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Thesis Proposal
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(1) RATIONALE

Who is God?

This thesis will demonstrate that Yahweh established a physical/concrete dominance against Ba'al in the Mt. Carmel epic, as evidenced by the utilization of certain Ba'alistic features in the battle, in order both to defeat Ba'al (historical purpose) and to vindicate the later judgment of His covenant people (literary purpose).

The times of the kings of Israel and Judah were times of punctuated crises in the midst of a covenant history. One such crisis is that of the Ahabite parenthesis – a quarter of a century when the gods of Phoenicia had camped in the temples of the Northern Kingdom. This crisis, detailed in 1 Kings 17—2 Kings 1, was the fulcrum of Northern disobedience; whereas the sins of Jeroboam introduced the idea of blending Yahweh with Ba'al, the sins of Ahab, on a state level, fully replaced Yahweh with Ba'al. This replacement was the work of the missionary queen, Jezebel, who converted the populace by the sword.

Of course, the blending of religions had occurred in Israel for quite some time, even before the nation entered into the Promised Land (e.g., the Golden Calf of Aaron). After the initial conquest, and the failure to fully conquer, the individual tribes had bouts of slipping into Ba'alism, turning to God, and then slipping further. Although David was said to be wholeheartedly devoted to Yahweh worship (in spite of his personal selfishness), Solomon embraced other religions with open arms. After the great divorce, both kingdoms fell from God's grace with only the Southern Kingdom having periods of loyalty. Finally, in the Northern Kingdom, we come to Ahab and a sudden state-sponsored, pure Phoenician Ba'alism that would even

spread to the South.

It comes as no surprise, then, that Yahweh would attempt to establish His dominance against Ba'al's very reality in the Mt. Carmel epic. To establish this dominance, Yahweh worked within the already existing framework found within the local political sociological model (Canaanite theology) of heavenly battles in order to convince the Israelites who had become quite Canaanite in practice and theory. What we see in the Mt. Carmel epic is a battle that, although patterned after the battles of the gods, represents a historically concrete instance of what ancients understood as a larger cosmological conflict.

In all actuality, the Mt. Carmel epic can be said to be the last great miracle of the Northern Kingdom. Yahweh not only sent His prophet, but He splayed His power and grandeur before "all Israel," proving, concretely, His existence and superiority.

In this event, several questions are brought to the surface, namely: what is the material evidence that Israel became Ba'alistic in her religion; why would Yahweh fight a battle with Ba'al when Ba'al doesn't even exist; why would God give credence to Ba'al by placing Ba'alistic features into the battle sequence; why did the author of Kings spend so much time on the Elijah cycle when Israel just fell in the end; and how does this apply to the Church today?

Of course, that final question outweighs all other questions, and it is this question to which we must ultimately turn. Yahweh won the battle. Israel turned from God anyway.

As a Christian and a military veteran, I have experienced both the grace of God and the exhilaration of nationalism, but in recent times I have also seen how the two have become blurred in our society. It seems that in whatsoever state we find ourselves, the zeitgeist of our time, region, political affiliation, etc. will always try to blend itself into all other aspects of our lives. Just like the regional socio-political environment of Canaan slowly became blurred with

pure Yahwism to develop a kind of folk-religion, so the regional socio-political environment of the United States is blending with Christianity to develop a new kind of local folk-religion, one that has in recent years caused many Christians to pronounce eschatological judgment on the opposing political parties, to raise living Christian politicians to a messianic level, and even to push apartheid in certain Middle Eastern nations. If the Biblical syncretism brought judgment to God's chosen people, what will the modern syncretism bring?

(2) OUTLINE AND SUMMARY

Chapter 1 will introduce the topic, as well as review scholarship on the issue. Scholarship on the issue will be limited to that which pertains to the Mt. Carmel epic itself.

Chapter 2 will argue that mythical and subjective dueling is replaced by objective fact at Mt. Carmel. To better understand how a duel between deities won such dominance, it is important to look at how the Canaanites and other local peoples signified the position of chief deity. Throughout many extra-biblical texts, specifically those found at ancient Ugarit (Ras Shamra), this signification comes about by means of some sort of epic battle. Those battles identifying Ba'al's move from a young god to the position of chief deity among the Canaanites are of extreme importance; the most essential to our context is the battle between Ba'al and Mot (Death), for this battle seems to create a sort of backdrop to the Mt. Carmel epic. Ultimately, though, Yahweh establishes his dominance in a peculiarly different manner than other deities establish dominance, i.e. a battle visible to the human world below.

In Chapter 3, we will see that Yahweh dominates Ba'al by administering handicaps to Ba'al as evidenced through the manner and context of the sacrifice. The battle that raged before the eyes of both the Israelites and the prophets of Ba'al contained significant Ba'alistic features,

as evidenced by both extra-biblical texts and material iconography from the time. In fact, since Yahweh was the controlling agent behind the time and place of the epic battle, it can be said that Yahweh purposefully inserted these features into the battle in order to give Ba'al the upper hand in the conflict. Some such features include the place of the battle (Mt. Carmel was a place where Ba'al's power over the storm would have been the greatest), the sacrifice (iconographic evidence shows Ba'al riding on a bull), the fire (fire is connected with the lightning of the storm god), etc.

Chapter 4 describes that Yahweh's victory over Ba'alism at Carmel demands a superiority of pure Yahwism over a syncretism of Yahwism with the Canaanite culture. The reason for this battle leads us to understand the need for Yahweh to incorporate the aforementioned handicaps, and that reason begins with the syncretization of Yahweh with Ba'al. As a matter of fact, from the days of Jeroboam and the splitting of the kingdom, Yahweh began to be blurred with Ba'al, forming what can now be called a folk-religion. Material evidence throughout both the northern kingdom and even the southern kingdom helps us to understand what the biblical text asserts about this folk-religion, i.e., syncretism in the faith. It isn't until Ahab's reign, though, that this syncretism makes a logical leap into full Phoenician Ba'alism – under the tutelage of the Phoenician missionary/queen, Jezebel. Thus, when Yahweh administers Ba'alistic features into the Mt. Carmel epic for the purpose of giving Ba'al an apparent advantage over Himself, Yahweh is in fact proving that this is not just a normal heavenly battle between a strong and weak god, but that Yahweh is the only God – defeating both Phoenician Ba'alism and the folk-religion that had come to be.

Chapter 5, moving from a historical analysis to a literary analysis, will argue that the narrator of Kings utilizes the Mt. Carmel epic to vindicate Yahweh's judgment of His people in a covenant history leading toward the divine verdict. While all that has come before describes the

historical purpose for the Mt. Carmel epic, sadly this purpose never came to fruition. Although Yahweh once again has physically entered into the lives of His people, showing signs and wonders, His people never did fully leave Ba'alism. Thus, the narrator of Kings, in his description of the covenant history of His people leading toward a divine verdict, uses this epic to fulfill his greater purpose. As a matter of fact, from a literary standpoint, the entire Elijah cycle itself seems to be nothing more than an attempt to show that Yahweh intimately involved Himself in the northern crisis of Phoenician Ba'alism (the Ahabite parenthesis); Yahweh cared for His people, even when they were at the height of heresy. Nonetheless, judgment did come.

Chapter 6 will conclude that Yahweh establishes a physical/concrete dominance against Ba'al in the Mt. Carmel epic, as evidenced by the utilization of certain Ba'alistic features in the battle, in order to vindicate the judgment of His covenant people. Throughout all of this, we can say that Yahweh is justified in His actions with Israel, but there is more that can be said about our actions with Yahweh. As we, the Church, live in the divine reality that is the person of our God, how do we match what Yahweh has revealed to us about how the chosen people once acted? It is vitally important that we see and understand the impact of mixing true Yahwism with our local beliefs about the world (Americanism, capitalism, Zionism, etc.), no matter how applicatory those beliefs might be.

Outline in thesis statement form:

WILL THE REAL DEITY PLEASE STAND UP? YAHWEH AND BA'AL DUEL FOR PROMINENCE THROUGH THE MT. CARMEL EPIC

1. Introduction; Review of Scholarship on 1 Kings 17-19 and the Ba'al/Yahweh duel.
2. Mythical and subjective dueling is replaced by objective fact at Mt. Carmel.
 - a. Deities dueled in the ancient world in order to establish prominence of chief deity.
 - b. The Ba'al/Mot duel, as seen in Ugaritic texts, lies hidden in the backdrop of the Mt. Carmel epic.

- c. Yahweh establishes dominance not through a mythical battle but by delivering to those present the objective fact of His dominance in the Mt. Carmel epic.
- 3. Yahweh dominates Ba'al by administering handicaps to Ba'al as evidenced through the manner and context of the sacrifice.
 - a. Extra-biblical literature reveals textual idiosyncrasies that can be described as Ba'alistic features.
 - b. Archaeology recognizes certain Ba'alistic features in iconography.
 - c. Yahweh establishes dominance over Ba'al in the Mt. Carmel epic when He gives Ba'al the upper hand by programming the Ba'alistic features into the battle sequence.
- 4. Yahweh's victory over Ba'alism at Carmel demands a superiority of pure Yahwism over a syncretism of Yahwism with the Canaanite culture.
 - a. The populace of the Northern Kingdom of Israel blurred Yahwism with Ba'alism, as evidenced both in the text and the material culture, thus establishing a folk religion.
 - b. The Ahabite parenthesis moved the Northern Kingdom from folk religion to state-sponsored Ba'alism by means of Jezebel and her Phoenician connection.
 - c. By utilizing the Ba'alistic features in the battle, Yahweh established a concrete and visible polemic against Ba'alism and folk religion.
- 5. The narrator of Kings utilizes the Mt. Carmel epic to vindicate Yahweh's judgment of His people in a covenant history leading toward the divine verdict.
 - a. Kings describes the covenant history of Israel/Judah leading toward a divine verdict.
 - b. Elijah's ministry centers on the crisis of Phoenician Ba'alism in the Northern Kingdom during the Ahabite parenthesis.
 - c. The Mt. Carmel epic vindicates Yahweh's later judgment of His people.
- 6. Conclusion
 - a. Summary: Yahweh establishes a physical/concrete dominance against Ba'al in the Mt. Carmel epic, as evidenced by the utilization of certain Ba'alistic features in the battle, in order to vindicate the judgment of His covenant people.
 - b. Implications for the Church, focusing on the conservative holiness tradition: The conservative holiness church has traditionally stood strongly against what it believes to be the obvious syncretism of historic Christianity and the world at large (much like the battle between Yahweh and Phoenician Ba'alism), but this victory is not enough to keep the subtle blurring of historic Christianity with Americanism, capitalism, and Zionism (Christian folk religion) from continuing until this day.

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