argues that tier four exists in the form of the "angels," which he sees as the other gods who through a long historical process get transformed into lesser divine beings.[27] Similarly, tiers two and three have been omitted due to the transformation within Israelite religion from polytheism to monotheism, which also accounts for the change in status of the beings in tier four.[28] Michael S. Heiser presents this understanding of the issue when he states, "The data apparently informs us that Israelite religion evolved from polytheism to henotheistic monolatry to monotheism."[29] While it seems certain that there is development within Israelite religion, the linear progression ending in radical monotheism described by Heiser should be questioned, and the council itself should be considered in this larger discussion.

Handy takes a slightly different approach. In his version, Yahweh occupies tier one, but tier two has not been edited out by the development towards monotheism. He places characters such as the Lying Spirit in 1 Kings 22 and השטן from Job and Zechariah on this tier as gods.[30] On tier three he suggests that Nehushtan (2 Kgs 18:4) and Baʿal-Zebub (2 Kgs 1:1–8) might have functioned at this level in Israelite religion.[31] Yet, his proposal is cautious due to lack of information regarding this level in the larger ancient Near Eastern context. On tier four, Handy takes the term המלאכים literally as messengers,[32] even though that is not how these characters function within biblical council type-scenes; in fact in these scenes, the role of messenger is usually filled by prophets, not המלאכים. Thus he bases most of his argumentation regarding this tier on terminology and names. This is mixed methodology, since his four tiers were initially developed on the basis of function. Therefore, this study will examine the way in which the members of the Council of Yahweh function, in order to develop a structural understanding purely on the basis of function.

While both theorists propose plausible explanations for understanding the Council of Yahweh, more could be said regarding its presentation in the Hebrew Bible. For example, Smith is almost certainly correct in stating that the development towards monotheism is an important factor for theologies regarding Israelite divine councils. However, he points out that divine

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[27] M. S. Smith, *Origins of Biblical Monotheism*, 49.

[28] M. S. Smith, *Origins of Biblical Monotheism*, 47–50.

[29] M. S. Heiser, "Monotheism, Polytheism, Monolatry, or Henotheism? Towards an Assessment of Divine Plurality in the Hebrew Bible," *BBR* 18 (2008): 2. It is important to note that Heiser is merely describing the standard pattern in scholarship. He, himself, questions this understanding.

[30] Handy, *Among the Host of Heaven*, 119–22.

[31] Handy, *Among the Host of Heaven*, 140–42.

[32] Handy, *Among the Host of Heaven*, 152–54.