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# WHO CONTROLS THE WATER? YAHWEH VS. BAAL

*Fred E. Woods*

As the Israelites settled in the land of Canaan, clashes over religious beliefs and practices developed with other inhabitants of the land. Baalism, the belief in the Canaanite god of water and storm, became a threat to the true belief in Yahweh (Jehovah). This paper is an investigation of the implicit polemical usage of

water and storm language in the Deuteronomic History (hereafter referred to as DH).<sup>1</sup> The DH consists of the book of Deuteronomy as well as what is referred to in the Hebrew Bible as the Former Prophets (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings).<sup>2</sup> Many passages in the Deuteronomic corpus instructed Israel that Yahweh, not Baal,

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1. This paper is a distillation of my dissertation, *Water and Storm Polemics against Baalism in the Deuteronomic History*, American University Studies; Series VII, Theology and Religion (New York: Peter Lange Publishing, 1994). “Polemic” or “polemical” is derived from the Greek word *polemikos*, meaning warlike. It is defined as “an aggressive attack on or refutation of the opinions or principles of another,” *Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* (Springfield, Mass.: Merriam-Webster, 1991), 910. It is used here in the sense of a literary attack against Baal, the Canaanite god of water and storm.

2. Biblical scholars refer to these books as the Deuteronomic History because there appears to be consistent editing throughout this stratum of the Hebrew Bible, which suggests a unified historical polemical work. Most of the editorial work seems to have occurred just prior to the exile during the era of Josiah’s reformation, the final editing taking place soon after Judah’s exile. See David Noel Freedman, “Deuteronomic History, The,” in the supplementary volume of *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. Keith Crim et al. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982), 226–28. For a more complete discussion of the Deuteronomic History, see Martin Noth, *The*

held the power over water, storm, and prosperity in the land and were thereby launching a literary attack against Baalism. This paper will proceed by first examining Baalism; then I will give a brief overview of the role of the book of Deuteronomy in the DH. Finally, I will analyze and summarize various passages in the remaining Deuteronomistic corpus of Joshua–2 Kings.

## Baalism

Scholars generally agree that the key to understanding Baalism, or, in other words, Canaanite religion, is the Ugaritic Texts.<sup>3</sup> These

texts were discovered on Syrian's northern coast in 1929 during the excavations of the tel Ras Shamra, which proved to be the ancient site of Ugarit.<sup>4</sup> With the decipherment of the tablets in 1930, Ugaritic literature has become of critical importance to the study of Canaanite religion in the Old Testament.<sup>5</sup> Before excavations of the Ugaritic texts, the Baalism that the Hebrew prophets adamantly battled was little understood. With the discovery of these tablets, a so-called Canaanite bible emerged. These writings not only revealed a complex Canaanite pantheon but also demonstrated that these people were

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*Deuteronomistic History* (Sheffield: University of Sheffield, 1981); Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 274–89; Mark A. O'Brien, *The Deuteronomistic History Hypothesis: A Reassessment* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989); Steven L. McKenzie, *The Trouble with Kings: The Composition of the Book of Kings in the Deuteronomistic History* (Leiden: Brill, 1991); and Erik Eynikel, *The Reform of King Josiah and the Composition of the Deuteronomistic History* (Leiden: Brill, 1995).

3. Mitchell A. Dahood, "Ancient Semitic Deities in Syria and Palestine," in *Le Antiche Divinità Semitiche, Studi Semitici*, ed. Sabatino Moscati, vol. 1 (Rome: Centro di Studi Semitici, 1958), 67; James B. Pritchard, *Archaeology and the Old Testament* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958), 107. See also G. del Olmo Lete, *Canaanite Religion: According to the Liturgical Texts of Ugarit* (Bethesda, Md.: CDL Press, 1999); M. S. Smith, ed., *The Ugaritic Baal Cycle*, Supplements to *Vetus Testamentum*, vol. 55 (Leiden: Brill, 1994); and articles entitled "Baal," "Canaanites," and "Ugarit" in David Noel Freedman, ed., *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2000).

4. For the complete account of these excavations, see Claude F. A. Schaeffer, *The Cuneiform Texts of Ras Shamra-Ugarit* (London: Oxford University Press, 1939).

5. Arvid S. Kapelrud, "Ugarit," in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. George A. Buttrick et al. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982), 4:725. On the other hand, it may be argued that perhaps Ugarit does not reflect a typical Canaanite society and is located beyond the northern border of the land of Canaan. In spite of these apparent limitations, I support the view of William F. Albright, who argues that Ugarit plays a vital role in understanding Canaanite culture and religion. He maintains that the language and culture of Ugarit is in harmony with that of Canaan. Consequently, he refers to the Ugaritic material as North Canaanite. Furthermore, he points quite convincingly to the ample evidence that the Ugaritic deities were worshipped not only at Ugarit, but also in Syria, Canaan, and even Egypt. William F. Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1968), 116. I also concur with Frank Eakin, who maintains that while we should recognize the apparent dangers of equating Canaan with Ugarit, "nonetheless a cultural homogeneity existed along the Levant during the cultural zenith of Ugarit. To describe the character of Ugaritic worship, therefore, is to portray also the nature of Canaanite worship." Frank E. Eakin Jr., *The Religion and Culture of Israel: An Introduction to Old Testament Thought* (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1971), 199. See also Niels Peter Lemche, "The Canaanites and Their Land: The Tradition of the Canaanites," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, Supplement Series 110 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991).

immersed in a fertility cult of which Baal-Hadad was the god par excellence.<sup>6</sup>

The most active deity both at Ugarit and in the Canaanite pantheon of the Hebrew Bible is Baal, the god of water and storm. Although his proper name is Hadad, he is most often referred to by the title *baal*, a common Semitic noun meaning “owner, master, husband or lord.”<sup>7</sup> The name *Hadad* itself occurs only seventeen times in the Ugaritic texts—an interesting fact in that it seems to relate to the notion of calling a specific deity *lord* to avoid repeating the sacred name of a deity.<sup>8</sup> This would be particularly true of Hadad, the supreme god at Ugarit, who is designated by the epithet Baal about 160 times.<sup>9</sup> The name *Hadad* is also attested in Akkadian, where it may be translated as “thunderer.”<sup>10</sup> This title is most appropriate, because Baal is associated with water and storm and is portrayed with “his weapon, the lightning, and his voice, the thunder.”<sup>11</sup>

In the Hebrew Bible, Baal is referred to more than any other Canaanite deity: a total of seventy-six times—eighteen times in the plural and fifty-eight times in the singular, the latter always accompanied by the definite article.<sup>12</sup>

M. J. Mulder observes, “the OT does not reveal whether another unknown divine name lies hidden behind the name Baal, e.g., Hadad. However, it does confirm the impression made by the Ugaritic texts that it has in mind Baal par excellence, the god of storm and fertility.”<sup>13</sup> The strong denunciation of Baal in the Old Testament lends itself to the notion that the Baal cult had deeply penetrated Israelite culture. Otherwise the issue would not have unleashed such a vehement literary attack against Baalism, best represented in the Deuteronomic History.

### Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic History

The book of Deuteronomy forms an integral part of the Deuteronomic History and serves as a prologue to the remaining strata of the DH, as attested in Joshua–2 Kings. It is as though the book of Deuteronomy says, “Here is what God has prophesied concerning Israel,” but Joshua–2 Kings says, “This is how God’s word has been exactly fulfilled in Israelite history from the settlement to the destruction of Jerusalem and the Exile.”<sup>14</sup> Thus the book of Deuteronomy serves

6. See John Gray, “Baal,” in *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, 1:328–29.

7. Ulf Oldenburg, *The Conflict between El and Ba’al in Canaanite Religion* (Leiden: Brill, 1969), 57–58.

8. J. C. De Moor, “Ba’al,” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, trans. John T. Willis (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1986), 2:183. See also D&C 107:2–4, where we find that modern-day revelation reveals that the Holy Priesthood after the Order of the Son of God was changed to the Melchizedek Priesthood “to avoid the too frequent repetition of the name of deity.”

9. Oldenburg, *Conflict between El and Ba’al*, 59.

10. Harvey H. Guthrie Jr., “Hadad,” in *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, 2:507.

11. J. C. L. Gibson, “The Theology of the Ugaritic Baal Cycle,” *Orientalia* 53 (1984): 202–19, facs. no. 2.

12. M. J. Mulder, “Baal in the Old Testament,” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, 2:197.

13. *Ibid.*, 193–94. The name *Hadad* occurs by itself in the Hebrew Bible, most notably in the name of the Syrian king Ben-Hadad (see 1 Kings 15:20; 2 Kings 13; 2 Chronicles 16). The name also occurs in the genealogies of the Edomites (Genesis 36:35; 1 Chronicles 1:30, 46, 50; see also 1 Kings 11).

14. Robert Polzin, “Reporting Speech in the Book of Deuteronomy: Toward a Compositional Analysis of the Deuteronomic History,” in *Tradition in Transformation: Turning Points in Biblical Faith*, ed. B. Halpern and Jon D. Levenson (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1981), 194–95.

not only as an introduction to the DH, but also as a standard to understand the remaining literature in the Deuteronomic corpus.

While the explicit biblical polemics against worshipping Baal have been apparent to scholars, the implicit polemical assault waged against Baal in the Deuteronomic corpus has gone virtually unnoticed, particularly as it relates to the usage of water and storm language—a steady device that launches a literary attack against the god of water and storm, Baal-Hadad.<sup>15</sup> The conditional covenant that God made with Israel in relation to the promised land helps clarify this implicit polemic. The Lord told the Israelites that if they were obedient, they could possess the land of Israel (Deuteronomy 11:8). He also told them that if they kept his commandments, he would give rain in its proper season (Deuteronomy 11:14). However, he also warned, “Beware not to be lured away to serve other gods. . . . For the Lord’s anger will be kindled against you, and he will shut up the skies so that there will be no rain and the ground will not yield its produce; and you will soon perish from the good land” (Deuteronomy 11:16–17). As the Israelites left the desert and entered Canaan, they entered a lavish agricultural territory unknown to them. When an unpredictable climate was encountered and their faith was tried, some may have asked their Canaanite neighbors something like, “What do you do to insure the fertility of the land?” This

seems to have led many Israelites into false worship, which culminated in their embracing Baalism and eventually led them into exile.

The rest of this paper demonstrates through selected examples how the Deuteronomic editors<sup>16</sup> (hereafter referred to as DTR) tried to resuscitate the covenant people by reminding them, through the Deuteronomic corpus of Joshua–2 Kings, that Yahweh<sup>17</sup> and not Baal controlled all aspects of water and storm, and thus life.<sup>18</sup>

## Water and Storm Polemics in Joshua–2 Kings

### Joshua 2:9–11

In Joshua 2, Joshua sends two spies to Jericho to observe conditions before the Israelites invade Canaan (Joshua 2:1). The spies enter the inn of the Canaanite harlot Rahab, who explains to them the condition of her people:

And she said unto the men, I know that the Lord has given you the land and that your terror has come upon us, for all the inhabitants of the land are melting because of you. For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you . . . And when we had heard these things, our hearts melted, and there did not arise again spirit in any man, because of you; for Yahweh is your God, he is God in heaven and earth beneath. (Joshua 2:9–11)<sup>19</sup>

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15. Two major works dealing with explicit polemics against Baalism are Norman C. Habel, *Yahweh versus Baal: A Conflict of Religious Cultures* (New York: Bookman Associates, 1964), and Frank E. Eakin Jr., “The Relationship between Yahwism and Baalism during the Pre-Exilic Period” (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1964).

16. A parallel example of editing divine writings can be readily observed through the inspired work of Mormon and Moroni in the Book of Mormon.

17. *Yahweh* or *Yahveh* is the Hebrew proper name of the God of the Old Testament, transliterated as “Jehovah” in the KJV.

18. The examples given here are not exhaustive but are limited to a brief discussion. For an exhaustive treatise, see my *Water and Storm Polemics*.

19. Translations of biblical passages throughout this paper are mine.

This text reflects the Canaanites' fear at the dawn of the Israelite conquest. On the surface, such theology implies that Yahweh is a divine warrior, yet beneath this explicit polemic lies implicit war language that warrants careful examination.

The inhabitants of the land of Canaan worshipped Baal-Hadad. In the Ugaritic literature we learn of Baal's dominion over Yam (Sea). Kothar-wa-Hasis, the craftsman god, has made for Baal two weapons (named Driver and Chaser), which probably symbolize thunder and lightning.<sup>20</sup> In this text Driver is told by Kothar-wa-Hasis:

Drive Sea from his throne, River from the seat of his dominion. You shall swoop in the hands of Baal, like an eagle in his fingers. Strike the head of Prince Sea, between the eyes of Judge River. Let Sea sink and fall to the earth. And the stick swoops in Baal's hands like an eagle in his fingers. It strikes the head of Prince [Sea], between the eyes of Judge River. Sea sinks, falls to the earth, his joints fail, his frame collapses. Baal pounces and drinks Sea, he destroys Judge River. (KTU 1.2.IV:19–27)<sup>21</sup>

This document from Canaanite literature conveys the idea that Baal rules the sea (personified

as Yam); by contrast, implicit in Joshua 2:9–11 is the message that Yahweh, not Baal-Hadad, has power over the sea and is the sole God of heaven and earth. The Canaanites apparently fear Yahweh, because when they hear the dreadful news of his parting the Red Sea, they realize that it is Yahweh who rules the sea and has power to rule them instead of their god Baal-Hadad.

The language of Joshua 2:9–11 typifies holy war language, suggested by the terror that falls on the Amorites (Canaanites)<sup>22</sup> when they hear of Yahweh's act.<sup>23</sup> The implicit water polemic is strengthened by the fact that this same terror falls on the Canaanites when they "heard that Yahweh had dried up the waters of the Jordan for the sake of the Israelites" (Joshua 5:1). Further, Yahweh rules not only Prince Sea (the seas of the earth), but also Judge River (the rivers of the earth).<sup>24</sup> In other words, Yahweh, not the Canaanite storm god Baal, controls all earthly waters.

### Joshua 10:10–11

The background of this narrative consists of the Israelites' engagement in battle with the Amorites at the valley of Ajalon:

20. For more information concerning Kothar-wa-Hasis, see Oldenburg, "Conflict between El and Ba'al," 95–100; Walter C. Kaiser Jr., "The Ugaritic Pantheon" (Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 1973), 122–25.

21. KTU is the abbreviation for M. Dietrich, O. Loretz, and J. Sanmartin, with H. W. Kisker, *Die keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit. Einschliesslich der keilalphabetischen Texte ausserhalb Ugarit. Teil 1 Transkription*, *Alter Orient und Altes Testament* 24 (Kevelaer and Neukirchen-Vluyn: Verlag Butzon & Bercker, 1976). For English translations of the Ugaritic texts, see J. C. L. Gibson, *Canaanite Myths and Legends* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1978), and J. C. de Moor, *An Anthology of Religious Texts from Ugarit* (Leiden: Brill, 1987). Translations of KTU throughout this paper are mine.

22. Amorites are considered one of the seven nations of people inhabiting the land of Canaan at the time of the conquest (Deuteronomy 7:1). Thus they are considered Canaanites by citizenship rather than by descent.

23. For an excellent treatise on the holy war language used in Joshua 2:9–11, see Dennis J. McCarthy, "Some Holy War Vocabulary in Joshua 2," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 33 (April 1971): 228–30.

24. Prince Sea and Judge River are used in a parallel structure to represent two different aspects of the Canaanite god Yam (Sea).



Yahweh confused them (Amorites) before Israel, and smote them with a great smiting at Gibeon, and pursued them towards the ascent of Beth-horon, and the Lord smote them until Azekah and Makkedah. And it came to pass in their fleeing before Israel they were descending at Beth-horon, Yahweh threw upon them great stones from heaven until Azekah, and they died; there were more who died from the (hail) stones than who died because of the sword of the Israelites. (Joshua 10:10–11)

In Ugaritic literature this same power is attributed to Baal:

The word of a tree  
 The whisper of a stone  
 murmur of heaven with earth  
 the deep with the stars  
 stones of lightning which heaven does not  
     know  
 a matter which people do not know  
 and the multitude of the earth do not  
     understand  
 I will execute, and I will reveal it in the  
     midst of my mountain, the godly  
     Zephon. (KTU 1.3.III:22–29)

In this Ugaritic mythological text, Baal is portrayed with divine ability to send stones from heaven; therefore, he is recognized as the Lord of the storm, with the inherent ability to send hailstones.<sup>25</sup>

Joshua 10:10–11 describes a terrible hailstorm, and the text apparently portrays Yahweh as a God who acts not as Baal in a mendacious

mythology, but rather as a divine warrior who acts in history.<sup>26</sup> Yahweh demonstrates his power through a storm that includes great hailstones—the very instruments that Baal is said to control—in the destruction of Baal’s followers. In this way, Yahweh asserts his claim that he is, as always, Lord of heaven and earth, superior to Baal.

### Judges 5

The Song of Deborah also contains storm polemics against Baalism. The text ultimately attributes to Yahweh the Israelite victory over the Canaanites:

They fought from heaven,  
 the stars in their courses fought against  
     Sisera.  
 The torrent Kishon swept them away,  
     that ancient torrent, the torrent Kishon.  
 (Judges 5:20–21)

Verse 20 points out that the stars fought against Sisera, an interesting comment when it is understood that in the Ugaritic myth, the stars are the source of rain (KTU 1.3.II:41). This implies that Yahweh sent a rainstorm that flooded the Kishon. Furthermore, in verse 21 the torrent Kishon is mentioned twice, which advances the idea that this is indeed a mighty storm.<sup>27</sup>

The prose account of this same victory indicates that Yahweh threw Sisera, his chariots, and all his army into a panic (Judges 4:15), suggesting that this is a divine conflict. Yairah Amit believes that “[t]hat type of war, which is uncharacterizable in human terms, is viewed as a sign of or convention for a divine war in which man’s share in the

25. For the complete argument as to why these stones should be viewed as hailstones rather than meteorites, see *Water and Storm Polemics*, 60–63.

26. Compare to Exodus 9:25–26. For a thorough discussion of Yahweh as a divine warrior, see Patrick D. Miller, *The Divine Warrior in Early Israel* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973).

27. Millard C. Lind, *Yahweh Is a Warrior: The Theology of Warfare in Ancient Israel* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1980), 70.

determination of the outcome is secondary.”<sup>28</sup> No doubt this story portrays a terrible storm that immobilized the Canaanite chariots, for the flooding water mired their wheels in the mud.<sup>29</sup> Josephus writes, “So the battle began; and when they were come to close fight, there came down from heaven a great storm with a vast quantity of rain and hail.”<sup>30</sup> Judges 4:15–16 also indicates that Baraq fought the Canaanites with the edge of the sword and pursued them. Perhaps Baraq symbolized Yahweh’s weapon of storm, since the Hebrew word *baraq* means “lightning” or “lightning flash.”<sup>31</sup> Just as Baraq pursued the Canaanites with the sword, so Yahweh figuratively pursued the Canaanite worshippers of Baal with his sword of lightning. In this way Baraq’s battle against the Canaanites epitomizes Yahweh’s divine war with the Canaanite storm god.

#### Judges 6:36–40

The background of this pericope consists of Gideon asking the Lord to give him a sign that He will be with him as he leads the Israelites in a battle against the Midianites:

And Gideon said to God, “If you really expect to deliver Israel by my hand, as you have said, Behold, I will set a fleece of wool on the threshing floor; and if dew falls only on the fleece and all the ground stays dry, I will know that you will deliver Israel through me, as you said you would.” And it was so; for he rose up early the next day and he squeezed the fleece and wrung out the dew out of the fleece, a bowlful of water.

Then Gideon said to God, “Do not be angry with me if I speak just once more. Please let me prove only this once with the fleece; let it now be dry only upon the fleece, and upon all the ground let there be dew.” And God did so that night; for it was dry upon the fleece only, and there was dew on all of the ground. (Judges 6:36–40)

In verse 36, Gideon is described as the person designated to deliver Israel from the Midianites and their Canaanite allies (Judges 6:14, 16, 33). The Hebrew Bible indicates that before the period of the Israelite settlement in Canaan, the Midianites had led Israel into Baalistic practices when Israel joined to Baal-Peor while dwelling at Shittim (Numbers 25:1–7). Verses 37–40 reveal that Gideon has specifically requested a sign of Yahweh’s ability to control the dews of heaven.

Gideon has just overthrown a hometown altar dedicated to Baal worship (Judges 6:25–32), and he wants to ensure that Yahweh will be with him and his people. The fact that the enemies he faces worship Baal makes the polemic even more clear. The best evidence for an implicit polemic, however, comes from an understanding that Baal supposedly controls the dew. A tablet excavated in 1961 describes Baal on the top of Mount Zephon encompassed by lightning, dew streaming from him.<sup>32</sup> One of the Ugaritic texts says,

Seven years shall Baal fail,  
Eight the rider of clouds  
There shall be no dew, no rain  
No surging of the deeps,

28. Yairah Amit, “Judges 4: Its Contents and Forms,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 39 (1987): 95.

29. H. H. Rowley, “Israel, History of (Israelites),” in *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, 2:754.

30. Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 5.5.4. See *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged*, trans. William Whiston (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel Publications, 1978), 115.

31. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1951), 140.

32. Andre Caquot and Maurice Sznycer, *Ugaritic Religion* (Leiden: Brill, 1980), 13.



Neither the goodness of Baal's voice.  
(KTU 1.19.I:42–46)

The issue is heightened by the fact that Gideon has overthrown the altar of Baal, who reportedly controls dew. And the fact that Gideon requests the miraculous sign of Yahweh's dominion over dew suggests an implicit moisture polemic against the storm/water god Baal.

### 1 Samuel 7:3–12

This narrative begins with a plea from Samuel for Israel to forsake Baalism and return to Yahweh:

And Samuel spoke to all the house of Israel saying, "If you intend to turn to Yahweh with all your heart, then you must put away the foreign gods and the Ashtaroth and prepare your hearts to the Lord and worship him alone, and he will deliver you out of the hands of the Philistines." Then the children of Israel removed the Baalim and the Ashtaroth<sup>33</sup> and worshipped only Yahweh. And Samuel said, "Gather all Israel to Mizpah, and I will pray in your behalf to the Lord." And they assembled at Mizpah, and they drew water and poured it out before Yahweh, and they fasted on that day and said there, "We have sinned against the Lord," and Samuel judged the children of Israel at Mizpah. And when the Philistines heard that the children of Israel had gathered to Mizpah, the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel. And when the children of Israel heard it, they feared the Philistines. And the children of Israel said to Samuel, "Don't be silent in crying to Yahweh

our God for us, that he will save us from the hands of the Philistines." And Samuel took a sucking lamb and sacrificed it as a whole burnt offering to Yahweh; and Samuel cried to the Lord for Israel, and Yahweh answered him. For as Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to fight against Israel, but Yahweh thundered with a great voice on that day upon the Philistines and discomfited them, and they were smitten before Israel. And the men of Israel went out of Mizpah and pursued the Philistines and smote them until they came under Beth-car. Then Samuel took a stone and erected it between Mizpah and Shen, and named it Eben-ezer, and said, "Until now, Yahweh has helped us." (1 Samuel 7:3–12)

In verses 3 and 4, Samuel teaches the Israelites that if they refrain from Baalism they will be delivered. In verse 6 we encounter what appears to be a ritualistic act of pouring water on the ground, a symbol of contrition of one's soul, as hearts are poured out like water before Yahweh (Lamentations 2:19). Although the suggestion of penitence may partially explain the practice, a polemic is also hinted by Philippe Reymond, who asks rhetorically, "Isn't the point of the recitation in the fact that the water is poured out before Yahweh and not before Baal?" Thus Israel would recognize Yahweh as the source of the rain and not Baal.<sup>34</sup>

An implicit polemic is also strengthened by the fact that the Philistines were also involved with Baalistic worship. In the Ugaritic texts, Baal

33. Here we find the plural usage for the Canaanite deities Baal and his consort Ashtaroth. This seems to reflect several manifestations of these same Canaanite fertility deities. See Freedman, *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, 114.

34. Philippe Reymond, *L'eau, sa vie, et signification dans l' Ancien Testament*, in *Supplements to Vetus Testamentum*, vol. 6, ed. G. W. Anderson et al. (Leiden: Brill, 1958), 215.

is related to Dagon, the chief Philistine deity; and he is called the son of Dagon eleven times.<sup>35</sup>

When the Philistines drew near to attack the Israelites, the Lord sent his divine weapons: “Yahweh thundered with a great voice that day upon the Philistines and discomfited them; and they were smitten before Israel” (1 Samuel 7:10). This passage recalls the Song of Hannah: “The enemies of Yahweh shall be broken to pieces; out of heaven will he thunder upon them” (1 Samuel 2:10). In KTU 1.4.V:8–9, the relationship between storm imagery and the voice of Baal is also attested: “And he gives his voice in the clouds, for the flashing of lightning bolts to the earth.” Such literature surely connotes that the lightning flashes are connected with Baal’s voice, just as the thunder is related to Yahweh’s utterance. The intent of general storm imagery is clear in both cases.

## 2 Samuel 22:10–18

Another pertinent text taken from the books of Samuel is 2 Samuel 22. Taken as a whole, this chapter is nearly identical to Psalm 18. The core of the storm imagery in the stratum of this chapter is found in verses 10–18:

He (Yahweh) bent the sky and descended,  
and a heavy cloud was beneath his feet.  
And he rode upon a cherub and flew;  
and he was seen upon the wings of the  
wind.  
And he made pavilions of darkness about  
him,  
a mass of water and clouds of the skies.  
In the brightness before him were burned  
coals of fire.  
Yahweh thundered from heaven,

and the Most High sent forth his voice.  
And he sent forth arrows and scattered  
them,  
lightning and discomfited them.  
And the channels of the sea were exposed  
and the foundations of the world were  
revealed,  
by the rebuke of Yahweh, at the blast of the  
breath of his nostrils.  
He reached down from above,  
he took me, he drew me out of the mighty  
waters.  
He delivered me from my strong enemy,  
and from those who hated me,  
for they were too bold for me.  
(2 Samuel 22:10–18)

In verses 10–12, Yahweh is portrayed as riding the clouds, an idea first attested in the DH in Deuteronomy 33:26. Parallel to this, we must consider the epithet of Baal, *rkb rpt* (Rider of the Clouds).<sup>36</sup> In verses 13–14 the storm imagery continues and is reminiscent of 1 Samuel 7:10, in which thunder and storm are associated with the voice of Yahweh.

In verse 15, the words “arrows” and “lightning” parallel each other. Yahweh’s weapon, depicted as lightning, is also portrayed as arrows. This lightning discomfited the enemy. The Hebrew verbal root *hmm* (translated “discomfited”) is evidenced here. This Deuteronomic word is a prime piece of evidence that the hand of DTR may have been here, as well as in other places in the Deuteronomic corpus where this word is prominent.<sup>37</sup> Such evidence suggests that DTR gathered this psalm into the Deuteronomic corpus because it illustrated precisely the emphasized concept.

Verses 16–17 provide the literary imagery that while Yahweh uses water and storm to

35. Oldenburg, *Conflict between El and Ba'al*, 46. For more information about Dagon, see 47–57.

36. Kaiser, “The Ugaritic Pantheon,” 268 n. 293, has an exhaustive list wherein this title is used.

37. See Deuteronomy 2:15, Judges 4:15, Joshua 10:10, 1 Samuel 7:10.

discomfit the enemies of Israel, at the same time he can deliver his covenant people from the “mighty waters” on the earth, which metaphorically are the enemy, as explained in verse 18. Thus, Yahweh’s ability to rebuke the mighty waters is most interesting when compared with Baal’s ability to rebuke Yam (Sea).

### 1 Kings 17–19

The book of Kings contains the climactic portion of the Deuteronomistic History. The accounts of Elijah and Elisha are particularly relevant to this study because they contain the most abundant collection of polemics against Baalism in the DH. I will now analyze the material in 1 Kings 17–19. This stratum of the book of Kings contains the most obvious climax of water and storm polemics against Baalism, not only in the book of Kings and the DH, but also within the entire Hebrew Bible.

The prelude in 1 Kings 16:29–33 sets the tone for this narrative: Ahab marries a Sidonian named Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal, a name meaning “with him is Baal, or man of Baal.”<sup>38</sup> As the book of Kings unfolds, it becomes readily apparent that Jezebel practiced her father’s religion and influenced her husband, who served Baal and reigned as the most wicked king in Israel’s history. Robert L. Cohn notes that “the deuteronomistic summary of Ahab’s reign in I Kings 16:29–33 serves as a prologue to the Elijah narrative because it identifies the issue with which Elijah must deal: Ahab’s patronage of Baal.”<sup>39</sup>

This polemical prologue is supported by the introductory verse of this narrative (1 Kings 17:1), in which Elijah swears, “As Yahweh lives, the God of Israel whom I serve, there will be no dew or rain these years, but according to my word.” Just so, the Ugaritic text of KTU 1.19.I: 42–46 manifests Baal’s supposed control of dew and rain, thus suggesting that Elijah is making an implicit water polemic against Baal.

Seven years shall Baal fail,  
Eight the rider of clouds  
There shall be no dew, no rain  
No surging of the deeps,  
Neither the goodness of Baal’s voice.

1 Kings 18:1 reveals that Elijah’s sealing power created a sore famine in Samaria, which the New Testament indicates lasted three and a half years.<sup>40</sup> This resulted in a showdown to determine who really controlled the water: Baal or Yahweh? Elijah requested that all Israel and all the prophets of Baal and his consort be gathered for the contest to be performed at Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18:19).

The showdown on Mount Carmel is interesting for several reasons. First, at the time of this confrontation, Mount Carmel was situated exactly on the border of Israel and Phoenicia. Jezebel, a zealous advocate of Baal, had patronized the spread of Baalism into Israel from her homeland in Phoenicia. Perhaps this location was selected because it was the most neutral position for an encounter between the god of each land. Second, the area of Carmel is used in the Hebrew Bible as an image of fertility.<sup>41</sup> In fact, the Hebrew word

38. Richard W. Cooney, “Ethbaal,” in *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, 2:153. In this same volume, under the title “Jezebel,” Dorothea Ward Harvey suggests that Jezebel is “probably the deliberate Hebrew distortion of a Phoenician name honoring Baal,” 905.

39. Robert L. Cohn, “The Literary Logic of I Kings 17–19,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 101/3 (1982): 334.

40. Luke 4:25.

41. Isaiah 35:2, 33:9; Jeremiah 50:19.

*karmel* actually means “garden land.”<sup>42</sup> Finally, an Assyrian inscription dated to 841 B.C. evidences that Mount Carmel was called Mount *Ba’li-ra’si* Baal of the headland.<sup>43</sup> The fact that the inscription dates to the ninth century B.C. suggests that Mount Carmel was referred to as Baal’s mountain or domain by the Canaanites during the time of the showdown.

When all Israel was gathered to this key location, Elijah inquired, “How long are you going to keep hopping between two branches? If Yahweh is God, follow him; and if Baal, follow him!” (1 Kings 18:20). The contest would determine which god would answer by sending fire to consume a sacrificial bull (1 Kings 18:23–24). The prophets of Baal tried in vain to get their god to respond, but to no avail (1 Kings 18:26–29). Elijah then had an abundance of water poured into the trench and upon the altar he had erected to Yahweh (1 Kings 18:33–35). Next, he called upon his God, and the fire of Yahweh fell and consumed the burnt sacrifice . . . and licked up the water that was in the trench (1 Kings 18:38). The people standing by cried, “Yahweh, he is the God” (1 Kings 18:39). Soon there also followed an abundance of rain (1 Kings 18:41–45). This suggests not only that the fire that devoured the altar was lightning, but also that this was a polemic par excellence against Baal-Hadad. For in the Ugaritic literature of KTU 1.4.V:6–9 we read,

The time for his rain Baal is appointing,  
the time for moisture;  
And he gives his voice in the clouds,  
for the flashing of lightning-bolts to the  
earth.

Although this was a dramatic display of power, it did not convert Jezebel, but rather hardened her heart to the point that she sought Elijah’s life (1 Kings 19:1–2). Elijah fled south and was instructed by the Lord to stand upon Mount Horeb, where Yahweh sent wind, an earthquake, and fire (lightning). But Yahweh was to be found only in the still small voice (1 Kings 19:11–12). Elijah was then reminded of “the voice of Yahweh which is beyond not within the elements of nature that Baal is believed to control.”<sup>44</sup>

### 2 Kings 2:8–15

Although Elijah was clearly aware of the omnipotence of Yahweh, Israel still needed to be continually reminded of his power, especially relating to water, which brought fertility and life. This is readily apparent in the transition of prophetic authority from Elijah to Elisha. In the pericope of 2 Kings 2:8–15, Yahweh affirms his choice of Elisha to succeed Elijah by parting the Jordan River. The text points out that Elijah smote the river with his mantle and that the waters were divided such that Elijah and Elisha passed through the Jordan on dry ground (2 Kings 2:8). Elijah was then taken up into heaven in a chariot (2 Kings 2:11).

Elisha retrieved the only material object Elijah had left: his mantle, the external symbol of the internal prophetic power with which he was imbued. Elisha struck the River Jordan with the mantle, and the river again divided. Yahweh had not only invested Elijah with divine power but also demonstrated that his successor Elisha

42. Brown et al., *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 502.

43. Yohanan Aharoni, *The Land of the Bible: A Historical Geography*, trans. and ed. A. F. Rainey, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1979), 341.

44. Cohn, “The Literary Logic of I Kings 17–19,” 349–50.

was also equipped with his authority to control nature and combat Baalism.

## Aftermath

Elisha continued to perform water miracles in order to remind Israel who it was that controls the waters of heaven and earth, and thus life. Such miracles included healing a spring of bitter waters at Jericho (2 Kings 2:19–22); providing a dry valley with an abundance of water from beneath the earth (2 Kings 3:17–20); causing an ax head to float on the Jordan River (2 Kings 6:1–7); and sealing the waters of heaven so that there was a severe famine in Samaria, lasting seven years (2 Kings 6:24–8:1). The seven-year period perhaps symbolized that the destruction of Israel was imminent.<sup>45</sup>

The concluding chapters of the book of Kings at the end of DH reveal that the water and storm polemics, which had reached their peak in the Elijah and Elisha narratives, thereafter subside. The fact that there are more water and storm polemics recorded in the Hebrew Bible during the time of Elijah and Elisha than at any other time is most interesting when we recognize that this occurred during the time when Ahab, and especially Jezebel, brought Baal-worship to its zenith in Israel. Furthermore, there seems to be a correlation between the fall of the house of Ahab and Jezebel (2 Kings 9–10) and the subsiding of the water and storm polemics. DTR then conveys the notion that the children of Israel have seen enough of Yahweh's superior power over Baal. In the culmination of

the DH (2 Kings 9–25), DTR sums up the historical events that led to the disastrous consequences that befell the Israelites in the Northern and Southern Kingdoms as a direct result of their apostasy to Baalism.

## Conclusion

The DTR selected historical stories to launch a literary attack against Baalism, which included the implicit polemical use of several aspects of water and storm. Select examples from each book of the Deuteronomic corpus reveal DTR's agenda: instructing Israel that Yahweh, not Baal, held the keys to a prosperous life in the land of Canaan. This agenda perhaps comes out most clearly at the time of Elijah and Elisha, when the water and storm polemics reached their peak just as Baal-worship reached its zenith in Israel. Israel was continually reminded of Yahweh's divine power and of his ability to provide and protect his covenant people on condition of their obedience to the stipulations of his divine laws.<sup>46</sup>

Jeremiah asked this rhetorical question when severe droughts occurred in the land of Judah (Jeremiah 14:1) and the Babylonian exile drew nigh: "Can any of the false gods of the nations give rain? Can the skies of themselves give showers? Only you are He, O Yahweh our God! Therefore we will wait for you, for you made these things" (Jeremiah 14:22). Instead of heeding the warnings of the prophets to follow the true source of water and power, the covenant people ignored their God and essentially drowned in Baalism.

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45. As noted previously, KTU 1.19.I:42 indicates, "Seven years shall Baal fail," which may also be viewed here as an implicit polemic against Baalism.

46. God's power over the waters is also a theme in the Book of Mormon; see 1 Nephi 17:50; 18:21; 2 Nephi 15:6; 27:2; Helaman 11:13, 17; 12:16; Ether 2:25; 9:35. Also, for examples of prosperity being contingent on obeying God's laws, see 1 Nephi 4:14; 2 Nephi 1:9, 20; Mosiah 2:22; Alma 36:1, 30; and many others. Jesus' power over the waters and storm also became evident in several New Testament episodes; see Matthew 8:23–27 and 14:22–33.