

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF RELIGION

WHO MAKETH THE CLOUDS HIS CHARIOT: THE COMPARATIVE METHOD AND THE  
MYTHOPOETICAL MOTIF OF CLOUD-RIDING IN PSALM 104 AND THE EPIC OF BAAL

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הַפֶּר מִחֶשְׁבוֹת בְּאֵין סוֹד וּבְרַב יוֹעֲצִים תִּקּוּם

Prov 15:22

To my patient and sympathetic wife, who endured my frequent absences during this project and supported me along the way.

פִּיהָ פְּתוּחָה בְּחִכְמָה וְתוֹרַת־חֶסֶד עַל־לְשׁוֹנָהּ

Prov 31:26

To the King, the LORD of all the earth, whom I love and fear. When I am in trouble, he races through the deserts to deliver me.

שִׁירוֹ לְאֱלֹהִים זָמְרוּ שְׁמוֹ סֵלוֹ לְרֹכֵב בְּעֵרְבוֹת בְּיַהּ שְׁמוֹ וְעֵלְזוּ לְפָנָיו

Ps 68:4(Heb. 5)

## ABSTRACT

Alleging parallels between Scripture and other ancient Near Eastern texts has always been a matter of controversy. The controversy has resulted from criticism of the comparative method by those who accuse its users of being overly simplistic or reckless when applying their particular approaches to the texts. This recklessness has resulted in alleged connections that are now considered very loose, unjustified, and harmful to the context of Scripture.

In order to avoid the dreaded “parallelomania” that has resulted from hasty conclusions in comparative studies, it is necessary to approach alleged comparative units in a more concrete fashion, synthesizing the best of past approaches and cautiously utilizing those approaches when arriving at conclusions. The comparative element under discussion in this paper is that of divine cloud-riding, and the texts under consideration are Psalm 104:3 and the Ugaritic Epic of Baal. Both the Hebrew Bible and the Ugaritic texts describe Yahweh/Baal as a rider of the clouds. The mythopoetical motif of cloud-riding can be seen in many ancient Near Eastern texts where a storm god races through the heavens on his or her angelic cloud-chariot. This is true also of portions of the Hebrew Bible that describe Yahweh as one “who makes the clouds his chariot, who walks on the wings of the wind” (Ps 104:3). Since Ugarit is, in literature, Israel's most significant Canaanite neighbor, it becomes a matter of interest when Baal is called repeatedly “the Rider of the Clouds” in his respective texts. Is there a legitimate parallel between the Yahwistic motif of cloud-riding and the northern Canaanite expression “Rider of the Clouds”? If so, what is to be made of this parallel and what were the psalmist's intentions by including Baal-like language in his description of Yahweh?

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## INTRODUCTION

Ancient Hebrew poetry is the vehicle par excellence upon which ride the praises of Yahweh whose worshippers continually cry out:

בְּרַכֵּי נַפְשֵׁי אֶת־יְהוָה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי גִדְלַת מְאֹד הוֹד וְהָדָר לְבָשֶׁת  
עֲטֵה־אֹר כַּשְׁלֵמָה נוֹטָה שָׁמַיִם כִּירִיעָה הַמְקַרָּה בַּמַּיִם עַל־יוֹתָיו הַשָּׁם־עֲבִים רְכוּבוֹ  
הַמְהַלֵּךְ עַל־כַּנְפֵי־רוּחַ<sup>1</sup>

Psalm 104 is about the glory of Yahweh—his kingship, creativity and compassion for the living are all on display in a hymn that describes the attributes and works of the One “who maketh the clouds his chariot, who walketh on the wings of the wind” (v.3).<sup>2</sup>

In the present study the motif of cloud-riding in Psalm 104:3 is compared and contrasted with a similar motif in the Ugaritic literature. There the Canaanite storm-god, Baal, is repeatedly called “the Rider of the Clouds.” To do a comparative study of this nature, a preliminary analysis of the comparative method and its usefulness for a study of Psalm 104 will be carried out. The goal of this paper is, primarily, to determine whether a legitimate parallel exists between the two texts and what the implications of that connection may be. At the outset, the hypothesis is made that the presence of this motif in Psalm 104:3 is intended by the psalmist to be polemical in nature. The Canaanite god Baal and the Hebrew God Yahweh are both known to be storm deities, but only one of

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<sup>1</sup>"Bless Yahweh, my soul! Yahweh, my God, you are very great! You are clothed with glory and majesty, wrapping yourself in light like you would a garment and spreading out heaven like a tent. Having laid the beams of his upper chambers on the waters, he makes the clouds his chariot and walks on the wings of the wind!" (author's paraphrase).

<sup>2</sup> Here the King James Version is quoted. Unless otherwise indicated, all Bible references and quotations in this paper are to/from the New American Standard Bible.

the two deities claims supreme authority over the other and, in the end, stands alone as King of the Universe.

### PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS FOR COMPARATIVE STUDIES

Looking back on the twentieth century and even at the last ten years, one cannot help but observe the war-trodden wastelands that remain in the wake of the promotion, destruction, and reconstruction of the comparative method. So much has been written on this issue that after reading only a fraction of the material it is a surprising revelation to learn that there are still trees standing in Lebanon. There have been many promoters of this method, but just as many critics. Critics complain that the comparative method is fraught with points of vulnerability or ambiguity, and often results in the ironic promotion of its applicants' hypotheses.<sup>3</sup> The difficulty with comparing one ancient Near Eastern (ANE) text to another for the purpose of ascertaining parallels resides in the utter confusion over which steps are necessary for legitimizing such parallels.

Several scholars have made earnest attempts to concretize an approach that could serve as a universal application of the comparative method to ANE texts, but little agreement has followed the proposed solutions. *The Golden Bough*, the classic book by Sir James George Frazer, was a groundbreaking work in comparative studies that encouraged many students of the method to view texts and cultures from a universal, anthropological viewpoint.<sup>4</sup> Frazer suggests that an "essential similarity" exists between all human beings and that a definite "pattern" underlined all ANE religions; however,

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<sup>3</sup> William W. Hallo, "Biblical History in its Near Eastern Setting: The Contextual Approach," in *Scripture in Context*, eds. Carl D. Evans, William D. Hallo and John B. White (Pittsburgh, PA: The Pickwick Press, 1980), 10.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Frazer, James George. *The Golden Bough: The Roots of Religion and Folklore*. New York: Avenel Books, 1981.

Frankfort sees Frazer's generalizations as hasty, dangerous and inaccurate.<sup>5</sup> Frankfort explains that a "pattern" should not be used as a "rigid scheme" wherein we anticipate finding "certain elements which are expected to occur and which are, consequently, postulated even when they have left no trace in our evidence."<sup>6</sup> In other words, when scholars expect to see elements<sup>7</sup> in one myth because of the "pattern" of other myths, they sometimes impose those elements onto the myth even when there is no justifiable reason for it. Rather than assume the existence of "essential similarities" between ANE religions, Frankfort writes, we should take common themes and examine them in their individual Egyptian and Mesopotamian (as an example) occurrences.<sup>8</sup> It is simple to see that Frazer's notions about human commonality in religion are intrinsically tied to his preoccupation with a socio-evolutionary viewpoint, one promoted by Freud who also saw the ultimate "essential similarity" between human beings as an appetite for food and fertility.<sup>9</sup> Frankfort would argue that the latter two men have oversimplified the similarities between human beings in their conclusions,<sup>10</sup> but he humbly notes that "a careful and critical use of psychoanalytical discoveries may well reveal 'essential

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<sup>5</sup> Henri Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1948), 5, 7.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 7-8. Frankfort gives reasons for why a "common pattern" does not underlie ANE religions (9-10).

<sup>7</sup> The term "elements" is used in this paper to describe the individual comparative units present in the text. In Psalm 104, such elements include "palace building", "cloud-riding", "battling with the sea" and others.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 10. Frankfort provides an example with the New Year Festival, a celebration of a society's creation story. Egyptian and Babylonian creation myths are compared here (10-11). He concludes that the similarities and contrasts between the Egyptian and Mesopotamian myths are of equal greatness (17).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 19. The "return to the mother" in sexual dreams and myths caught Freud and Jung's eyes as well, notes Frankfort (20).

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

similarities' in the imagery of various religions on a level altogether different from those we have envisioned."<sup>11</sup> This statement is given in a tone of caution, since Frankfort's approach is more in line with Sandmel, who aptly notes that in comparative studies "it is in the detailed study rather than in the abstract statement that there can emerge persuasive bases for judgment."<sup>12</sup> Abstract statements about the nature of man cannot be the sole basis upon which parallels are claimed to exist between cultures that are separated by timing, space, language and other factors.

Despite the warnings of Frankfort, Sandmel and others, parallelomania<sup>13</sup> has run rampant in publications where authors analyze texts from a comparative standpoint. Despite the difficulties of approaching comparisons through the lens of "essential similarities," Frazer has nonetheless contributed significantly to comparative studies. Though his methods are heavily criticized by later scholars, it is Frazer who is responsible for teaching many students that an isolationist approach to religious studies "reduces one's chances of understanding it," which is why comparative studies is a legitimate enterprise with rewarding results.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, critics of the method have been inaccurately classified as those who desire to destroy or ignore parallels at all costs. Sandmel notes, however, that "the intention is not to repudiate the comparative approach, but to define it, refine it and broaden it, notably by wedding it to the 'contrastive

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>12</sup> Samuel Sandmel, "Parallelomania," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 18, no. 1 (Mr 1962): 2.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 1. Sandmel defines parallelomania as "that extravagance among scholars which first overdoes the supposed similarity in passages and then proceeds to describe source and derivation as if implying literary connection flowing in an inevitable or predetermined direction."

<sup>14</sup> Frankfort, 3.

approach.”<sup>15</sup> He goes on to say that “comparison and contrast are alike legitimate tools in providing the essential context of biblical historiography; they are twin components in a contextual approach to biblical narratives.”<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, Talmon states that “Scholars[...]seldom ponder basic questions such as whether the comparative method intrinsically operates under the ‘assumption of uniformity,’ as one school opines, or whether the aim should be ‘a comparison of contrasts rather than a comparison of similarities,’ as another school would have it.”<sup>17</sup> When approaching a text containing alleged parallels, the scholar needs to have a healthy and objective method which highlights and discusses contrasts as well as comparisons.

However, just because a parallel is alleged does not make an academic pursuit of that allegation worthwhile. There are several important questions that must be asked about the proximity of the given texts geographically, chronologically, and linguistically. One must ask whether it is reasonable to suggest that a parallel is even possible in any given instance. Talmon notes this problem and concludes that,

There can be no quarrel with the comparative method as long as it is employed within the bounds of reason and does not divorce the issue under discussion from its proper context in the culture compared. However, sometimes researchers seem to let their penchant for resemblances and parallels run wild, relentlessly searching the great expanse of the ancient Near Eastern literature for every possible similarity or likeness with presumed biblical counterparts, often closing an eye to factors which differentiate one cultural system from another.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Sandmel, 2.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>17</sup> Shemaryahu Talmon, *Literary Studies in the Hebrew Bible: Form and Content, Collected Studies* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1993), 12.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

The aim of this paper is to examine alleged parallels while keeping in mind the precautions presented above. The following section explains how the work of careful scholars has produced several methodologies that surpass those of past generations.

#### **METHODS FOR DETERMINING PARALLELS**

Many years ago Shemaryahu Talmon produced what Averbeck identifies as a “classic essay” on applying the comparative method.<sup>19</sup> It is of critical importance to establish a “set of rules” that can be used by biblical scholars when making comparisons between literatures. Such a “set of rules” is stated by Talmon to be beyond the scope of his paper, but his insights have been used by scholars as general guidelines when considering comparative possibilities.<sup>20</sup> In comparative studies the student is often faced with any number of elements in a given text that resemble elements known to be in other, similar, texts. Talmon notes that the difficulty is determining “which two of an available selection of compared features culled from different cultural settings are most likely to represent a common basic phenomenon.”<sup>21</sup> M. J. Herskovits and others have said that this can be done by analyzing the cultures that exist in the same “historical stream.”<sup>22</sup> This term can be defined roughly as “aspects of historical and geographical proximity as well as those of cultural affinity” that are shared between people groups.<sup>23</sup> Malul also

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<sup>19</sup> Richard E. Averbeck, “Sumer, the Bible, and Comparative Method: Historiography and Temple Building,” in *Mesopotamia and the Bible: Comparative Explorations*, eds. Mark W. Chavalas and K. Lawson Younger, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 88.

<sup>20</sup> Talmon, 48.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Shemaryahu Talmon, “The ‘Comparative Method’ in Biblical Interpretation—Principles and Problems,” in *Essential Papers on Israel and the Ancient Near East*, ed. Frederick E. Greenspahn (New York: New York University Press, 1991), 386.

picks up on this theme since he defines the method as a drawing of comparisons between societies that are within the same "historic stream"—this he calls the "historical comparison approach."<sup>24</sup> Along similar lines Talmon notes, "The closer the affinity of one language to another, in structure and other basic features which point to a common historic origin, the wider the scope for the comparison of their respective vocabularies."<sup>25</sup>

This approach is to be contrasted with the "typological approach," which consists of comparisons between unconnected cultures that speak to underlying human traits. The "typological approach asks whether there is some underlying unity to mankind—a question posed by Frazer.<sup>26</sup> The present debate is between the historicists—those who see an underlying historical connection— and the typologists—those who "explain the similarity as deriving from the unity of the human mind, which is believed to be the real cause for the existence of similar or identical phenomena in various human societies."<sup>27</sup>

When it comes to the application of the method itself, Talmon points out two major schools of thought: the atomistic or isolationist approach versus the comprehensive, holistic, or total phenomena approach—the latter associates comparative units with "more comprehensive organic structures."<sup>28</sup> For example, if the overall "organic structure" in which a given element occurs is "kingship," that element should not be stripped from the structure of kingship in order to be equated with an element from

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<sup>24</sup> Meir Malul, *The Comparative Method in Ancient Near Eastern and Biblical Legal Studies*, *Alter Orient und Altes Testament* 227 (Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker, 1990), 13.

<sup>25</sup> Talmon, *Literary Studies*, 19.

<sup>26</sup> Malul, 14. Note above on Frazer.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>28</sup> Talmon, *Literary Studies*, 18-19.

another text that appears in a contrasting structure. The holistic approach is preferred to the atomistic since, in it, individual elements are not stripped from their larger literary and cultural contexts.<sup>29</sup> As Sandmel writes, “Two passages may sound the same in splendid isolation from their context, but when seen in context reflect difference rather than similarity.”<sup>30</sup> A related issue is how similar elements between cultures should be kept “under the control of their shared comparable function within their distinctive cultures.”<sup>31</sup> In other words, the individual elements to be compared should be viewed in consideration of their individual functions. Wayne Pitard notes that “one can argue for parallels only when there is a clear evidence of a belief or practice in both cultures.”<sup>32</sup> If a given element functions in a specific manner in one text, the element to which it is compared should function the same way. If the functions equate, there is a greater chance a legitimate parallel may be present. To do this the student must engage in what Liverani called a “comprehensive reading” of an individual text as a “first step to in the comparative study of literary compositions.”<sup>33</sup> All texts under consideration must be read and understood as separate literary units before cross-comparison can add value to the discussion.

Talmon’s “classic essay” outlined basic guidelines to consider when approaching an alleged parallel. His four major principles were: “proximity in time and place, the

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>30</sup> Sandmel, 2.

<sup>31</sup> Averbeck, 114.

<sup>32</sup> Wayne T. Pitard, “Voices from the Dust,” in *Mesopotamia and the Bible: Comparative Explorations*, eds. Mark W. Chavalas and K. Lawson Younger, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 255.

<sup>33</sup> Averbeck, 115.

priority of inner biblical parallels, correspondence of social function, and the holistic approach to texts and comparisons.”<sup>34</sup> P.C. Craigie offers similar guidelines by requiring that linguistic relationships, chronological factors, geographical factors, and the relationship of literary genres be taken into consideration.<sup>35</sup> Talmon’s last principle envelopes the “linguistic relationships” and “literary genres” principles offered by Craigie. Therefore, since Talmon’s method is more comprehensive and Craigie’s does not contain any element missing in Talmon’s, the latter’s approach is preferred here.

To add to this, Malul points out several trends that occur in the application of the comparative method: the claim that a historical connection is present between texts,<sup>36</sup> the tendency to use one text to illuminate another,<sup>37</sup> the use of external sources to prove the veracity of the biblical text,<sup>38</sup> and the highlighting of the Bible’s uniqueness as contrasted with other ANE texts.<sup>39</sup> Another is the inventorial approach—this method simply lists possible parallels between cultures (within or without the historic stream) with no commentary on what the alleged parallels mean or if they are even legitimate.<sup>40</sup> For this reason, the inventorial approach is unhelpful and potentially dangerous.<sup>41</sup> The “polemic seeking approach” is one wherein a contrast is highlighted and the claim made that the

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>35</sup> Peter C. Craigie, “The Poetry of Ugarit and Israel,” *Tyndale Bulliten* 22 (Jan 1971): 5-9.

<sup>36</sup> Malul, 22.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 27

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 32. It is dangerous because it is reckless—listing possible parallels with no explanation can trend toward parallelomania since supposed similarities will be recognized but not developed.

contrast represents a deliberate attempt on the part of the borrowing culture to adapt the borrowed material into “its own ideological scheme, thereby taking a polemical stance with respect to that of the source culture.”<sup>42</sup> Malul states that the contextual approach is the preferred one—“this approach is based on the pre-assumption of an historical connection between the Old Testament and the ancient Near East.”<sup>43</sup> It is also based on the existence of linguistic, chronological, and cultural points of strong comparison between two civilizations—not all of which might be said to fall under the umbrella of an historical connection. However, the importance of the contextual approach is not meant to downplay the importance of some of the other approaches listed above.

This following section will provide the specific method to be employed in application to the text at hand—Psalm 104.

#### **THE APPLICATION OF THE COMPARATIVE METHOD TO PSALM 104**

It is of critical importance that before one attempt to show parallels between Psalm 104 and the Epic of Baal, it must first be determined that such an attempt would be a meaningful endeavor. The following paragraphs demonstrate that there is a legitimate basis for comparative study between the two texts. Several of the methods and philosophies discussed above are here sifted through to determine which is the best approach to Psalm 104. The historical, holistic, contextual, illuminative, and polemical approaches have been chosen from the above-given categories. The historical approach will be fully addressed here, but the holistic, contextual, illuminative, and polemical approaches will only be mentioned here in order to show how they will be implemented throughout the paper.

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 29.

To start, it is the historical, rather than the typological, approach that will be employed here. The historical approach views comparisons in light of connectedness between cultures of familiar ilk. However, as stated above, the typological approach gleans similarities from unconnected cultures that speak to underlying human traits. Here the term “historic stream” becomes relevant to the Psalms, for past attempts to make cross-cultural connections have ignored the Semitic cultural setting of the Hebrew Bible. To place this term in the present context, note Talmon’s comments on the centuries immediately preceding Israel’s entrance into the land:

A synoptic view of the ever-increasing information brought to light from the archives of Ugarit, Nuzi, Mari, and the Hittite lands made it exceedingly clear that in the two millennia before the common era the peoples of the Ancient Near East indeed lived within a ‘historic stream’ created and fed by the geographic-historical continuity which made possible a steady transfer and mutual emulation of civilization and cultural achievements.<sup>44</sup>

In the past, scholars have compared Psalm 104 to the chronologically and culturally distant Greek hymns. This was in part due to the lack of information available regarding the ANE and in part because a refined method had not yet been developed. Many still compare Psalm 104 to the Egyptian Hymn of Akhenaten.<sup>45</sup> While it is apparent that Egyptian literature and culture has had a profound impact on biblical literature, a more realistic and even more profound impact is seen in the Canaanite influence on the Bible. Craigie notes regarding the Hymn of Akhenaten that “a more significant parallel [may be observed] between Psalm 104 and the Ugaritic resources” in

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<sup>44</sup> Talmon, *Literary Studies*, 17. For connections made between the Hellenistic and Semitic worlds, cf. Cyrus Herzl Gordon, “Hellenes and Hebrews,” *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 12 no. 2 (1967): 134-140. Also cf. Michael C. Astour, “Ugarit and the Aegean,” in *Orient and Occident*, 17-27. *Alter Orient und Alter Testament* 22, Kevelaer: Verl Butzon & Bercker, 1973.

<sup>45</sup> Paul E. Dion, “YHWH as Storm-God and Sun-God: The Double Legacy of Egypt and Canaan as Reflected in Psalm 104,” *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 103, no. 1 (1991): 43-71.

the “Baal myth.”<sup>46</sup>

Since one of the goals of this paper is to show historical connections between the Ugaritic texts and Psalm 104, it is important to ask whether Ugarit is properly “Canaanite,” since the historical stream into which the Hebrew Bible fits is certainly Canaanite. Pitard points out that while Ras Shamra is not within the political borders of Canaan, culturally they could still be considered Canaanite. He suggests that in order to associate Ugarit with Canaan “one must examine the other sources of information about Canaanite religion and determine whether there is substantial continuity between it and the Ugaritic texts.”<sup>47</sup> Pitard argues that the necessary continuity is present, and one need only examine the overt influence of the Ugaritic myths onto the Hebrew Scriptures to see this (i.e. 1 Kgs 18).<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, the presence of countless cult figurines from the divided monarchy has convinced several scholars that the religions of Ugarit and Canaan were intricately related and were assimilated into Hebrew culture.<sup>49</sup> The connections

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>47</sup> Pitard, 253. Pitard goes on, “Most of the gods that were important at Ugarit are also known to have played a major role in the religion of southern Canaan as well, even though the exact status of some of the deities may have varied in the different regions,” which is why Pitard does not see a great distinction between Ugarit and Canaan (254).

<sup>48</sup> The following articles demonstrate how the author of 1 Kings understood the Baal myth and its claims, showing that more than just a cursory knowledge of Baal was present in Hebrew society: John A. Beck, “Geography as Irony: The Narrative-Geographical Shaping of Elijah's Duel with the Prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18),” *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 17, no. 2 (2003): 291-302; Gary Yates, “The Motif of Life and Death in the Elijah-Elisha Narratives and its Theological Significance in 1 Kings 17-2 Kings 13,” A paper delivered at ETS in Providence, RI, 2008; Robert B. Chisholm, “The Polemic Against Baalism in Israel's Early History and Literature,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 150 (Jul-Sep 1994): 267-83. F C. Fensham, “A Few Observations on the Polarization between Yahweh and Baal in 1 Kings 17-19,” *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 92, no. 2 (Jan 1980): 227-236.

<sup>49</sup> Ryan Byrne, “Lie Back and Think of Judah: The Reproductive Politics of Pillar Figurines,” *Near Eastern Archaeology* 67, no. 3 (Sep 2004): 139. Byrne notes, “Approximately ninety-six percent of the provenanced pillar figurines (822 of the 854 total specimens), have surfaced within the geographic parameters traditionally ascribed to Judah during the eighth to seventh centuries BCE.” These figurines are overwhelming female representations synonymous with what scholars have identified as votive objects related to the Asherah cult. There is debate, however, on whether Asherah was worshipped personally or if

between Israelite and Ugaritic religion should be acknowledged without being overstated—one can recognize the distinctness of Israelite religion while acknowledging “the substantial debt it owed to the cultural background out of which it developed.”<sup>50</sup> In contrast to the linking of Ugarit with Israel, Smith comments that “the striking thing about the religion of the Ugaritica is its almost total lack of any direct relationship to that of the OT.”<sup>51</sup> Smith is convinced that the shared jargon between the Old Testament and Ugarit is just common Semitic language and does not imply a special relationship.<sup>52</sup> While many would not agree with such a strong separation between Ugaritic literature and the Hebrew Bible, Smith’s sentiment regarding the explosion of publications on such parallels is soberingly true: “had there been much that was really near, less would have been made of what was really remote.”<sup>53</sup> Still, Smith's extreme doctrine of separation needs to be read with caution.

It is important to mention Mitchell Dahood as possibly being a reason for the

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“the asherah” referred to a pillar or tree that was somehow representative of Yahweh. Cf. Shmuel Ahituv, “Did God Really Have a Wife?” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 32, no. 5 (Sep-Oct 2006): 62-66. Also, cf. André Lemaire, “Who or What was Yahweh’s Asherah?” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 10, no. 6 (Nov-Dec 1984) 42-51.

<sup>50</sup> Pitard, 255. This is not to say that Israelite religion was an evolutionary product of Canaan, but that Canaanite and other ANE religious constructs were employed in the worship of Yahweh—constructs Yahweh himself approved of. For example, the offering of sacrifices did not begin with Israel, but was a universal religious practice that Israel tailored and adapted in accordance with the revelation Moses received from Yahweh.

<sup>51</sup> Morton Smith, “The Common Theology of the Ancient Near East,” in *Essential Papers on Israel and the Ancient Near East* ed. Frederick E. Greenspahn (New York: New York University Press, 1991), 49. He goes on to say that “a few traces of Ugaritic mythology are found in OT poetry—but the striking fact is the rarity of such references, and when they do occur they are pieces of poetic imagery, probably of no religious significance” (50). Again, Smith's comments are extreme—while these “pieces of poetic imagery” may have no practical religious significance (in terms of Temple worship), they indeed had religious significance for the Israelites' concept of who God was. Otherwise, they would not have been written down by the psalmist in the first place.

<sup>52</sup> Smith, 50.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

extreme nature of Smith's statements (as a reaction to Dahood). Dahood is known for his impressive and extensive work in the Psalms and Ugaritic. His groundbreaking work has benefitted biblical studies in positive and negative ways.<sup>54</sup> What is meant by a "negative benefit" is that his methods have taught scholars what not to do in comparative studies. Dahood's contributions to the Psalms are lasting valuable and controversial since no one to that point had explicated the meaning of the Psalms so extensively, yet in a way that tended toward overcompensation by means of imposing Ugaritic upon the Bible where it may not have been appropriate.<sup>55</sup> Dahood's methods have raised flags in the minds of those engaged in comparative studies, but he

[...]has made an important contribution by forcing those who have followed him to pay attention to the nature of Hebrew poetry, to think before resorting to emendation of the consonantal text, to be aware of the incompleteness of our understanding of Hebrew grammar, and, in the realm of ideas (such as the question of whether there was a belief in a worthwhile afterlife), to be wary of accepting uncritically a received consensus.<sup>56</sup>

In light of Malul's notes on the various approaches to the comparative method, this paper proposes that an historical connection exists between the texts (Ps 104 and Epic of Baal), thus, the Epic of Baal will be used to illuminate Psalm 104. I will not be using external sources to prove the veracity of the Bible and I will only point out the uniqueness of the Bible insofar as it highlights the contrasts between Psalm 104 and the Epic of Baal. I will not however, be highlighting the uniqueness of the Bible in order to, as Malul says, try to prove that the Bible has no connection with other ANE cultures, a

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<sup>54</sup> Loren R. Fisher, *The Claremont Ras Shamra Tablets*. Analecta Orientalia. Roma: Pontificum Institutum Biblicum, 1971. Dahood's contribution to this work helped earn his reputation as a groundbreaking scholar.

<sup>55</sup> A. H. W. Curtis, "The Subjugation of the Waters Motif in the Psalms: Imagery or Polemic?" *Journal of Semitic Studies* 23 no. 2 (1978): 3.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

trait he broadly accuses fundamentalists of possessing—a trait that could today, also be attributed to minimalists.<sup>57</sup>

The fact that the historical approach will be primarily employed here is not an admission that the typological approach is useless. In fact, the typological approach can provide valuable insights into the psychological constitution of man and can identify which elements of his constitution create a repetitive cross-cultural phenomenon. The difficulty with this method and the reason it will not be employed here is inherent in its ambiguous nature. How should one go about effectively determining what is or is not part of the “essential similarity” between all human beings? This is the reason why many have reacted negatively to Frazer’s and Freud’s methods, and it is why the two men’s musings will not be drawn upon heavily in this paper. In the spirit of the above discussion concerning an “historic stream,” and as a way of including the typological method, it may be appropriate to fuse the two approaches and ask “What essential similarities exist between neighboring cultures whose language, customs, and chronology are all closely related?” Asking questions about general similarities in the context of an historic stream is what Talmon’s “holistic approach” is about. Having seen that the Ras Shamra tablets and the Hebrew Bible exist within the same “historic stream,” we move on to the holistic approach.

The holistic approach is, as stated above, a way of viewing a given text in light of overarching themes in ANE literature. For example, texts and their comparative elements are viewed in light of themes such as *chaoskampf*, kingship, adoption, fertility, and other related, yet unique structures. The atomistic approach ignores the broader relationship

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<sup>57</sup> Malul, 28. Following the dash is mine.

between comparative elements and isolates figures or images in order to promote the idea of direct borrowing or some other conclusion. The holistic approach is far more sober in that it recognizes the presence of shared cultural meanings between texts but does not attribute those meanings to any “essential similarity” like the typological approach. The primary points of comparison between Psalm 104 and the Epic of Baal are the connected themes of kingship, divine warrior, and fertility (Yahweh as creator-sustainer). The particular point of comparison under consideration in this paper is the motif of the cloud-riding god. This motif fits under the category of divine warrior, but is also connected to the theme of kingship and even more loosely to the theme of fertility.<sup>58</sup>

The themes of kingship, divine warrior, and fertility are all connected by the thread of *chaoskampf*, which is German (*chaos* = chaos, *kampf* = struggle) for struggle with chaos.<sup>59</sup> Typically this motif involves a warrior god in a cosmological context who battles with the forces of chaos and overcomes them to establish order on earth, before or after which he sets up his palace as king.<sup>60</sup> Often, these chaotic forces are represented by water or the sea, as in the epic of Baal. For example, in this myth Yam the Sea is jealous of Baal’s new palace—so much so that he responds by waging war against Baal, who defeats Yam after a powerful rebuke, following which he (Baal) establishes order and

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<sup>58</sup> It has been suggested that Baal's activity of riding on the clouds is accompanied with the simultaneous giving of rain, but this is not readily apparent in the Ugaritic texts.

<sup>59</sup> For a recent analysis of *chaoskampf* in the Old Testament, cf. David Tsumura, *Creation and Destruction: A Reappraisal of the Chaoskampf Theory in the Old Testament*. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005. Tsumura denies that there is any *chaoskampf* connection to Ps 104 (p. 143), but again this work is recent and it does not agree with the majority of prior scholarship on the subject. Psalm 104:6-9 may be historically connected to the Noahic flood narrative (according to Tsumura), but the mythological and cosmological context of the psalm demand a reconsideration as to whether or not *chaoskampf* can be seen in it. The traditional view is that *chaoskampf* is seen in Psalm 104, and this view is maintained here.

<sup>60</sup> Dion, 43-71.

kingship.<sup>61</sup>

Psalm 104 has been identified by scholars as existing in the same *chaoskampf* tradition as the Epic of Baal. This very motif seems to show up throughout the Old Testament as Yahweh calls back or rebukes the elements of chaos to establish his kingdom of order.<sup>62</sup> He, like the gods of the ANE, battles with the primordial waters of chaos, defeats them, and establishes stability on the land so that the power of water will be put to fertilizing use rather than destructive use.<sup>63</sup> Regularly, *chaoskampf* is connected to the creation of the world (cosmogony) which is interesting in light of Psalm 104's alleged connection to the creation days of Genesis and the Noahic Flood. Here, Yahweh rebukes the waters and they flee from his voice, returning never again to cover the earth (vv. 4-9).<sup>64</sup> Broyles comments that "in the psalms of Yahweh's kingship and a number of other psalms, there are three recurring motifs: Yahweh proves himself superior to the seas and establishes the world...he is acclaimed as king...and reference is made to his temple or palace."<sup>65</sup> So it would seem, therefore, that this psalm has within it the ANE concept of *chaoskampf*, which will be an important thing to keep in mind in order to approach

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<sup>61</sup> Victor Matthews and Don C. Benjamin, *Old Testament Parallels: Laws and Stories from the Ancient Near East* (New York: Paulist Press, 2006), 263-274. Note that chaos myths do not always contain just one mythic struggle.

<sup>62</sup> Exodus 14; Joshua 3; 2 Samuel 22; Psalm 18; 29; 46; 66; 74; 77; 104; Isaiah 27:1; 50:2; 51:9; Jeremiah 47:2; 51:16; Amos 9:6, etc. Yahweh does not establish his palace or temple each time the *chaoskampf* theme appears in the Old Testament.

<sup>63</sup> Leslie C. Allen, *Psalms 101-150*. Word Biblical Commentary 21 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2002), 46.

<sup>64</sup> Recognizing this passage as referring to the Noahic flood does not exclude it from the canon of *chaoskampf*. In fact, it might be suggested that the concept of *chaoskampf* in the ANE developed from an anachronism of the Noahic flood in the minds of people.

<sup>65</sup> Craig C. Broyles, *Psalms*, New International Biblical Commentary 11 (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1999), 25. Broyles' comment here is open to discussion and should be understood as a general rule for many places in the Psalms rather than a dogmatic standard.

these texts in a holistic way.

The contextual approach is a study in comparisons and contrasts, according to Hallo's divisions.<sup>66</sup> The reason for including the contextual approach is so that the comparisons that are eventually drawn will not be over-exaggerated so as to equate the two texts. Regarding *Ras Shamra Parallels*, Talmon mentions that "when imagination is given free reign, the resulting 'parallelomania' gives Old Testament studies a bad name and puts in question the reliability of biblical lexicography and comparative research generally."<sup>67</sup> The linguistic similarities between the Hebrew Bible and the Ugaritic texts have led some (e.g. H. L. Ginsberg) to draw so close a parallel between the two as to say that they are "one literature."<sup>68</sup> Talmon, however, objects to generalizations like this by stating, "I would say that in comparative studies generally our concern is and should be with differences as much as with likenesses. The particularity of Hebrew literature on the one hand, and of Ugaritic writings on the other, must not be blurred so as to facilitate and legitimize their being judged as one cultural whole."<sup>69</sup> To give an example of how this approach works, notice that in both Psalm 104 and the Epic of Baal the element of a cloud-riding god (in epithet or in metaphor) is present. Rather than analyze only the comparisons between the two texts, it will be necessary to discuss the different circumstances surrounding the (G/g)ods' cloud-riding exploits. This is the contrastive

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<sup>66</sup> Malul, 29. Those divisions are the comparative and contrastive methods, notes Malul. Cf. Hallo, 18.

<sup>67</sup> Talmon, *Literary Studies*, 36. Cf. Loren R. Fisher, F. Brent Knutson and Donn F. Morgan, *Ras Shamra Parallels. The Texts from Ugarit and the Hebrew Bible*. *Analecta Orientalia* 49-51. Rome: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 1972. *Ras Shamra Parallels* is a collection of linguistic parallels between the Hebrew and Ugaritic texts.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

approach and it is a subset of the contextual approach. Frankfort notes, "...the comparative method is most valuable when it leads, not to the spurious equation, but to a more subtle distinction of similar features in different civilizations."<sup>70</sup> Keeping a balanced view of the text in this way is important in order to avoid the frequent errors of the past. The context in which one finds a comparative element should be similar to the context of the element to which it is being compared. Not only should the contexts of the compared passages be similar, the functions of the individual compared elements ought to be similar. For example, it will be discussed below that in the past some have compared the Greek "gatherer of the clouds" motif with the Ugaritic "rider of the clouds." While these two elements seem strikingly similar, their functions in their respective mythologies are not similar at all, so the comparison is not a legitimate one.<sup>71</sup> Rather than identifying two texts as equating one another, it is often better to view a text as having some level of influence on the other—analyzing the effects of this influence is called the illuminative approach.

The illuminative approach uses one text as a second-hand commentary on another text. For example, 2 Samuel 22 might be used to illuminate Psalm 18 since there is an obvious synoptic relationship present between the two. Likewise, the Epic of Baal will be used here to illuminate the meaning of Psalm 104 since the latter clearly came later chronologically and probably represents an intentional or unintentional adaptation from the former. There are different types of connections between texts: a direct connection (an immediate dependence of one text upon another), a mediated connection, (the text in

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<sup>70</sup> Frankfort, 21.

<sup>71</sup> Cf. p. 25 below.

question is third in a line of borrowing), a common source (the texts are co-borrowers from an older, original source), or a common tradition (the two texts have similar traditions that may not come from one unified source).<sup>72</sup> In Psalm 104 there seems to be a mediated connection (the Hebrew author probably did not have the Baal texts right before him, but used conventional knowledge concerning Baal) and a common tradition (flood story) present in the psalm.<sup>73</sup>

The illuminative approach usually involves analyzing how literary imagery is borrowed from one text and assimilated into another. Literary imagery is another area where comparative analysis can find some level of concretization. The imaginative iconography of Hebrew literature can be analyzed in order to trace those images back to the cognitive units or thought processes of the author—“they constitute a form of capsule descriptions which substitute for the detailed presentation of intricate thought processes.”<sup>74</sup> Imagery in the Hebrew Bible has the ability to concretize cognitive abstractions.<sup>75</sup> An element of imagery in the Baal texts—the cloud-rider element—will be used to illuminate a strikingly similar element in Psalm 104. “These elements,” notes Craigie, “have undergone thorough adaptation; they occur principally in vv. 1-7, 13, 16 and 26 [of Psalm 104]. Many of these elements might formerly have been interpreted against the background of the Mesopotamian text, *Enuma Elish*, though now the Ugaritic texts

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<sup>72</sup> Malul, 89-91.

<sup>73</sup> Again, the author of Psalm 104 may have done this intentionally or unintentionally.

<sup>74</sup> Talmon, *Literary Studies*, 39.

<sup>75</sup> Cf. Othmar Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms*, Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997.

provide a closer and more immediate background for exegesis."<sup>76</sup> Once a parallel has been established in the text the next step is to interpret the parallel. For example, one must ask whether the parallel represents borrowing, commonly shared knowledge, or intentional insertion of pagan elements by the author. It probably involves some combination of the three and may represent the author's attempt at writing polemically.

The polemical approach seeks to uncover an overt or implied polemic in the Hebrew text. An example of an overt polemic against Baal is 1 Kings 18, where Baal is specifically named and the religious practices of his worshippers are condemned. The Elijah-Ahab narratives do, however, have moments of implied polemic. An instance of this may be seen in the raising of the widow's son or the return of rain in the following chapters.<sup>77</sup> This would be an implied polemic because Baal is a dying and rising god who brings both the rains and drought, but it is Yahweh who caused the widow's son to rise and Yahweh who controlled the weather patterns through these narratives. Though a full exposition of Baal's divine powers is not provided in Kings, an understanding of those powers and of Baal's inability to affect them is subtly advanced, making portions of the 1 Kings narratives an implied polemic. Another implied polemic may include the nature of the Exodus plagues as they correspond to various Egyptian gods.<sup>78</sup> It is the suggestion of some that Psalm 104 contains an implied polemic against Baal since several attributes reserved for Baal are directly applied to Yahweh in the text—the idea is that Yahweh is

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<sup>76</sup> P. C. Craigie, "The Comparison of Hebrew Poetry: Psalm 104 in the Light of Egyptian and Ugaritic Poetry," *Semitics* 4 (1974): 16.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. Chisholm and Yates above.

<sup>78</sup> Gary Yates, Lecture notes for OBST 591 Old Testament Bible Studies, Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, October, 2008. Cf. C. J. Labuschagne, *The Incomparability of Yahweh in the Old Testament*, Pretoria Oriental Series 5, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1966.

assuming Baal's powers as a means of asserting superiority.<sup>79</sup> The polemical approach is less scientific than the others, making it difficult to arrive at a dogmatic conclusion since there is no official test to determine whether alleged polemical elements are intentional or the product of shared cultural meaning—or both. For this reason, the polemical approach is more controversial.<sup>80</sup>

In conclusion, Talmon points out that the comparative method did not begin in the realm of biblical studies but has been adopted by it.<sup>81</sup> The general uncertainty with which this method has been applied in the past will be kept in mind throughout this paper in order to arrive at cautious, non-dogmatic conclusions while providing sufficient evidence for those conclusions. In studying the Baal texts it is important to also keep in mind that comparative studies in mythology is among the most dangerous, and "underlying issues emerge only from a careful comparison of biblical and extra-biblical literature and also how the literary device of juxtaposition plays a key role."<sup>82</sup>

The particular brand of comparative methods discussed above (historical approach, holistic approach, contextual approach, illuminative approach, and polemical

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<sup>79</sup> Allen, 45.

<sup>80</sup> An example of the controversial nature of the polemical approach may be seen in how one group may view borrowed imagery as pagan syncretism while another group may view the same imagery as intentional and polemical. Cf. short discussion about interpretive methods in Andrew E. Hill and John H. Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 24. Cf. Tremper Longman III and Raymond B. Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 261.

<sup>81</sup> Talmon, *Literary Studies*, 12.

<sup>82</sup> Stephen A. Geller, "Textual Juxtaposition and the Comparative Study of Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Literature," in *Approaches to Teaching the Hebrew Bible as Literature in Translation*, eds., Barry N. Olshen and Yael S. Feldman, *Approaches to Teaching World Literature* 25 (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1989), 72.

approach) will be applied to the text of Psalm 104 in each chapter of this paper, addressing the various comparative elements in light of the above considerations.<sup>83</sup>

### THE HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CHARIOT

To begin this study on the cloud-rider theme in Psalm 104 and the Epic of Baal, it is important to provide historical information on the implied physical object behind all this cloud-riding—the chariot. While the chariot is scarcely mentioned in Hebrew or Ugaritic contexts related to cloud-riding, it is an understood instrument—a fact that can be observed in the following section on the mythological significance of the chariot. Frequently, the image presented is of a god mounted on an object, riding through the heavens. It may be that this object is a horse or some other beast of labor, but the mythological evidence coming from all over the ANE suggests that horseback riding was not something as typical of the gods as was chariotry.<sup>84</sup> In this section the historical significance of the chariot is discussed in order to show the concrete concept upon which the mythology is built.

The chariot was first developed in Mesopotamia in the third millennium BC after horses were trained to pull wagon-carts effectively, writes Bourne.<sup>85</sup> Since then chariots have been frequently mentioned in ANE texts that record military expeditions. In a correspondence discovered by archaeologists between the Assyrian king Shamshi-Adad

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<sup>83</sup> See Appendix A for a chart that maps out the various approaches in reference to how they are used in this paper.

<sup>84</sup> Keel, 105.

<sup>85</sup> John M. Bourne, "Chariot," *The Oxford Companion to Military History*. Ed. Richard Holmes. Oxford University Press, 2001. *Oxford Reference Online*. Oxford University Press. Liberty University. 16 December 2009 <http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t139.e265>. The Royal Standard of Ur provides an image of beast-drawn wagon carts, but the beasts appear to be mules rather than horses.

and Yasmah-Addu of Mari, a request is made by the former to send horses and a chariot for a religious festival in Ashur.<sup>86</sup> Cottrell believes that this request indicates the scarcity of chariots in Assyria at that time and their uniqueness as a tool in the ANE. The horse-drawn chariot was a commodity that eventually became one of the most feared instruments of warfare. Of course, chariotry was not possible without harnessing the power of the horse. It was during the reign of Ashurbanipal II that cavalry riding was first introduced to warfare in Assyria.<sup>87</sup> It was probably developed “to provide a means of defense against the unexpected attacks of the horse-breeding and riding Indo-European people.”<sup>88</sup> The practical use of horses and wagons somehow fused to create one of the ANE’s most powerful weapons. So popular were horses and chariots that Pharaoh Tutankhamun's name, some have suggested, may mean "possessing many horses."<sup>89</sup> A name like this must be an indication of power and wealth, attributes associated with the acquisition of chariots and horses. Tutankhamun's chariots would have had different functions. Three of them, all richly decorated with gold, were probably reserved for ceremonial use, while the less ornate models had more practical purposes.<sup>90</sup> In the Hittite military system the Chief of charioteers outranked the Chief of infantry and Chief of shepherds in seniority.<sup>91</sup> They were the “the most prized part of the Hittite army, a

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<sup>86</sup> Arthur Cotterell, *Chariot: The Astounding Rise and Fall of the World's First War Machine* (London: Pimlico, 2004), 71.

<sup>87</sup> Cotterell, 237. Cf. also Sigmund Mowinckel, “Drive and/or Ride in O.T.” *Vetus Testamentum* 12, no. 3 (Jul., 1962): 279.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 280.

<sup>89</sup> Cotterell, 72.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 82. “The next level below these senior officers comprise a group of divisional commanders: in order of seniority they were Chief of the Chariot Warriors of the Right, Chief of the

position it kept in royal esteem from the earliest days of the empire down to the end."<sup>92</sup> ANE art frequently depicted kings and gods mounted atop chariots in attack positions. These reliefs often depict a king hunting wild game or attacking enemy soldiers. Astarte is shown in one such painting mounted upon a chariot.<sup>93</sup> On the stele of Edfu she rides a chariot while crushing her foe beneath.<sup>94</sup> The British museum has a relief showing Sennacherib's capture of Lachish while using war chariots.<sup>95</sup> There are several reliefs that show Ashurbannipal hunting bulls and lions while riding upon a two-wheeled chariot pulled by three horses.<sup>96</sup>

The significance of the chariot for this study is its function in Israel and Ugarit—the biblical and Ugaritic poetic images of this weapon must have derived from a concrete form in history. Notes Cotterrell, "Chariotry was of course the key weapon in the Ugaritian armoury, and surviving texts from the city archive record the high status of the Chief of Chariotry."<sup>97</sup> The Ugaritian charioteer was equipped with "a bow and arrows, a

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Chariot Warriors of the Left, Chief of the Infantry of the Right, Chief of the Infantry of the Left, Chief of the Shepherds of the Right and Chief of Shepherds of the Left."

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 96. The meaning of Astarte atop a chariot should be clear since a primary divine function of hers is warfare.

<sup>94</sup> Mowinckel, 280.

<sup>95</sup> André Parrot, *The Arts of Assyria* (New York: Golden Press, 1961): 46. Parrot's collection of photographs provides visual imagery to assist in understanding the appearance and function of ANE war chariots.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 54-59.

<sup>97</sup> Cotterrell, 86. The Ugaritic charioteer (*tmn*) may be connected to the Alalakh warriors called *šananu*. Egyptian has a cognate *snn*, which means chariot-warrior or archer (William A. Ward, "Comparative Studies in Egyptian and Ugaritic," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 20, no. 1 (Jan 1961): 39). Obviously Ward is trying to establish a connection between the Egyptian and Ugaritic chariot-warriors. This pattern—Egypt to Ugarit to Israel—is one that has been explored with mythological texts as well. It has been suggested that Israel was somewhat of a third-wheel or final recipient of shared cultural material that originated in Egypt, spread to Canaan, and was eventually adopted by the Israelites. Yahweh clearly

sling and stones, a javelin, a club and a shield.”<sup>98</sup> In connection to this, it is interesting to note that the Baal tablets list his weapons as including thunder, lightening, and clubs—the latter (clubs) being named “expeller” and “all-driver”—given to him by Kothar-wa-Khasis.<sup>99</sup> There is also a concrete basis for the chariot-riding imagery in Israel. Cotterrell points out that King Solomon was famous for his horses, and is reputed to have maintained 4,000 chariot teams and 12,000 horsemen.”<sup>100</sup> Solomon also would have received chariots from the foreign families he married into.<sup>101</sup> One of the most popular inscriptions mentioning Israel is a stele upon which Shalmaneser III records the many chariots of King Ahab who met him at the battle of Qarqar around 853 BC.<sup>102</sup> Later history suggests to us that Ahab won that battle, but Shalmaneser III records it as a victory for Assyria.<sup>103</sup> There is no doubt that the use of chariots weighed significantly in the victory of Ahab and Ben-Hadad of Damascus over Assyria.<sup>104</sup>

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used the shared material from these cultures to reveal new truths about himself and his religious requirements for the Israelites.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>99</sup> Cf. John Day, "Echoes of Baal's Seven Thunders and Lightenings in Psalm XXIX and Habakkuk III 9 and the Identity of the Seraphim in Isaiah VI," *Vetus Testamentum* 29, no. 2 (1979): 143-151. Day discusses the relationship between Baal's lightning and thunder to Psalm 29.

<sup>100</sup> Cotterrell, 96. Cf. 1 Kings 4:26.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid. He would have received chariots from Egypt for marrying Pharaoh's daughter in the 10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>102</sup> K. A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 27.

<sup>103</sup> Hill and Walton, 158.

<sup>104</sup> For more information on chariotry in Israel cf. Yeivin, Ze'ev. "Cart and Chariot." *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. Ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik. 2nd ed. Vol. 4. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007. 497. *Gale Virtual Reference Library*. Web. 20 Apr. 2010.  
[http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?&id=GALE%7CCX2587504006&v=2.1&u=vic\\_liberty&it=r&p=GVRL&sw=w](http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?&id=GALE%7CCX2587504006&v=2.1&u=vic_liberty&it=r&p=GVRL&sw=w)

Having seen briefly here the historical component of chariot use in the ANE (especially in Ugarit and Israel) it is time to move on to the mythological significance of this war weapon in ANE literature. Weisner “has pointed to the general rule that the ideas about the equipment of the gods is imagined in accordance with the ruling ideal of the heroic warrior.”<sup>105</sup> The historical fact of beast-riding and chariot-riding is the basis for mythological descriptions of the transportation of the gods.

### **THE MYTHOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CHARIOT**

Here the holistic approach is applied to our study as we examine the broader theme of cloud-riding in the ANE and understand the Hebrew and Ugaritic texts as contributors to that theme.

The value of the chariot in ANE life lent naturally toward its being assimilated into the mythology of ANE cultures. In mythological texts the term “chariot” is often metaphorically represented by clouds or winds. The divine weapons (meteors, lightning, thunder, etc.) and vehicle (clouds) were originally ANE elements that were later adopted by the Greek poets.<sup>106</sup> Zeus is called "the Gatherer of the clouds" and Baal is called in "the rider of the clouds"; however, these are two different ideas and should not be equated.<sup>107</sup> The clouds were, in fact, chariots or tents for Greek gods, but scholars have frequently erred when comparing ANE material with the Greek legends since much meaning is lost in the millennia that separate the two worlds.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Mowinckel, 295.

<sup>106</sup> Moshe Weinfeld, "'Rider of the Clouds' and 'Gatherer of the Clouds,'" *Journal of the Ancient Near East Society* 5 (1973): 421-422.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 422.

<sup>108</sup> Richard D. Patterson, "Imagery of Clouds in the Scriptures," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 165 (Jan-Mar 2008): 14.

The epithet that is applied to Baal above is the most significant form to consider in the phenomenon of mythologizing the chariot since a modified form of this epithet is also used of Yahweh.<sup>109</sup> The rider of the clouds phenomenon goes back to the Akkadian Period (c. 2360-2190) where we see "the depiction of the weather god mounted in a four-wheeled chariot drawn by a lion-griffin, on which stands a goddess holding bundles of lightening or rain."<sup>110</sup> Both Baal and Yahweh are "storm gods" in their own respects. The role is specifically applied to Baal, but appears to be just one of Yahweh's many functions. It has already been noted that Baal, as a god of war and fertility carried weapons of fire with him in his chariot—this is similarly true of Yahweh.

The imagery of winds and wings play a significant metaphorical role in describing the transportation methods of ANE storm-gods. Weinfeld writes that "the Sumerian Hymns to Iškur (Semitic Adad) and Martu (the eponymous deity of the Western Semites) depict these gods as harnessing winds and riding them."<sup>111</sup> Marduk mounts his storm chariot and harnesses it to the four winds—"An identical imagery is found in the Hurrian and Ugaritic myths."<sup>112</sup> Weinfeld observes that "The imagery of 'God the rider' comes to full expression in the emblem of the god Aššur from the period of Tukulti-Ninurta II (890-884 B.C.E.). Here we find the god with spread wings and a drawn bow, among rain clouds, over a chariot scene of which only the head of the charioteer and the upper part of

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<sup>109</sup> Cf. Deuteronomy 33:26 ("Who rides the heavens"); Psalm 68:5 ("who rides through the deserts"), 34 ("who rides upon the highest heavens"); Psalm 104:3 ("Who makes the clouds his chariot, who walks on the wings of the wind"); Isaiah 19:1 ("the LORD is riding on a swift cloud"); 2 Samuel 22:11/Psalm 18:11 ("And He rode on a cherub and flew; And He appeared on the wings of the wind").

<sup>110</sup> Weinfeld, 422-423.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 424.

a horse's head remain."<sup>113</sup> In Psalm 104:3 Yahweh is one *עַל־כַּנְפֵי־רוּחַ* (“who walks on the wings of the wind”). The element of “wings” may be connected to the presence of angelic guardians, but this will be discussed below.

As is pointed out in the previous paragraph concerning the god Aššur, sometimes the gods are said to be riding with the assistance of a horse or mule—it is uncertain whether the presence of these beasts always implies the use of a chariot, though. Weinfeld discusses Enlil's dais which flows about on the clouds and concludes that “according to the Sumerian cosmic view, God—especially the weather god—is riding on a beast as well as on winds and clouds.”<sup>114</sup> It is interesting that Yahweh is also sometimes said to ride a horse.<sup>115</sup> Figurines have been uncovered in Judah of males riding on the backs of mules or horses. They typically have an uplifted arm that was probably holding a spear or some other type of weapon.<sup>116</sup> Similar figurines have been found during excavations in Jerusalem.<sup>117</sup> It is interesting to note that Baal figurines also depict the god with his arm raised in a similar fashion. Stern has suggested that the horse-riding figurines likely depict a different warrior god while other turban-wearing figurines may

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<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> Weinfeld, 423.

<sup>115</sup> Zechariah 10:3. Judah is here metaphorically referred to as Yahweh's majestic horse. Though the book of Revelation is chronologically removed from the Bronze Age, the imagery of God riding a war-steed recurs there as well. Mowinckel disagrees and states that Yahweh is never “depicted as riding on horseback.” In Zechariah 10:3 the house of Judah is depicted as Yahweh's “majestic horse in battle.” Still, it could be a chariot horse, but the text is not definitive as to whether he's riding the horse or driving the chariot led by the horse (Mowinckel, “Drive and/or Ride,” 283). Cf. Habakkuk 3:8 where it is also ambiguous as to whether Yahweh is riding on the horse or being pulled by horses or both.

<sup>116</sup> Ephraim Stern, “Pagan Yahwism: the Folk Religion of Ancient Israel,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 27 no. 3 (May-Jun 2001): 27.

<sup>117</sup> Richard Hess, *Israelite Religions: An Archaeological and Biblical Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 298.

represent Baal or Yahweh.<sup>118</sup> While it is possible that these horse-back riders are supposed to represent Yahweh or Baal, Mowinckel points out that the horses in the Ugaritic texts appear to be all chariot-horses, making the chariot rather than the bare-backed horse the primary means of transportation for Baal.<sup>119</sup> Also, he suggests that when the Israelites entered Canaan with their donkeys and cattle, they knew nothing of horses (for themselves—they could see Egyptians using them while in slavery). The horse was a weapon of the gentiles, writes Mowinckel. David hamstrung the Canaanite horses when he captured the Aramean kings (Sam 8:4). Joshua treated them the same way according to Yahweh's command in Joshua 11:6.<sup>120</sup> Mowinckel may be mischaracterizing Yahweh, whose alleged animosity toward horses and chariots must be seen in light of horse imagery in prophetic texts that place horses alongside success in Israel—Jeremiah 17:25 clearly states that the successful future of Israel will be characterized by horses and chariots.<sup>121</sup> The reason why Yahweh ordered the slaying of the horses was probably to show the decimation of Canaanite power and to keep the Israelites from hording their enemy's spoil as an observance of the command in Deuteronomy 17:16.<sup>122</sup> Weinfeld summarizes the findings discussed above:

The elements of chariot, lion, bird, cloud, and wind which occur in the Sumerian image of God the rider are also attested in the later Mesopotamian, as well as in

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<sup>118</sup> Stern, 28.

<sup>119</sup> Mowinckel, 281.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 282.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 283. He sees David's use of horses as an adoption of Canaanite warfare. The suggestion is that David is possibly not honoring God, but Mowinckel seems to be taking his conclusions a little too far. Note once more Zechariah 10:3 and Habakkuk 3:8.

<sup>122</sup> Several passages in the Old Testament describe horseback riders who are not military related (Genesis 44:17; 2 Kings 4:18; Esther 6:8, 9, 11; Job 34:18, etc.).

the Syro-Palestinian tradition. Thus we find the God of Israel "riding on the cherub" (2 Sam. 22:11 = Ps. 18:11); soaring on the *wings* of the wind (ibid, and Ps. 104:3); "riding the cloud" (Isa. 19:1; Ps. 68:5; 104:3); and, as we already indicated, riding a chariot with horses (Hab. 3:8).<sup>123</sup>

Another important component of the mythological significance of the chariot is the apparent connection between the place of God's enthronement and the vehicle of God. The Ark of the Covenant was the seat or throne of Yahweh which was repeatedly moved from place to place in the wilderness wanderings so that God's presence would remain with his people. The "mercy seat," as it is called, is protected by the overarching wings of the cherubim. Mettinger sees the Ark as the footstool of Yahweh and the wings of the large Temple cherubim above as his throne.<sup>124</sup> The concept of a moving god on a cherubim throne somehow developed into a mythological concept of God flying through the clouds "on the wings of the wind" in his cloud-chariot. This, coupled with ANE mythology involving cloud-riding may explain the development of this imagery in ancient Israel. Properly speaking, the Ark was the earthly throne of God, and when it moved God moved with it. It has been noted that the Ark of the Covenant was set upon a wagon in some festivals, which, though it seems like somewhat of a stretch, still provides an image of the Ark with wheels—a feature similar to the ANE chariot with cherub reliefs on its sides.<sup>125</sup>

The religious symbolism of the angel is not restricted to Israel. Cherubim functioned in this way all over the ANE with respect to the gods. The cherubim on the

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<sup>123</sup> Weinfeld, 424.

<sup>124</sup> Tryggve N. D. Mettinger, "YHWH SABAOTH—The Heavenly King on the Cherubim Throne" in *Studies in the Period of David and Solomon, and Other Essays*, ed. T. Ishida (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1982), 114.

<sup>125</sup> Mowinckel, 298.

throne were protectors of the cosmic warrior king.<sup>126</sup> In paintings and other forms of pictorial art the “cherubim are portrayed as winged sphinxes with human heads.”<sup>127</sup> Tutankhamun had a cherub chariot—“the cherubs form the sides of the chair, their feet being its feet and their wings its arms.”<sup>128</sup> It is not difficult to see how a mythological representation of the gods corresponded with a physical representation, the latter being the cherub throne/chariot or ark. In archaeology, a relief from Ahiram’s sarcophagus of Byblos displays a king seated on his cherubim throne. A late bronze “Ivory plaque 16 cm. long was found at Megiddo showing a prince on his cherubim throne.”<sup>129</sup> A model of a cherubim throne was also found at Megiddo. Ezekiel depicts Yahweh as sitting on a throne-wagon that has wheels and is powered by  $\Pi\eta\eta$ .<sup>130</sup> Ezekiel's description of the throne is similar to Tutankhamun’s and we can imagine Yahweh sitting upon it—appearing above the “head of the cherubim” sat the presence of Yahweh.<sup>131</sup> Barrick notes, “That the cloud-chariot and the cherub-throne did, in fact, converge in Israelite thought is evidenced by 1 Chron 28:18b which speaks of a 'golden chariot of the

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 298.

<sup>127</sup> Mettinger, 113.

<sup>128</sup> Mowinckel, 297.

<sup>129</sup> Mettinger, 113.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 297. Cf. Dale Launderville, “Ezekiel's Throne-Chariot Vision: Spiritualizing the Model of Divine Royal Rule,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 66, no. 3 (Jul 2004): 361-377. He writes, “The wheels gave the throne-bearing vehicle the appearance of a chariot and so accented the mobility of Yhwh's throne” (366). Cf. John T. Strong, “God's Kabôd: The Presence of Yahweh in the Book of Ezekiel” in *The Book of Ezekiel*, eds., Margaret S. Odell and John T. Strong, Symposium Series 9 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000).

<sup>131</sup> Mowinckel, 297. Cf. Ezekiel 10:1.

cherubim' as part of the Temple furnishings."<sup>132</sup> Solomon built two cherubim to guard the temple entrance (1 Kgs 6:23-28); both stood about 4.3 meters high. Their inner wings connected to form the seat of the throne, as Mettinger sees it (2 Chr 3:12). The throne was left empty because God was invisibly enthroned.

Still, there is some question as to the meaning of “wings of the wind.” Barrick suggests that, “mythologically, the cherubim would have drawn the cloud chariot through the sky, in which capacity they are probably to be understood as personifications of the winds.”<sup>133</sup> Mettinger concludes that “the cherubim are no doubt to be regarded as a tangible representation of God’s heavenly chariot of clouds.”<sup>134</sup> Psalm 18:11 shows a close parallel between “wings of the wind” and cherubim: “He rode upon a cherub and flew; And He sped upon the wings of the wind.” Nowhere in the text does it state that God has physically harnessed the cherubim to his chariot, but that is because mythology<sup>135</sup> does not always provide a complete image that corresponds exactly to the

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<sup>132</sup> Boyd W. Barrick, “The Meaning and Usage of RKB in Biblical Hebrew,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 101, no. 4 (1982): 495. “And for the altar of incense refined gold by weight; and gold for the model of the chariot, {even} the cherubim that spread out {their wings} and covered the ark of the covenant of the LORD” (1 Chronicles 28:18).

<sup>133</sup> Barrick, 495. Cf. Chisholm, 279—“The reference to the “wings of the wind” in verse 10b suggests that the cherub (v. 10a), a winged creature depicted in the Old Testament as possessing both human and animal characteristics, is a personification of the storm wind. The wind/cherub is Yahweh’s war vehicle, the equivalent of a horse-drawn chariot. Parallels to this portrayal of Yahweh abound in ANE literature.”

<sup>134</sup> Mettinger, 122. Cf. 2 Samuel 22:11, Psalm 18:11.

<sup>135</sup> When “mythology” is used in reference to what the Psalms say about Yahweh it is not meant to place Yahweh or the Scriptures outside the realm of “reality,” but is meant to refer to the Israelite’s understanding of Yahweh—an understanding that is not meant to be taken literally. The image of Yahweh riding about on the clouds is a figure, and thus is referred to as a mythological representation of him. For a recent work on “mythology” in the Bible cf. John Oswalt, *The Bible Among the Myths: Unique Revelation or Just Ancient Literature?* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009.

terrestrial form it represents.<sup>136</sup> Not everything that one might observe in the physical realm regarding a chariot—wheels, axels, leather, rope, strapping for the beasts of labor, etc.—needs to be or is communicated figuratively in the description of Yahweh. So it comes as no surprise that the Ark of the Covenant, the Cherubim, the “wings of the wind,” the throne of Yahweh, and the cloud imagery do not have a direct correspondence to different parts of an ANE war-chariot. There is, however, enough information here to at least observe a unique connection between these elements, one that primarily associates the Ark with the cloud-chariot of Yahweh. In Psalm 80:1 and 99:1 Yahweh is “enthroned/seated above the cherubim,” on which Mann comments, “It is important to understand that this *yšb* is always used of Yahweh to refer to his heavenly dwelling, *except* in just this phrase, which must be read, ‘He who is *enthroned* on the cherubim.’”<sup>137</sup>

### CLOUD-RIDING IN SCRIPTURE

The purpose of this section is to present a unified theology of cloud-riding as it is presented solely in the Old Testament. Each of the other major appearances of this theme (Deut 33:26; 2 Sam 22:11; Ps 18:11; 68:5, 33; Isa 19:1) are examined here and compared to the standard of Psalm 104:3 in order to show similarities, differences and how the passage under consideration contributes to a better understanding of the motif in Psalm 104:3.

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<sup>136</sup> Thomas W. Mann, "The Pillar of Cloud in the Reed Sea Narrative," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 90, no.1 (Mar 1971): 23. Mann proposes that Yahweh actually rides atop the cherubim: “Clouds are here often interchangeable with cherubim, as Yahweh rides through the heavens on the wings of these creatures (Ps. 18:11)” (23). Cf. 1 Samuel 4:4; 2 Samuel 6:2; 1 Chronicles 13:6; 2 Kings 19:15; Isaiah 37:16—Yahweh sits/dwells between his cherubim.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*

Psalm 18 and 2 Samuel 22 are parallel hymns in the Hebrew Bible. Some think they are intended to be identical and thus will impose one upon the other in textual emendations, but others see the latter presentation of the song as unique to the narrative of Samuel, containing its own message.<sup>138</sup> In both passages, the motif of cloud-riding is presented with identical syntax and, by nature of its parallelism, an identical mythological context. For this reason, only one of the two texts will be dealt with here. Second Samuel 22:11 appears in a section of the narrative (chapters 21-24) that is viewed as an “intrusion” on the story, containing older material that has been grouped together in these chapters.<sup>139</sup> There are two songs found in this section—22:1-51 and 23:1-7. The first of these songs could be viewed as a “counterpart” to the song of Hannah at the beginning of 1 Samuel.<sup>140</sup> This song of deliverance praises Yahweh for his powers in salvation from the enemies of the king.<sup>141</sup> The “gospel of rescue” is seen in vv. 8-20 where “Israel employs the powerful mythic language of *theophany* to express God’s powerful, transformative, rescuing coming (vv. 8-20).”<sup>142</sup> In this passage God comes in his war chariot in verse 11—“And He rode on a cherub and flew; And He appeared on the wings of the wind” (וַיִּרְכַּב עַל־כְּרוּב וַיַּעֲף וַיֵּרָא עַל־כַּנְּפֵי־רִיחַ):). At this time Yahweh also defeats the chaotic waters of death by using his thunderous voice and arrows of lightening—mention is also made of his Temple. McCarter notes that “Seated-upon-the-

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<sup>138</sup> Robert D. Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, The New American Commentary 7 (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 455.

<sup>139</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*. Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville, Ky: John Knox Press, 1990), 335.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 339.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 339-340.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*

Cherubim” was a cultic epithet of the Shilonite Yahweh, envisioned as an enthroned monarch.”<sup>143</sup> Cartledge points out the reference to the abode of Yahweh—“The word for ‘temple’ is *hēkāl*, poetically used for God’s dwelling place in the heavens.”<sup>144</sup> He also makes note of Yahweh’s cloud-riding exploits in the other known passages mentioned at the beginning of this section, pointing out the obvious connection to the epithet in the Ugaritic texts.<sup>145</sup>

In 2 Samuel 22:11 the mythological language of cloud-riding is accompanied by *chaoskampf* language and the mentioning of Yahweh’s palace. All of these elements likewise appear in Psalm 104. Differences include the mentioning of a **כְּרוּב** in 2 Samuel 22:11, a creature whose presence is only implied in Psalm 104. Another difference includes the presence of the word **עוֹף** (“flew”), an idea implied in Psalm 104:3. Lastly, the text says that “He appeared on the wings of the wind.” The Syriac and Vulgate use the term **וַיִּנְּף** (“and he flew”) rather than **וַיֵּרָא** (“He appeared”).<sup>146</sup> The LXX maintains the reading of “he appeared”— *καὶ ὤφθη ἐπὶ πτερύγων ἀνέμου*. However, Psalm 18:11 uses the term **וַיֵּרָא** as well, so the suggestion of some scholars is that “an orthographic error” is present in the text of 2 Samuel 22:11.<sup>147</sup> After that, all that remains in the 2 Samuel 22:11 formula is the phrase **עַל־כַּנְפֵי־רוּחַ** (“on the wings of the wind”),

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<sup>143</sup> P. Kyle. McCarter, *II Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes and Commentary*, Anchor Bible Commentaries 9 (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 2007), 466.

<sup>144</sup> Tony W Cartledge, *1 & 2 Samuel*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary (Macon, Ga: Smyth & Helwys Pub, 2001), 652.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 654

<sup>146</sup> Bergen, 455.

<sup>147</sup> A. A. Anderson, *2 Samuel*, Word Biblical Commentary 11 (Dallas, Tex: Word Books, 1989), 261.

which happens to be identical to the phrase in Psalm 104:3. Since 2 Samuel 22:11 and Psalm 104:3 share very similar mythological contexts (cloud-riding, palace-dwelling, and *chaoskampf*), we can be comfortable with the notion that they are talking about the same mythological activity when they speak of cloud-riding. The contribution of 2 Samuel 22:11 is an improved understanding of “making the clouds his chariot” in Psalm 104:3. It must be that this chariot-making activity is related to Cherub-riding, a fact that can be seen in the imagery of cherubim on and around the ark-throne of Yahweh.<sup>148</sup> 2 Samuel 22:10 speaks of Yahweh having “thick darkness” beneath his feet, a feature reminiscent of Yahweh’s walking (הלך) on “wings of the wind” in Psalm 104. It appears from all this that a precise definition of each of these terms is not possible since they intersect on so many points. In other words, it does not seem possible to create a 1:1 correspondence between mythological elements and concrete objects, like angels. The cherubim seem to be Yahweh’s beasts of labor—they are called “the wings of the wind,” but they are portrayed as clouds at the same time. If anything, the import of 2 Samuel 22:11 is a further recognition that cherubim are involved in the process of cloud-riding, a fact not immediately apparent in Psalm 104:3.

Isaiah 19:1 is part of a larger unit (18:1-20:6) where Isaiah is prophesying concerning the powers of the South.<sup>149</sup> Chapter 19 is the oracle concerning Egypt, and it begins with the ominous words, מִשָּׂא מִצְרַיִם הִנֵּה יְהוָה רֹכֵב עַל-עַב קַל וּבָא מִצְרַיִם (“The oracle concerning Egypt. Behold the LORD is riding on a swift cloud and is about to come to Egypt”). The immediate context is apparent from the first few verses—God is

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<sup>148</sup> Anderson, 263.

<sup>149</sup> John Goldingay, *Isaiah*, New International Biblical Commentary 13 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2001), 117.

coming to personally administer judgment on Egypt and her idols. The first problem facing a comparison between Isaiah 19:1 and Psalm 104:3 is the utter absence of mythological terminology and themes in Isaiah 19. The first verse mentions how God is coming down on a swift cloud, but the remainder of the chapter is a pronouncement of the wrath of God on the Egyptians historically, eventually concluding that one day there will be peace between Israel and Egypt. Interestingly, in Psalm 68, 104, and Deuteronomy 32, other mythological elements are present. It could be that these earlier writings are more tied to mythopoetical imagery and that Isaiah 19:1 presents a preserved representative of a group of mythologies presented in the earlier texts. So all that can be said here is that Yahweh's riding on a "swift cloud" in Isaiah 19:1 implies his kingship and authority because he is riding *from* his heavenly palace. Isaiah elsewhere contains pockets of *chaoskampf* language (27:1; 50:2; 51:9-10), but here such language is excluded and all that remains is the urgency of Yahweh's rapid approach—הִנֵּה יְהוָה רֹכֵב עַל-עָב קֹל רֹכֵב עַל-עָב קֹל The עָב here is a “dark cloud” or “rain-cloud,” a reference to Yahweh's role as God of the Storm or just a reference to the connection between his wrath and darkness.<sup>150</sup> The LXX reads, ἰδοὺ κύριος κάθηται ἐπὶ νεφέλης κούφης καὶ ἤξει εἰς Αἴγυπτον, and interestingly νεφέλης is seen also in Exodus 16:12 where the glory of Yahweh appears in a cloud—interesting because the glory cloud of Yahweh is elsewhere portrayed as dark or thick (Ex 19:9, 16). Psalm 104 also contains the עָב : νεφέλη equivalence in translation between the MT and LXX. The import of Isaiah 19:1 is quite indirect, but by tracing the “cloud” through the LXX to Exodus 19:9 and 16 it can be seen how עָב is related to darkness, which allows for corroboration in identifying the

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<sup>150</sup> Clines, 208.

עֲבִים of Psalm 104:3 as also involving darkness. In the following sections the association of the word עֵב with darkness will be discussed.

The final two chapters of Deuteronomy contain an account of the death of Moses, and are appropriately titled so by Miller.<sup>151</sup> Before his death, the man who had functioned as an earthly king of the Hebrews gives his final words. He starts and finishes his will and testament with blessings to the children of Israel.<sup>152</sup> Moses blesses each of the tribes of Israel and then concludes his speech in a hymn of praise where is found the reference in 33:26 to the אֵל יִשְׁרוּן רֹכֵב שָׁמַיִם בְּעֶזְרֹךָ וּבְגֹאֲוֹתוֹ שְׂחֻקִים (“God of Jeshurun, who rides the heavens to your help and through the skies in his majesty”). Actually, the text begins with the incomparability formula—אֵין כָּאֵל יִשְׁרוּן. Craigie notes that “the poetic imagery indicates the great power of God, not in an abstract sense, but in relation to the people of God. His majestic passage through the heavens takes him to the aid of his people.”<sup>153</sup> The immediate context of the verse is one of warfare and the salvation of Yahweh in the face of Israel’s foes.<sup>154</sup> Some have seen אֵל יִשְׁרוּן as “Like El, O Jeshurun,” but this seems too tied to a preoccupation with seeing the Canaanite El in the text.<sup>155</sup> After all, “riding on the heavens” is much more closely associated with Baal than with El. Here, however, it describes the actions of Yahweh who delivers his people from

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<sup>151</sup> Patrick D. Miller, *Deuteronomy*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching. (Louisville: J. Knox Press, 1990), 237.

<sup>152</sup> Miller, 238.

<sup>153</sup> Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 2004), 403.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>155</sup> Duane L. Christensen, *Deuteronomy 21:10-34:12*, Word Biblical Commentary 6B (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2002), 857. A slight change in pointing from the MT would produce “there is no one like the God of Jeshurun.” It is the translation “El” that seems problematic for the context. Cf. Wright, 315.

their historical foes by telling his children to “destroy” them (Deut 33:27). He is the “Divine Warrior of vv. 2-3” and he rides “through the skies like the weather god.”<sup>156</sup> He “rides on the heavens as kings going to war ride on their mighty chargers.”<sup>157</sup> Yahweh rides on the שָׁמַיִם, for which שָׁחֲקִים (“sky”) is a parallel term in the verse. It is difficult to say that “heavens” is a contribution to the discussion since “heavens” is one of the most basic and assumed elements in the activity of cloud-riding. However, the term שָׁחֲקִים can be translated “dust” or “cloud.”<sup>158</sup> Isaiah 40:15 maintains the usage of “dust” for this term. In Job 36:28 שָׁחֲקִים are rain clouds. The same is true of Job 38:37.<sup>159</sup> The majority of the time, שָׁחֲקִים refers to the “heavens,” but the fact that this term can connote the presence of storm clouds or dust allows for the question of whether the עָבִים of Psalm 104:3 can connote the same. Like Isaiah 19:1, Deuteronomy 33:26 contributes to the theme of darkness in the cloud-riding imagery of Yahweh in Scripture.

Psalm 68 has been noted as one of the most complicated in the Psalter, mostly due to translational difficulties.<sup>160</sup> It is a psalm “about God’s triumphant journey, represented by the movement of the ark of the covenant, from Sinai to the Jerusalem sanctuary, at the head of his people.”<sup>161</sup> Psalm 68:5 is the first of two instances (the other being v. 34) of

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<sup>156</sup> Richard D. Nelson, *Deuteronomy: A Commentary*, The Old Testament Library (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 392.

<sup>157</sup> Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, The New American Commentary 4 (Nashville, Tenn: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 447

<sup>158</sup> Victor P. Hamilton, “שָׁחֲקִים,” *TWOT*, 2367a:916.

<sup>159</sup> שָׁחֲקִים is translated “skies” but is in the context of dark rain clouds in Psalm 18:11. The same is true in Psalm 77:17 and Isaiah 45:8.

<sup>160</sup> Geoffrey Grogan, *Psalms*, The Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2008), 124.

<sup>161</sup> Grogan, 125.

the cloud-riding motif in this song. The first contains the characteristic רָכַב followed by the unexpected עֲרָבָה, translated "deserts" in the NASB,<sup>162</sup> but "heavens" elsewhere. The ambiguity comes from an imposition of the theme of cloud-riding on the text from those who wish to see Psalm 68:5 as promoting the same mythological motif of cloud-riding as in the Ugaritic texts.<sup>163</sup> However, Grogan proposes that the word "deserts" was chosen for its ambiguity since "God rides both in the heavens and, ahead of his people, through the desert."<sup>164</sup> Marvin Tate affirms the desert context of the word but notes how the "Hebrew 'b/v' (ב) is accepted as a mutation of the Ugar. 'p'."<sup>165</sup> He allows for a "double reference" to both deserts and clouds, but leans toward the latter rendering because of the Ugaritic texts.<sup>166</sup> The contribution of Psalm 68:5 is significant since it presents a new plain of travel in the divine transport of Yahweh. "Deserts" should remain a legitimate interpretation since the wilderness wanderings were characterized by Yahweh's deliverance in the desert as he is oft seen there as a pillar of cloud or with the Ark of the Covenant, the ark being an image of Yahweh's chariot. The term עֲרָבָה may have connotations of darkness as well, but these will be discussed at length below. Verse 34 is part of a doxology at the end of the psalm. The text reads לָרֶכֶב בַּשָּׁמַיִם שְׁמִי־קָדָם ("to him

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<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.* "The word translated 'clouds,' עֲרָבָה, 'ārābā, normally relates to a semidesert with few plants (loosely, a wilderness), but the Ugaritic word for "clouds" is very similar." Seeing the Ugaritic motif of cloud-riding here, some scholars have suggested translating עֲרָבָה "heavens" by revocalizing the word.

<sup>163</sup> Kraus, 51. Kraus is just one of many who make the connection without suggesting that the designation "deserts" has any merit.

<sup>164</sup> Grogan, 125.

<sup>165</sup> Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 51-100*, Word Biblical Commentary 20 (Dallas, Tex: Word Books, 1990), 163.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 176. "The two concepts of Cloud Rider and Wilderness Rider seem likely to be merged here."

who rides on the heavens of heavens of old"). Rather than "riding the heavens" as in Deuteronomy 33:26, here Yahweh rides "on" the heavens of heavens, possibly referring to the celestial realm above the visible sky. The double construct may be a "superlative" for "highest heaven."<sup>167</sup> This could very well be an assertion of Yahweh's kingship not only in the earth but in the primeval world prior to creation and transcendent to the terrestrial sphere.<sup>168</sup> Verse 34 adds to the discussion by noting how Yahweh's cloud-riding exploits extend beyond the physical sphere of the earth and its circumstances to reach the unknown world of the שָׁמַיִם שְׁמַיִם. In this way Yahweh is universal as a warrior.

Another mythological element in Psalm 68 presents itself as Yahweh's holy habitation is mentioned in verse 6—Just as in Deuteronomy, the heavenly dwelling place of God is mentioned in the verse immediately following the motif of cloud-riding. Also the "depths of the sea" is mentioned in verse 22, a reference to historical Bashan in *chaoskampf* terminology. Psalm 104:3 speaks of Yahweh's timeless activity of "walking on the wings of the wind," a metaphor that can now be extended to include the realm of existence where the physical phenomenon of wind is absent—in the celestial realm.

Other passages like Exodus 34:5, Numbers 11:25 and Ezekiel 1 have a looser connection to cloud-riding. The first two references have an identical syntactical arrangement—וַיֵּרַד יְהוָה בְּעַנָּן ("the Lord descended in the cloud"). Certainly the idea of using the clouds as a means of transportation from the heavenly abode to the earth is present, but this reference is a little more removed from the patterns of the texts above.

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 170. "Perhaps better: 'through the primeval heaven of heavens,' which should not be reduced to a mere 'highest skies'."

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 184.

A scriptural theology of cloud-riding can be seen in the above passages (Deut 33:26; 2 Sam 22:11; Ps 18:11; Ps 68:5, 34; 104:3 and Isa 19:1;) where Yahweh rides<sup>169</sup> or walks<sup>170</sup> on a dark<sup>171</sup> cloud<sup>172</sup> chariot<sup>173</sup> motored by the presence of cherubim<sup>174</sup> through the heavens<sup>175</sup> and the heavens of heavens.<sup>176</sup> Psalm 104:3 benefits from all these by acknowledging that, in addition to making the clouds his chariot and walking on the wings of the wind, Yahweh performs these actions in the terrestrial and extraterrestrial heavens and is accompanied by storm clouds and cherubim.

### *SITZ IM LEBEN:* רָכַב

Second Samuel 22:11, Isaiah 19:1, Psalm 18:11; 68:5, 34, and Deuteronomy 33:26 make use of the word רָכַב when referring to the movement or position of Yahweh. Psalm 104:3, the however, does not contain this word; rather, it uses הִלָּךְ. The purpose of investigating the *sitz im leben* of רָכַב is to understand the meaning of this word in the other primary passages since they are essentially describing the same thing Psalm 104:3 is describing. It could be said that Psalm 104:3 contains some remnant of רָכַב in the form of the verb הִלָּךְ. This is not to say that the terms are equivalent, but it is to say that there

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<sup>169</sup> Deuteronomy 33:26; Isaiah 19:1; 2 Samuel 22:11; Psalm 18:11; 68:5, 34.

<sup>170</sup> Psalm 104:3.

<sup>171</sup> Various terms seem to indicate a dark cloud or contain darkness in their contexts—Deuteronomy 33:26; Isaiah 19:1; Psalm 104:3.

<sup>172</sup> Isaiah 19:1; Psalm 104:3.

<sup>173</sup> Psalm 104:3.

<sup>174</sup> Psalm 18:11; 2 Samuel 22:11; Psalm 104:3.

<sup>175</sup> Deuteronomy 33:26; Psalm 68:5.

<sup>176</sup> Psalm 68:34.

is a similar relationship forced upon them by the context of Psalm 104:3. Both terms appear to have the basic meaning of “movement.”<sup>177</sup>

Certainly, the image that the phrase “rider of the clouds”<sup>178</sup> produces in the mind is one of forward horizontal movement; however, it seems clear from its contexts that רָכַב normally indicates vertical movement, though not equated with עָלָה. With רָכַב, “this relationship [vertical movement] is implicit in the verb itself: *superimposition* is always involved regardless of the means of subordination employed.”<sup>179</sup> It would be prudent to take the adverb “always” with a grain of salt here. עָלָה does not always carry the meaning of superimposition. Van Zijl cites the connection between the meaning of *rkb* (𐎓𐎗𐎕) with “ascend” in the Ugaritic texts and the Old Testament and notes that, in Akkadian, *rakābu* originally meant “to ascend.”<sup>180</sup> As an example of this vertical movement, Barrick points to Leviticus 15:9 where the charge is that every saddle upon which a person-with-issue rides, that saddle shall become unclean. Certainly, the problem is not that the person-with-issue is *riding* on the saddle, but rather that they have *mounted* it. The moment their body straddles the beast its saddle becomes unclean. The meaning of רָכַב is seen throughout Scripture as frequently indicating some level of vertical rather than horizontal movement. For example, see 1 Samuel 25:20 where the use of רָכַב for “to mount” is followed by a different verb for “move forward.” In this verse the basic

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<sup>177</sup> Leonard J. Coppes, “רָכַב,” *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, eds. R. Laird Harris, Gleason Leonard Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 498:216-217. William White, “רָכַב,” *TWOT* 2163:846-848.

<sup>178</sup> Zijl credits Cross with coming up with the meaning “rider of the clouds.” Peter Johannes Van Zijl, “Baal: A Study of Texts in Connexion with Baal in the Ugaritic Epics,” *Alter Orient und Altes Testament* 10 (Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker, 1972): 127.

<sup>179</sup> Barrick, 483.

<sup>180</sup> Zijl, 329.

meaning of רָכַב is not “forward movement”, which is why another verb had to be supplied to complete the thought of “traveling.” The NASB translates the phrase: “It came about as she was *riding* on her donkey and *coming down* by the hidden part of the mountain.” רָכַב here is a Qal participle (fs) as is the occurrence of the complementary verb, יָרַד. A reconstruction of the phrase might read, “It came about [that] after she *had mounted* her donkey, she *came down* by the hidden part of the mountain.” This translation eliminates the verbal duplication in the phrase and is consistent with the basic meaning of רָכַב.

Barrick notes that the essential meaning of רָכַב is “to mount” in both biblical Hebrew and Ugaritic. “This meaning,” he writes, “can be established independently for Akkadian, Aramaic, and Arabic as well.”<sup>181</sup> In 1 Kings 1:33 Solomon was to “mount,” rather than “ride” upon the mule, as the verb רָכַב should indicate. This political move of mounting the mule was to show that Solomon was heir to the throne. After all, the symbolism of attaining kingship is not necessarily achieved through the riding, but through the mounting of a royal mule.<sup>182</sup> In Esther 6 the action occurs again when Haman causes Mordecai to mount a horse. רָכַב here has been traditionally interpreted “ride” but does not necessitate movement. The point is that Mordecai mounts the animal, a display of the manifestation of royal favor.<sup>183</sup> Barrick notes,

A number of biblical descriptions of Yahweh can be better understood once the precise meaning of RKB is recognized. These passages allude, in differing ways, to a mythological pairing of Yahweh with a vehicle, comparable to the vehicular

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<sup>181</sup> Barrick, 487.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 488.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 489.

imagery associated with Baal and similar deities among Israel's cultural neighbors.<sup>184</sup>

To illustrate this, note how in Isaiah 19:1 the verb **רָכַב** may be translated “mount” since it is followed by a verb of forward movement (**בָּוֹא**).<sup>185</sup> The mythological pairing of Yahweh with this chariot-throne is better understood if **רָכַב** is translated according to Barrick’s suggestion. He lists other passages (e.g. Deut 32:13) where he thinks **רָכַב** indicates stationary or vertical or non-horizontal movement.<sup>186</sup> Barrick admits that on rare occasion, the MT will provide an instance where the term indicates horizontal movement: 2 Kings 9:28; 23:30 and 1 Chronicles 13:7.<sup>187</sup> Van Zijl notes regarding the Ugaritic verb that *rkb* is used in reference to mounting a horse, but this means to mount a horse chariot, since horse riding did not become normal in ANE until the twelfth century.<sup>188</sup> Van Zijl does not think that Baal is actually mounting the cloud itself, but the chariot associated with the cloud. So when the cognate Ugaritic term *rkb* appears in connection to Baal riding the clouds, the term should be understood as “he who mounts the cloud chariot” or “Mounter of the Clouds.”

More than twenty years before Barrick’s article, Sigmund Mowinckel had proposed a similar rendering for **רָכַב**. He pointed out the debate over whether the term meant “ride” or “drive,” and concluded that the essential meaning of the term is “to

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 492.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 493.

<sup>186</sup> Barrick, 499 and onward.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., 500.

<sup>188</sup> Zijl, 330.

mount.”<sup>189</sup> However, Mowinckel was not prepared to divorce all “forward movement” from the verb. He agrees that the term does not mean “ride,” but posed that it may mean “drive”—“whenever we meet horses in connection with *rakab* (*markaba*, *rakaš*), we are concerned with chariot horses, horse spans, not with *riders* on horseback.”<sup>190</sup> In this way the verb is more closely connected to the meaning of “drive” rather than “ride,” since driving is a secondary physical movement predicated by “mounting.” In fact, Mowinckel equates רָכַב in Deuteronomy 33:26 with לָרַכַּב בְּשָׁמַיִם קְדָמָיִם in Psalm 68:34 and says that “Yahweh drives his chariot(s) over the heaven, or heaven of old.”<sup>191</sup> Barrick combats this conclusion, stating that “Mowinckel’s view that Yahweh is ‘not standing or sitting on the swift cloud, but driving his chariot over it’ (*VT* 12 [1962] 299) is unsound on both grammatical and contextual grounds.”<sup>192</sup> He points out that there are many primary Hebrew verbs for “drive/ride” in the MT, but רָכַב is not one of them.<sup>193</sup>

Mowinckel and Barrick take considerable pains to maintain their position regarding the “mounting” nature of רָכַב. It might even be suggested that they go too far. For example, Mowinckel suggests that Habakkuk 3:8 does not indicate a “riding” motion when using the word “רָכַב.”<sup>194</sup> However, the clear meaning of the verse insinuates a riding action and רָכַב is not accompanied by a complementary verb of movement.

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<sup>189</sup> Mowinckel, 278.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, 248. My italics.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, 298. Mowinckel sees Psalm 68:5 as Yahweh inheriting the horses and chariot of the Sun-God.

<sup>192</sup> Barrick, 493. Cf. Isaiah 30:16 and Amos 2:15.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, 503.

<sup>194</sup> Mowinckel, 285.

Mowinckel claims this particular use of רָכַב is merely stylistic writing. In this way it seems that Mowinckel and Barrick have overcompensated in their attempt to correct our understanding of the word with the result that one of them (Barrick) would divorce forward movement altogether. At least Mowinckel recognized that some level of forward movement is involved when he suggested the translation “drive.” A more balanced approach may be to see the primary meaning of רָכַב as “mount” or “physically superimpose” with the connotation of forward movement, that is, if such movement is not already indicated by a complementary verb. Van Zijl concludes that “ride” or “rider” still makes more sense than “mount” since it “suggest[s] an active, or even a vertical, movement in the sense of ‘place oneself on top of something, mount, or rise up.’”<sup>195</sup>

Here we have seen that the meaning of רָכַב in Scripture is essentially “to mount,” but with an occasionally implied sense of forward movement.

#### *SITZ IM LEBEN: עָבִים AND עֲרֹכָה*

In Psalm 104:3 Yahweh is described as one הַשָּׁם-עָבִים רָכֹב (‘‘who makes the clouds his chariot’’). The form of ‘‘chariot’’ (רָכֹב) is found only in Psalm 104:3 in Scripture, but also occurs in the Ugaritic religious poetry.<sup>196</sup> Here and in Isaiah 19:1 Yahweh rides on the עָבִים, but Deuteronomy 33:26 and Psalm 68:34 describe the

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<sup>195</sup> Zijl, 330. He cites Ullendorff who claims that *rkb* ‘*rpt* could be connected to Homer’s “νεπεληγερέτα or νεφεληγερέτη” the ‘cloudgatherer.’” And from that the idea of harnessing a horse, or in this case, the clouds for a chariot ride emerges. Zijl says this isn’t a good interpretation because it is a late comparison with Greek and we wouldn’t have the preposition “b” in front of *arabot* if it meant “cloudgatherer.”

<sup>196</sup> White, “רָכַב,” *TWOT*, 2163:847. There is “no necessary connection between the Hebrew and Canaanite usage,” and “the rarity of this form of the common word for chariot suggests that it is an expression limited to the needs of poetry.” A connection, however, is certainly suggestive in light of its use in the various cloud-rider themes in the OT and at least 14 times in Ugaritic—each time being used in nearly the same manner.

platform upon which Yahweh rides as שָׁמַיִם. Psalm 68:5 contains the most interesting version of this platform when it says that he rides בְּעֶרְבֹתָא (“on/through the deserts”). The meaning of שָׁמַיִם seems rather plain as it is used basically the same way in a host of contexts throughout the Old Testament, so it will not be dealt with in depth here. However, a study of עֲבָיִם will be necessary and will be followed by a cross-analysis with the meaning of עֶרְבָה.

The term עֲבָיִם appears to be part of the שָׁמַיִם, functioning somewhat as a metonymy. Patterson notes that “clouds are frequently mentioned synonymously with the heavens (e.g. Job 37:18; Ps 36:5).”<sup>197</sup> What makes “clouds” significant as opposed to the cursory use of “heavens” is the divine imagery associated with the former. The glory of Yahweh is represented by a cloud in Scripture (Exod 16:10). Some have suggested that the cloud imagery in Scripture was a cultic way of protecting the people from the image of the deity, which they greatly feared.<sup>198</sup> However, in Scripture it is Yahweh who communicated the dangers of looking directly upon him, and for that reason he hid himself.<sup>199</sup> He repeatedly represents himself as a cloud or as hiding behind a cloud for the sake of his people. This is especially true in the Reed Sea narratives where he led his people as a dark cloud.<sup>200</sup>

The image of black darkness is often a description of Yahweh’s clouds. The dark smoke coming up from the censer of coals in the most holy place protected the high priest

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<sup>197</sup> Patterson, 20.

<sup>198</sup> Mann, 17.

<sup>199</sup> Cf. Exodus 33.

<sup>200</sup> Exodus 13:21; 19:16, 18; 40:36-38; Deuteronomy 1:33; Psalm 78:14; 105:39.

from looking upon the mercy seat where the glory of God dwelt (Exod 25:22; Lev 16:2; Num 7:89).<sup>201</sup> The cloud in general is a recurring theophany for Yahweh, who comes in a whirlwind in his horse-drawn chariots (Jer 4:13) and as a cloud of thick darkness (Joel 2:2; Ezek 30:2-4). Dark clouds are frequently associated with God's wrath (Lam 2:1; Amos 5:8-9). Isaiah 30:27 speaks of the smoke (עָשָׁן) of Yahweh's anger and Joel 2:31 warns of the sun turning to darkness at his coming. The Psalms describe Yahweh as covering himself in "clouds and thick darkness [which] surround Him; Righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne" (Ps 97:2). Psalm 18:11 states that Yahweh "made darkness His hiding place, His canopy around Him, Darkness of waters, thick clouds of the skies." The passages listed in this paragraph are only a reminder of the extensive nature of divine cloud imagery in the Old Testament and how that imagery frequently presents a picture of darkness. So when considering the עָבִים of Psalm 104:3, it is important to keep in mind the possibility that this word represents dark clouds.<sup>202</sup>

The question at hand is: "How did the cloud function as a vehicle?"

Notes Barrick, "Whether the 'clouds' are to be understood here as a vehicle is unclear," especially since most lean towards the heavens being Yahweh's vehicle.<sup>203</sup> However, Yahweh, cannot be riding the heavens, writes Barrick—it must instead be where the activity is taking place.<sup>204</sup> It may be that the distinction between heavens and

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<sup>201</sup> Mann, 18. Cf. Mettinger, 114.

<sup>202</sup> The following verses contain the word עָבִים and present an image of darkness in theophany: Exodus 19:19; 2 Samuel 22:12; Job 22:14; 36:29; Psalm 18:11, 12; 77:17; Isaiah 14:14; 19:1. Other times this word represents dark storm clouds, but is not necessarily connected to theophany: Judges 5:4; 2 Sam 23:4?; 1 Kings 18:44-45; Job 26:8; 37:11; 38:34; Psalm 147:8; Proverbs 16:15; Ecclesiastes 11:3-4; 12:2; Isaiah 5:6; 18:4. The sins of people are compared to a dark cloud: Isaiah 44:22.

<sup>203</sup> Barrick, 496.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid., 497.

clouds is being drawn too hard, since it is recognized that the terms are, to some extent, synonymous. The clouds seem to be more closely associated with the *actions* of Yahweh (concealing himself, riding, etc.), rather than the *domain* in which the action takes place. In other words, the heavens are the platform of Yahweh's riding, and the same can be said about the clouds; however, Yahweh is not said to “make the heavens his chariot,” but to make the עֲבִים his רֶכֶב. The vehicular movement of the cloud-chariot may be associated with the movement of a storm. In several places the Scriptures indicate that God is in the whirlwind and storm and treads the clouds under his feat (Ps 68:5; 83:16; 97:2; Isa 14:14; 29:6; 66:15). It is probable that the “cloud” is Yahweh’s vehicle rather than the “heavens.” Note also the natural phenomenon of clouds, especially dark storm clouds, as they move across the sky.

In light of the previous discussion concerning the connection between Yahweh’s theophanic cloud (עֲבִים) and darkness, it is important to note here how that theme of darkness continues in our analysis of the עֲרֶבָה. This term occurs in Psalm 68:5 where Yahweh “rides upon the heavens.” The difficulty is that this word in the MT does not literally translate “heavens,” but “deserts.” After the explosion of publications surrounding the Ugaritic texts, scholars tended to exchange the כּ for a פּ so that the text would more smoothly read “who rides upon the *heavens*,” reflecting the Ugaritic noun *rpt* (𐎒𐎖𐎕) and making the text more congruent with the Baal Epic.<sup>205</sup> Here at the

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<sup>205</sup> Chishom, 278. "The phrase is better understood as equivalent to Ugaritic *rk* *rpt*, ‘rider of the clouds’ (NIV). The immediate context focuses on Yahweh's aid to His people, especially in the form of rain (w 8-9). The presence of the epithet ‘rider of the heavens’ later in the poem (v 33) also favors this interpretation. In this case עֲרֶבָה, ‘cloud,’ is a homonym of עֲרֶבָה, ‘steppe,’ and is cognate to Akkadian *urpatu/erpetu* and Ugaritic *rpt*. This is an example of the nonphonemic interchange of the bilabial *b* and *p* attested elsewhere in Ugaritic/Hebrew. See the examples offered by Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms 1-50*, Anchor Bible [16] (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), 141. While Bush's statistical study shows the rarity of

outset of this study on עֲרָבָה it is important to reconsider why this noun is significant to the meaning of Psalm 104:3, in which it does not occur. All the passages mentioning cloud-riding can be better understood from an analysis of their most unusual cousin, Psalm 68:5. If one is to recognize any congruence between these verses—and this paper proposes that these verses are all sharing the same basic motif—then understanding the meaning of עֲרָבָה will necessarily result in a better understanding of the meaning of “clouds” in Psalm 104:3.

Har-El brings up five lexical notes on ערב—the three consonants from which many cognate Hebrew roots come—and concludes with the following: “All the roots mentioned by Kutscher appear to have one element in common: the setting sun, connoting ‘sinking,’ ‘twilight,’ and dark colors and signifying the following: the ‘*erev* is that time of day when the sun sinks in the *ma‘arav* (the west), a time of ‘*alata* (twilight). ‘*aravot* – ‘*arafot* are dark, heavy clouds precipitating rain.”<sup>206</sup> Har-El sees the noun עֲרָבָה as capable of encompassing the idea of dark rain clouds since it is related to the setting of the evening sun. While this is a possibility, the basic meaning of עֲרָבָה, “desert” or “desert plain,” is not identical with the basic meanings of its root ערב.<sup>207</sup>

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such interchanges in roots common to Ugaritic and Hebrew, it nevertheless demonstrates the existence of the phenomenon ("A Critical and Exegetical Study of Psalm 68," 69)."

Cf. Mowinckel, 299. "Since the discoveries at Ugarit, light has been shed on the expression *rokeb ba'arabot* Ps. lxxviii 5 '*arabot* = Ugar. '*rpt* means the clouds, or the skies; like the Ugaritic Ba'al, Yahweh too is 'the skyrider.' But what does 'ride' mean here? Certainly not that Yahweh is sitting upon a cloud and thus transported through the air, but that he drives his chariot over the skies. The thundercloud is mythopoetically considered as the chariot of the god, cf. on the thunder caused the rolling of his wheels Ps. lxxvii 18f.)."

<sup>206</sup> Menashe Har-El, "The Aravah," *Hebrew Studies* 26, no. 2 (1985): 219. Clines lists roots with the same three consonants that mean "evening" (p. 548, 550, 551), sunset (p. 548, 549, 551), and west (p. 548).

<sup>207</sup> Ronald B. Allen, "ערב," *TWOT*, 1688:694.



definition of *ghurab* as a “black raven.”<sup>213</sup> The כָּל-עַרְבִים (mixed multitude), who were separated from Israel in Neh. 13:3, were likely dark-skinned peoples.<sup>214</sup> עַרְבִים means “swarms of flies,” which present an image of darkness.<sup>215</sup> It is not difficult to see from this how the term “Arab” is related—an Arab is, traditionally, a dark-skinned person dwelling in the desert (עַרְבָּה).<sup>216</sup> The עַרְבָּה is a desert plain, valley, or river bed between mountains through which Arabs were said to have traveled. Har-El notes, “Transportation routes in the desert were entirely restricted to the river beds.” He identifies the relationship between “*arav* and an Arab in Arabic and *aravah* in Hebrew, the latter being located in low-lying areas between mountains, which catch the rays of the sun for a longer time because of the higher altitude.”<sup>217</sup> Furthermore, the עַרְבָּה is associated with a stream or trench dug out by water which is shaded by trees making natural paths through the desert.<sup>218</sup> In his article Har-El gives a geographical description of the Jordan עַרְבָּה, the Dead Sea עַרְבָּה, and the עַרְבָּה valley proper, the southernmost of the three.<sup>219</sup> Since valleys functioned as traveling routes throughout the Levant it may become more clear why the psalmist described Yahweh as one who rides through the עַרְבָּה. Har-El’s article gives a summary of the meaning of עַרְבָּה but does not conclude that its appearance in

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<sup>213</sup> Har-El, 219. Cf. Clines, 551. עורב = raven or rook. Clines cites Song of Solomon 5:11 where the male’s hair is “black as raven” (שחרוח כעורב).

<sup>214</sup> Har-El, 219. Cf. Clines, 547, 549, 550, 551.

<sup>215</sup> Clines, 547, 549.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*, 549, 553.

<sup>217</sup> Har-El, 220-221.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.* Clines, 552.

Psalm 68:5 should be understood in any particular way. Nevertheless, his comments on the etymological variance of this word can help us determine what exactly the Psalmist intended by עֲרָבָה.<sup>220</sup> Desert valleys are shaded areas where Yahweh traveled with his people through the wilderness into the hill country of the Levant—these valleys and desert regions have since become a mythological plain of travel for Yahweh. If Psalm 68 is an exodus Psalm, as Lemche suggests, then maybe it makes sense that Yahweh rides through the “deserts” protecting his people.<sup>221</sup>

The dark desert cloud may be associated with billowing desert dust caused by the armies of Yahweh whose marching drives up this dust beneath them to create a dark cloud-like mass in the desert. The LORD of armies accompanies his people in this way through his presence on the Ark of the Covenant. Mettinger goes to great pains to show that the *sitz im leben* of יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת (“Yahweh of Hosts”) is the temple cult, which identifies primarily with the cherub throne of Yahweh.<sup>222</sup> Mettinger writes that “The central cultic object of the temple was the enormous cherubim throne with the Ark as its footstool.”<sup>223</sup> The strong connection Mettinger makes between יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת and the cherub-throne may help shed light on the premise that the armies of Yahweh drive up a dark cloud of sand and dust as they are traveling through the desert, an event represented

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<sup>220</sup> Har-El, 221.

<sup>221</sup> Niels Peter Lemche, "Psalm 68" in *Early Israel: Anthropological and Historical Studies on the Israelite Society Before the Monarchy*. Supplements to *Vetus Testamentum* 37 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1985): 339. Lemche claims Psalm 68 is an exodus psalm. The author of Ps. 68 “knew the complexes of tradition which are now preserved in the Pentateuch and was able to use them to form a continuous description of Israel’s path from Egypt to the Promised Land.” Chisholm notes that like Deuteronomy 33:26, Psalm 68 pictures Yahweh as the “rider of the heavens” (v. 34) who thunders in the skies as an affirmation of His sovereignty over the earth’s kingdoms (cf. vv. 32, 34-35). Psalm 68:5 even applies Baal’s title “rider of the clouds” to Yahweh (Chisholm, 278).

<sup>222</sup> Mettinger, 123.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

figuratively by Yahweh's cloud-chariot. Note Isaiah 29:6—"From the *LORD of hosts* you will be punished with thunder and earthquake and loud noise, [with] *whirlwind and tempest* and the flame of a consuming fire" (my italics). In Jeremiah 4:11-13 the invaders from the North are described as a "dry wind" coming "in the clouds" as a "whirlwind."<sup>224</sup> The desert winds and the armies of Yahweh produce a dark cloud that threatens his enemies. The Ark is frequently connected to battle in the Old Testament, since it went out with the Israelites to war.<sup>225</sup> The Ark had the unique function of being perceived "as a type of palladium in battle, embodying the presence of Yahweh as he marched to fight for Israel and acting as a security for victory over her adversaries."<sup>226</sup> Miller points to the Song of the Ark in Numbers 10:35-36 where Moses invokes Yahweh to "rise up" and "scatter" his enemies so that they would flee from before him. In a similar Ugaritic text (CTA 4.VII.35-36) the "enemies" and "haters" of Baal flee from before his palace theophany.<sup>227</sup> As can be seen in the following paragraphs, it is possible to maintain this connection even if the Ark is intrinsically connected with the desert as Yahweh is said to ride upon the deserts (Ps 68:5). Regarding the epithet, "Yahweh of Hosts," Miller points out that "most scholars" agree "that the epithet in its earliest stages is to be associated with the Ark."<sup>228</sup> Admittedly, inserting the concept of **צְבָאוֹת יְהוָה** complicates our analysis of the relationship between **עֲבֵים** and **עֲרֵבָה** since so much work still needs to be

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<sup>224</sup> Mowinckel, 287.

<sup>225</sup> Miller, 146.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid., 145. Cf. 1 Samuel 4-6.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid., 146.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid., 152.

done on the involvement of this important phrase. However, there is one other strong possibility to consider in the comparison of עֲרֶבָה with the dark storm clouds of Yahweh. The strong winds of the Negev can create a dust storm that has the appearance of a dark cloud chasing across the desert. This southern wind is known as the *khasmin*, which is “a hot, dry, dusty wind occurring in late spring and summer around the eastern Mediterranean. A counterpart of the sirocco, it is a southerly wind over Egypt, and an easterly over the Negev Desert and parts of Saudi Arabia.”<sup>229</sup> The approach of Yahweh may be connected to a dark dust-storm tearing through the desert. In this way, darkness may be an association between the "desert" of Psalm 68:5 and the "clouds" of Psalm 104:3.

Since Psalm 68:5 is formulaically related (by motif) to the other cloud-rider verses, it is possible to see an association between the עֲרֶבָה of Psalm 68:5 and the עֲבִים of Psalm 104:3, and that association is broken down thusly: the עֲרֶבָה is the desert with its dark dust clouds and the עֲבִים is the dark heavenly cloud—both are theophanies of Yahweh. Although עֲרֶבָה is here shown to be an acceptable reading of the MT, there is still the temptation to exchange the ב for a פ to produce “heavens” in order to smooth out the text from a comparative standpoint. Since Baal and Yahweh are said to be riders of the clouds and heavens, it has been the opinion of many that the text of Psalm 68 conforms to the broader context of this motif. However, one must wonder whether the desire to modify the MT here is motivated by tendencies harkening to parallelomania.

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<sup>229</sup> "Khamsin" *A Dictionary of Weather*, Storm Dunlop. Oxford University Press, 2008. *Oxford Reference Online*. Oxford University Press, Liberty University 19 December 2009 <http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t16.e939>

To conclude here, the various terms that are used to describe the constitution of the platform or vehicle upon which Yahweh rides (עֲבִים, עֲרֶבֶה, שָׁמַיִם) are made up of an atmospheric (in the heavens) or terrestrial (in the desert) cloud of thick darkness. Therefore, a unified theology of cloud-riding in Scripture is not hindered by the translation "deserts" in Psalm 68:5.

### THE CONTEXT OF THE CLOUD-RIDER MOTIF IN THE UGARITIC TEXTS

The contextual approach seeks to view a text within its own context and to view the comparative elements of that text according to their specific function. This must come before making comparisons to elements in other texts. For this reason the cloud-rider theme will be examined in its own context and function in Ugaritic before being compared to Psalm 104:3.

The meaning of the Ugaritic phrase *rkb 'rpt*<sup>230</sup> has been debated by scholars since it was first translated in the early twentieth century. The above discussions regarding the meaning of *rkb* and cloud-gathering in the Greek epics make up some of the debate. In Ugaritic, the term *rkb 'rpt* means “charioteer of the clouds,” and it is applied to Baal who “chariots” through the heavens.<sup>231</sup> The phrase *rkb 'rpt* is more of an epithet than an action; however, when the phrase or some form of it is applied to Yahweh, an action is

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<sup>230</sup> Gregorio del Olmo Lete and Joaquín Sanmartín, *A Dictionary of the Ugaritic Language in the Alphabetic Tradition* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 184. Olmo’s compelte entry—“*rpt* n. f. ‘cloud(s)’ (Akk. *erpetu*, *urpatu*, AHw 243, 1432; CAD E 302ff. Cf. De Moor SP 98; Emerton Fs. Williams 44; Watson NABU 1998 83); par.: *ars* Forms: sg./pl. *'rpt*. Cloud(s): *rkb 'rpt* Charioteer of the clouds, epithet of the god Baal (cf. *rkb (I)*; Hb. *rkb b 'rbwt*, Ps. 68:5 nd cf. *ibid.* 34; cf. Loretz UF 19 1987 101ff.); *ysly 'rpt* he implored the clouds, 1.19 I 39; *yr 'rpt tmtr* may the clouds bring rain!, 1.19 I 40; *w at qh 'rptk* and you, take your clouds, 1.5 V 7 (cf. *rh*, *mdl*, *mtr*, *ibid.* ln. 7-8; cf. 1.13:34); [*yhd*] *b 'rpt [nšrm]* [he saw the eagles] in the clouds, 1.19 II 57; *yph bdqt 'rpt* may he open a loophole in the clouds, 1.4 VII 19 and par.; *w <y>tm qlh b 'rpt* and may he give his voice from the clouds, 1.4 V 8 (// *l ars*). Unc. ctx. *'rpt tht*, 1.8 II 11 (cf. 1.4 VII 57).

<sup>231</sup> Olmo, 184.

usually implied.<sup>232</sup> This is not to say, however, that there was not a social consciousness of Baal's activities as the Cloud-Rider—in other words, he was not given that title arbitrarily or for no reason. Each of the instances in the Ugaritic texts where *rkb* 'rpt occurs is discussed below. The goal here is to determine the context and/or function of these instances.

There are at least fourteen clear places where this epithet occurs in the Baal texts. The contexts in which these epithets occur include the themes of kingship, divine warrior, and fertility.<sup>233</sup> The first instance is in KTU 1.2:IV:8 where Baal is in the thick of battle with Yam, the god of the sea. The two are fighting because Baal desires to build a palace for himself to declare his kingship over the gods—Yam is less than pleased with this assertion. Baal insults Yam and claims that he<sup>234</sup> will fall. It is Baal, however, who is losing the battle with Yam. Kothar-wa-Khasis, the divine craftsman, challenges Baal to press on despite his projected failure. Kothar-wa-Khasis gives Baal two clubs with which he defeats Yam.<sup>235</sup> In this text Kothar-wa-Khasis speaks to Baal saying, "I hereby

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<sup>232</sup> This can be observed by surveying the instances of the motif in the Ugaritic texts and those in the Old Testament.

<sup>233</sup> See Appendix B for a full chart explaining the recurrence of this epithet in Ugaritic. The following texts were used in the acquisition and assimilation of the material used to construct this chart: Aicha Rahmouni, *Divine Epithets in the Alphabetic Ugaritic Texts* (Leiden: Brill, 2008). John C. L. Gibson and Godfrey Rolles Driver, *Canaanite myths and legends* (London: T & T Clark International, 1977). William W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger, Jr., eds. *The Context of Scripture 1: Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World* (New York: Brill, 1997). N Wyatt, *Religious Texts from Ugarit: The Words of Ilimilku and his Colleagues* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998). English translations from the Ugaritic tablets used in this paper come from the above sources.

<sup>234</sup> Nahar, "river," is another name for Yam. Cf. Susan Ackerman "Myth," *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan, eds. Oxford University Press Inc. 1993. *Oxford Reference Online*. Oxford University Press. Liberty University. 20 December 2009 <http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t120.e0510>

<sup>235</sup> Gibson, 5, 43.

announce to you, Prince Ba'lu, //and I repeat, Cloud-Rider."<sup>236</sup> Pardee's English translation here is not the typical "rider of the clouds" rendering, but the same idea is maintained. The parallelism here, a common literary feature in Semitic languages, renames Baal as the "cloud-rider." As stated above, the goal is to take this instance of the epithet and ask the question: in which context does it appear? To do this we will draw from the above stated categories that are based on prior analysis of this epithet (kingship, divine warrior, and fertility). In the present context, Baal is battling with his enemies, employing the weapons given him by a fellow god. The two categories that come to mind immediately are kingship and divine warrior. The extended context includes the idea of Baal building his palace as king, but since there is no reference to Baal's kingship in this immediate context, it must be determined that Baal is called the "Cloud-Rider" in relation to his being a warrior.

The next instance is found in KTU 1.2:IV:29 where Baal is dragging out Yam after defeating him when Anat rebukes Baal for being too slow and exhorts him to "scatter" Yam, which harkens to other *chaoskampf* myths where the sea creature is scattered or mutilated.<sup>237</sup> Baal does so and as a result the coming of the spring season is no longer hindered by the mischief of Yam. Anat, Baal's sister and consort, proclaims jubilantly Baal's kingship.<sup>238</sup> Anat cries out "Scatter (him), O Mighty [Ba'lu], //scatter

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<sup>236</sup> Dennis Pardee, "Ugaritic Myths" in *The Context of Scripture: Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World*, eds. William W. Hallo, K. Lawson Younger Jr. and Harry A. Hoffner, Jr. (New York: Brill, 1997), 248. "KTU 1.2:IV:8—"l rgmt lk . l zbl . b'l . tnt . l rkb . 'rpt."—Aicha Rahmouni, *Divine Epithets in the Alphabetic Ugaritic Texts*, trans. by J.N. Ford, *Handbook of Oriental Studies, Part One: The Ancient Near East and Middle East* (HOSANE / HOSNME 93 Brill Academic Publishers, 2009), 288.

<sup>237</sup> As in *Enuma Elish*.

<sup>238</sup> Gibson, 5-6, 44.

(him), O Cloud-Rider.”<sup>239</sup> In this context several themes come into play. The divine warrior Baal drags out the carcass of Yam in victory over the latter’s defeat. As a result of this overwhelming victory, the coming spring rains will now certainly fall as Baal will be available to deliver them, meaning that fertility will be on the land. Finally, Anat proclaims Baal’s kingship toward the close of the passage. Miller notes that Baal and Anat are warrior deities “par excellence,” a fact that can be observed here in context. So the themes of divine warrior, fertility, and kingship are all in play here in KTU 1.2:IV:29.

In KTU 1.3:II:40 Anat has just slaughtered the inhabitants dwelling in a valley.<sup>240</sup> She is covered in gore and is hysterically elated with the work of her hands. The warriors and guards who escaped her the first time she slaughters in her own palace until she is swimming in blood. Notes Gibson, "Wiping the blood from the house and from her own person, Anat performs a rite at which a peace-offering is poured out; she replaces the furniture and scooping up dew, washes herself with it and remakes her toilet."<sup>241</sup> The third person narrator of the text reads, "She gathers water and washes, //dew of heavens, oil of earth, //the showers of the Cloud-Rider."<sup>242</sup> Here it is rather plain that the theme associated with Baal is fertility, since his “showers” are mentioned. Even though the surrounding context here may lead one to conclude that the divine warrior attribute should be applied, it is Anat’s statement that changes the context quickly from a gruesome war scene to a gentle bath in the dew. Baal is given credit for the moisture that

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<sup>239</sup> Pardee, 249. KTU 1.2:IV:29—“*bt l ályyn . b[l'] bt . l rkb . 'rpt.*”—Rahmouni, 288.

<sup>240</sup> Anat is one of the various Canaanite goddesses whose names are all very similar (in some cases synonymous) and whose function is often to promote war and fertility. Anat and Astarte (a.k.a. Athtart) are thought to be the same goddess. Cf. Stern, 23.

<sup>241</sup> Gibson, 8-9, 48.

<sup>242</sup> Pardee, 251. KTU 1.3:II:40—“*tl . šmm . šmn . árş . rbb [r]kb 'rpt.*”—Rahmouni, 288.

comes from the heavens and the earth, it seems, since the parallelism in the text equates the two sources with “showers.”

In KTU 1.3:III:38 (= 1.3:IV:4) Baal begins to think about a particular performance/rite his sister Anat is known for and sends messengers to her so that she would meet him on "his holy hill Zephon" to perform this rite, which apparently includes playing the lyre and singing love songs to Baal. Anat hears from Baal's messengers and agrees to do it "only if Baal should first set his thunderbolt in the sky and flash forth his lightning."<sup>243</sup> In this quotation Baal is speaking to his couriers before he sends them off to deliver the message to Anat. He says, "So, what enemy has arisen against Ba'lu,/(what) adversary against the Cloud-Rider?"<sup>244</sup> Here once again the surrounding context suggests fertility, but the question Baal poses to his attendants demands a swift change in context to the theme of divine warrior. The question is whether there is a formidable adversary of Baal's who poses a legitimate threat to him. The answer his attendants give is a solemn “no”—"No enemy has arisen against Ba'lu,/(no) adversary against the Cloud-Rider."<sup>245</sup> The attendants address Anat saying, “(Rather we have a) message (from) Mighty Ba'lu,/(a word (from) the mightiest of warriors).”<sup>246</sup>

Gibson sets the scene for KTU 1.4:III:11:

Anat, as they draw near to Athirat, is encouraging Baal with the prospect of an eternal kingdom; but Baal is himself still anxious and reminds his sister how because he has no house he has been treated with contumely in the assembly of

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<sup>243</sup> Gibson, 9, 50.

<sup>244</sup> Pardee, 252. KTU 1.3:III:38 (= 1.3:IV:4) “*mn . ib . yp' l b'l .srt . l rkb . 'rpt'*—Rahmouni, 288.

<sup>245</sup> Pardee, 252. KTU 1.3:IV:6—“*l ib . yp' l b'l .srt . l rkb . 'rpt'*—Rahmouni, 288. To prevent confusion, "Ibid" will not appear when multiple sources are cited in one note.

<sup>246</sup> Pardee, 251.

the gods, where he has been served with foul and disgraceful food, though he hates all meanness and lewd conduct.<sup>247</sup>

Baal introduces his own conversation by saying, "Again Mighty Ba'lu (speaks),//Cloud-Rider tells his story."<sup>248</sup> Baal proceeds to discuss his longing for a palace of his own. Clearly, the context at present is kingship. A few lines down in KTU 1.4:III:18 Baal expresses his disgust for poor sacrifices: "Now there are two (kinds of) feasts (that) Ba'lu hates,//three (that) Cloud-Rider (hates)."<sup>249</sup> The context is still kingship and the theme is extended by Baal's complaining about the insufficiency of the other gods' sacrifices to him. In this he expresses his superiority over them. Pardee notes, "The divine banquet is depicted in the same terms as are used in the sacrificial feasts practiced by humans, though divinities would not, of course, 'sacrifice' the beasts in the same sense as humans would."<sup>250</sup> Nevertheless, kingship is in view here.

In KTU 1.4:V:60 Kothar-wa-Khasis has been invited over to eat before he begins building Baal's palace. Baal urges his fellow god to hurry up and get started. Kothar-wa-Khasis suggests he build a latticed window in the palace but Baal says no. Here Kothar-wa-Khasis is responding to Baal's urges: "Listen, O Mighty Ba'lu,//understand, O Cloud-Rider."<sup>251</sup> The context is once again clear—kingship. It could be argued that fertility is also in view because the latticed window could be a way in which Baal could water the earth. However, it is true, as Pardee notes, that "Kôṭaru-wa-Ĥasīsu's motivation for

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<sup>247</sup> Gibson, 11.

<sup>248</sup> KTU 1.4:III:11—"y[*t*]b . *álíyn* . b'l y't'dd . rkb . 'rpt"—Pardee, 258; Gibson, 11, 58.

<sup>249</sup> Pardee, 258; Gibson, 11, 58. KTU 1.4:III:18—"dm . tn . dbhm . šná . b'l . tlt rkb . 'rpt."—Rahmouni, 288.

<sup>250</sup> *Ibid.* n. 142.

<sup>251</sup> Pardee, 261. KTU 1.4:V:60 "*šm'* . *lálíyn* . b'l bn . l rkb . 'rpt"—Rahmouni, 288-289.

wanting to put the disputed window in the palace is not stated: is it the simple fact that palaces had windows or is the contractor somehow in league with Môtu, whose defeat of Ba‘lu follows the eventual opening of the window?”<sup>252</sup> Pardee does not suggest fertility, but once the window is in place Baal is rather pleased with it since it enables him to pass his storm through it to the earth.<sup>253</sup>

In KTU 1.5:II:7 Baal is admittedly terrified of Mot whom he must soon battle. Either Baal is speaking here, or someone is speaking on his behalf.<sup>254</sup> It reads, “Mighty Ba’lu will fear him, // Cloud-Rider will be frightened of him.”<sup>255</sup> Here the context should be divine warrior, but Baal’s horror at the sight of his brother “Death” has him cowering away. We could apply the arbitrary theme of “fear” to this context, but it would be better to remain inside the realm of divine warrior since a battle is taking place between two gods.

In KTU 1.10:I:7 Anat is seeking to make love with Baal.<sup>256</sup> She begins her appeal to him thusly, “[V]aliant Baal / the Charioteer of the Clouds.”<sup>257</sup> Anat is thereafter informed that she will give birth to a bull from Baal.<sup>258</sup> The Canaanite gods had consorts, and Anat belonged to Baal, in a manner of speaking. Fertility, therefore, appears to be the primary context here. Yet, Anat addresses Baal as “[V]aliant.” This may be sufficient to

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<sup>252</sup> Pardee, 261.

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>254</sup> Gibson, 15, 69.

<sup>255</sup> Pardee, 266. KTU 1.5:II:7—“*yr'a'un . 'al'yn . b'l tt'.nn . rkb . 'rpt'*”—Rahmouni, 289.

<sup>256</sup> Gibson, 32, 132.

<sup>257</sup> Wyatt, 155. Wyatt translates “rider of the clouds” as “charioteer of the clouds,” but the same Ugaritic words are being referenced. KTU 1.10:I:7—“*[ 'al]'iyn . b'l [ ] . rkb . 'rpt'*”—Rahmouni, 289.

<sup>258</sup> Gibson, 32.

place this text into the theme of divine warrior, but it is difficult to be dogmatic on this point. Rather, it may be suggested that some form of fertility is present. The exact category under which to place this instance is uncertain.

In KTU 1.10:III:36 Anat gives birth to the before-said bull some time after copulating with Baal.<sup>259</sup> She rushes to Baal to deliver the great news and addresses him in the following manner: “for a bull is born to Baal, / and a wild ox to the Charioteer of the Clouds!”<sup>260</sup> Once again, it can only be conjectured that some level of fertility is present. Though Baal is primarily a fertilizer of the earth and Anat a fertilizer of the body, it is possible that the two themes converge at this point. Baal, however, does fertilize the womb as can be seen in the case of Daniel.<sup>261</sup>

In KTU 1.19:I:43-44 Daniel, the father of the wise son Aqhat, is experiencing a drought. Daniel’s daughter, Paghat approaches her father and begins to mourn by rending cloth. Writes Gibson, “Daniel, now as a result of her action in fear lest a prolonged drought may be imminent, prays that the dew and rains may come in their proper season.”<sup>262</sup> It appears that Baal is going to cause a draught for 8 years. Daniel cries out in anger to Baal, whose powers of fertility have already given him a son, and says, “For seven years Baal shall fail, / for eight, the Charioteer of the clouds!”<sup>263</sup> The obvious context here is terrestrial fertility. The presence of the cloud-rider theme in the context of

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<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>260</sup> Wyatt, 160. KTU 1.10:III:36—“*k . ūbr . l b'l [.] yldw r'rm . l rkb [.] 'rpt'*”—Rahmouni, 289.

<sup>261</sup> Matthews, 70. “Danil and Danatiya were unable to have a son until Baal, their divine patron, helped them.”

<sup>262</sup> Gibson, 25.

<sup>263</sup> Wyatt, 296. KTU 1.19:I:43-44—“*šb' . šnt ysrk . b'l . tmn . rkb 'rpt'*.”—Rahmouni, 289.

dark, rain-bringing storm-clouds could be a point of connection between the meaning of the cloud-riding motif in the Baal texts and Scripture.

In KTU 1.92:40 Baal is seeking to make love with Anat, but she is reluctant. A great deal of the text here is damaged and illegible so that it is difficult to make much observation: “[...] the Charioteer of the Clouds.”<sup>264</sup> Since erotica is once again in view, the only theme that can be applied with any basis is fertility. A few lines down the epithet occurs again, only this time with the co-epithet, *álíyn*: “[...] for Valiant Baal, / [...] for the Charioteer of the Clouds.”<sup>265</sup> Again, the overriding context is fertility, but since the epithet *álíyn* (“valiant”) is present a notion of divine warrior exists. Nothing can be determined with certainty here.

Having observed and evaluated all fourteen of the known instances of the cloud-rider epithet, it is important to note that there were six strong occurrences of a divine warrior context, one more being questionable. There were four occurrences of a kingship context, none of which were questionable. And finally there were four strong occurrences of the fertility theme, three more being questionable.

Occurrence	Divine Warrior	Kingship	Fertility
KTU 1.2:IV:8	*	*	
KTU 1.2:IV:29	*	*	*
KTU 1.3:II:40			*
KTU 1.3:III:38	*		
KTU 1.3:IV:6	*		
KTU 1.4:III:11		*	
KTU 1.4:III:18		*	
KTU 1.4:V:60		*	?
KTU 1.5:II:7	*		
KTU 1.10:I:7	?		?

<sup>264</sup> Wyatt, 374. KTU 1.92:40—“[p npš npš] *b'l thwyn* [hm brlt rk] *b 'rpt'*—Rahmouni, 289.

<sup>265</sup> Wyatt, 374. KTU 1.92.40—“[xxxxx] *l 'al'iyn b'l* [xxxxx] *x . rkb 'rpt'*—Rahmouni, 289.

KTU 1.10:III:36			*
KTU 1.19:I:43-44			*
KTU 1.92:40			?
KTU 1.92.40	?		

From this, it becomes apparent that the most frequent themes in which the epithet-motif of cloud-riding occur are divine warrior and kingship.<sup>266</sup> In fact, it could be argued that the divine warrior theme always belongs as a sub-category of kingship, but they were separated here for closer analysis. There are a few more severely damaged places in the Ugaritic texts where the epithet is thought to occur, but only one consonant or less remains for the translator to work with so they will not be included in this study.<sup>267</sup> In reading *Religious Texts from Ugarit*, one other instance of this motif appeared that cannot properly be called an epithet. KTU 1.4:V:7 reads, “And now the season of his rains may Baal indeed appoint, the season of his storm-chariot.”<sup>268</sup> The translation of *b‘l.y’dn. ‘dn.tkt.bglʔ* is debated. Gibson translates it as “a time for his rain, a time for (his) barque (to appear) in the snow.” He notes, “The white snow clouds are pictured as Baal’s ship” and points to the Egyptian sky-ship of Ra.<sup>269</sup> Wyatt acknowledges that *tkt* means “ship,” but suggests *tkt* be understood as *trt*, which means “abundance of moisture” or “cloud.”<sup>270</sup> From this, some conclude that “storm-chariot” is a possibility. If this is an instance of the cloud-riding motif, then note that it also occurs in the context of palace

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<sup>266</sup> By not including the uncertain references (indicated by a question mark), the overwhelming number of hits occur in the warrior and kingship contexts.

<sup>267</sup> KTU 1.3:IV:27 and 1.10:III:21.

<sup>268</sup> Wyatt, 101. The text appears as, “b‘l.y’dn. ‘dn.tkt.bglʔ”—Gibson, 60.

<sup>269</sup> Gibson, 60.

<sup>270</sup> Wyatt, 101.

building. If Baal's palace is built, the thought goes, he will be able to bring the "season of his rains." So even this debated instance occurs in the context of kingship. As Chisholm states, Baal's quest for kingship was his primary goal, a fact observable from a cursory reading of the texts.<sup>271</sup>

Having thoroughly surveyed the contexts surrounding the epithet of cloud-riding in the Ugaritic texts, it is now appropriate to see whether Psalm 104:3 exists in a similar context. If Psalm 104:3 can be identified as part of an enthronement/kingship passage, the likelihood increases significantly that there is some relationship between the two texts.

### **THE CONTEXT OF THE CLOUD-RIDER MOTIF IN PSALM 104:3**

Considering the discussion surrounding the mythological significance of the cherub-chariot and how it is intricately connected to kingship, it almost seems unnecessary to embark upon further analysis of this theme. However, every text has a unique context and that is why it is important to understand Psalm 104 *in situ* before proceeding.

Dating any one of the Psalms is a difficult process that often leads to uncertain conclusions, at best. Scholars have devised theories about the history, authorship and dating of this text but, as can be expected, all conclusions are offered with fingers crossed. Due to the nature of the psalm itself (a hymn of praise), Allen suggests that the hymn was probably written by a priest for the purpose of communal worship.<sup>272</sup> Others have recognized the connection between Psalm 103 and 104, and have thus concluded that they may have the same author or were at least produced under similar

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<sup>271</sup> Chisholm, 271.

<sup>272</sup> Allen, 39.

circumstances.<sup>273</sup> Since Psalm 103 is known by its superscription to be a Psalm of David, Psalm 104 might also be; but as Broyles points out, this initial phrase can refer to David himself or to the Davidic king.<sup>274</sup>

Concerning the date of the psalm there are a few more opinions. The nature of its language led Crusemann to suggest a late date, but a pre-exilic date cannot be ruled out. Some say that the preterit use of the imperfect may point to an early date for the psalm, but other scholars have suggested a postexilic date due to its relationship to Genesis.<sup>275</sup> Baker proposes a pre-exilic date suggesting that the presence of ׀׀ indicates this.<sup>276</sup> While Kraus is less committed, he still agrees that a pre-exilic date cannot be ruled out.<sup>277</sup> Craigie suggests, "It is possible, though by no means certain, that Psalm 104 was composed initially as a dedication hymn for the newly constructed temple of the Lord."<sup>278</sup> He is referring to the Solomonic temple, of course, so his suggestion is that the text is pre-exilic.

In all, this broad range of opinions should demonstrate to the reader that Psalm 104, like most of the other psalms, is nearly impossible to date or verify the authorship of with any certainty. The question should be asked, however, whether a concrete date is of critical importance for our understanding of the mythological import of the text. The

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<sup>273</sup> Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 60-150, A Continental Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 298.

<sup>274</sup> Broyles, 27.

<sup>275</sup> Allen, 40.

<sup>276</sup> David G. Barker, "The Waters of the Earth: An Exegetical Study of Psalm 104:1-9," *Grace Theological Journal* 7 (1986): 55, 69. Cf. Psalm 104:25 for ׀׀.

<sup>277</sup> Kraus, 299.

<sup>278</sup> Peter C. Craigie, *Ugarit and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 77.

mythological imagery in Psalm 104 (cloud-riding, temple-building, *chaoskampf*) can be seen in ANE literature from pre-conquest times into the New Testament. So regardless of where exactly in Old Testament chronology Psalm 104 is placed, it still remains a significant text for comparative studies in mythopoetical language. In this instance, the date of the psalm does not drastically affect its theological context.

The structure of Psalm 104 has been presented in different ways. Grogan sees the first four verses, where the cloud-riding theme occurs, as focusing on Yahweh's greatness and covering the first two days of creation.<sup>279</sup> The remainder of the chapter, however, does not present the days of creation in sequential order. Gunkel sees the psalm beginning abruptly in the middle of verse 2—the split can be seen where the testimony of Yahweh's greatness is intruded upon by the description of how he canopies the heavens.<sup>280</sup> As a grammatical justification, he poses that everywhere where one finds a participle in the psalm a new section occurs.<sup>281</sup> However, it may be that Gunkel's analysis itself is more intrusive than the second part of verse two since, like Grogan points out, the first four verses are a testimony to the greatness of God while the grammatical break occurs in verse 5 where participles are replaced with finite verbs. Goldingay also chooses to make the break between verses 4 and 5.<sup>282</sup> He says that the presence of articular participles in verse 3 indicates a new section, showing that what was before should not be intimately connected with what follows, so Yahweh's tent is not

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<sup>279</sup> Grogan, 174

<sup>280</sup> Hermann Gunkel and Joachim Begrich, *Introduction to Psalms: The Genres of the Religious Lyric of Israel*, Mercer Library of Biblical Studies (Macon, Ga: Mercer University Press, 1998), 39.

<sup>281</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>282</sup> Goldingay, 183.

equal to Yahweh's palace.<sup>283</sup> He goes on to say that "while participles sometimes indicate that creation was not merely a past act, here they serve to make a past event a present reality before our eyes."<sup>284</sup>

The psalm begins with the psalmist invoking himself to praise God. It starts out as an individual praise song in verse 1, but at the end he says "praise YHWH" which indicates it was communal.<sup>285</sup> This introduction follows with "*mythological observations about nature*. Light is YHWH's coat; the clouds his chariot; wind and flames his messengers (Ps 104:2-4)."<sup>286</sup> Psalm 104 is a psalm of kingship and enthronement. The connection between this psalm and the creation account in Genesis indicates this since, as Allen says, creation is usually tied to kingship.<sup>287</sup> Notes Kraus, "The praise of the Creator will certainly have had its 'Sitz im Leben' in the homage before 'King Yahweh' in the worship of Israel."<sup>288</sup> Allen states that "founding the earth is a cultic formula associated with Yahweh's kingship as victor over chaotic forces."<sup>289</sup> Kingship is usually affirmed in texts where the motif of *chaoskampf* is present. As stated above, the warrior god battles

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<sup>283</sup> Ibid., 184.

<sup>284</sup> Goldingay, 183.

<sup>285</sup> Goldingay, 181.

<sup>286</sup> Gunkel, 51. Concerning Psalm 104 and others, Gunkel notes that "the poets connect with the aesthetic enthusiasm for the beauty and unity of the world with the religious feelings of reverence and worship. These *portrayals of nature* are characterized by their sense of reality, their delightful richness of color, but at the same time their majestic simplicity" (53).

<sup>287</sup> Allen, 39. Cf. Arthur Warren Walker-Jones, "Alternative Cosmogonies in the Psalms" (Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton Theological Seminary, 1991), 89. Monarchy is one of a three features that typically occur in the Psalms and especially so here, in Psalm 104.

<sup>288</sup> Kraus, 299.

<sup>289</sup> Allen, 45. Cf. Goldingay, 185.

with the primordial sea, establishes order and builds his palace.<sup>290</sup> Both Yahweh's palace and the earth are threatened by the dangers of water, so they are firmly fixed by him.<sup>291</sup>

One of the elements that make this a kingship psalm is Yahweh's establishment of a heavenly palace, the beams of which "he sets on the waters"—**עַל־יַדְיָוָה** (v.3). One verse prior to this Yahweh stretches the heavens out to make a tent for himself, where immediately the thought of the wilderness tabernacle and the tent of El come to mind—**כִּי־רִיעָה**.<sup>292</sup> In verse 13 Yahweh "waters the hills from his upper chambers"—**מִשְׁקָה הַרִים מֵעַל־יַדְיָוָה**—an activity interestingly similar to the way Baal uses the window of his palace. Some have suggested that the setting of this psalm and its function is the "festival of the enthronement of Yahweh."<sup>293</sup> Others, like Craigie, have suggested that the psalm was sung at the dedication of the Solomonic Temple: "It is possible, though by no means certain, that Psalm 104 was composed initially as a dedication hymn for the newly constructed temple of the Lord."<sup>294</sup> Craigie points to the Phoenician craftsmen Solomon employed in the building of the temple, seeing there an avenue for Canaanite influence in the production of the psalm. It has already been noted above that Yahweh's cherub-chariot represents the throne of God where he **יָשָׁב** and rules the heavens. Notes Mettinger, "Around the cherubim throne and the ark a theological

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<sup>290</sup> Note Broyles above: "In the psalms of Yahweh's kingship and a number of other psalms, there are three recurring motifs: Yahweh proves himself superior to the seas and establishes the world...he is acclaimed as king...and reference is made to his temple or palace" (25).

<sup>291</sup> Goldingay, 184-185. In reference to his palace, the text says that Yahweh established his palace in the waters and firmly fixed the earth, after which came the waters of death. Yahweh's preparedness and authority prevent the waters from destroying his work.

<sup>292</sup> Kraus, 299. Cf. Isaiah 40:22; 42:5; 45:12; 51:13.

<sup>293</sup> *Ibid.* Kraus does not hold this view—he is only noting it.

<sup>294</sup> Craigie, *Ugarit and the Old Testament*, 78.

complex of ideas takes form in the Jerusalem cultic tradition, having at its center the notion of God as king.”<sup>295</sup> He goes on to say, “On the immense cherubim throne in the inmost shrine, God sits enthroned as king. Thus Solomon says at the dedication of the temple (1 Kgs 8:13): **בנה בניתי בית זבל לך מכון לשבתך עולמים** I have built a royal house for thee, An established place for thy throne forever.”<sup>296</sup>

Yahweh is also a divine warrior in Psalm 104. Rather than go into an exposition of how this is played out, it is sufficient to look back on the description of *chaoskampf* and recognize how the formula is developed with Yahweh’s rebuking of the waters in verses 7-9. Furthermore, Patterson points out that associating Yahweh with cloud-riding is associating Yahweh with the motif of the divine warrior.<sup>297</sup> It has already been noted that Yahweh’s chariot is a weapon of warfare against his enemies. One need only give a cursory reading to the Old Testament to see this theme played out.

Yahweh’s kingship is established in Psalm 104 through his palace building and activity as a cloud-rider, divine warrior, and creator in *chaoskampf*.

#### PARALLELS AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS

Leslie Allen aptly notes that "Ps 104 is a model of venturesome cross-cultural borrowing that by careful accommodation to Israel's distinctive faith enriched its own religious tradition."<sup>298</sup> It is almost universally recognized that Psalm 104 and the cloud-rider theme in general is representative of an earlier textual tradition than both the

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<sup>295</sup> Mettinger, 117.

<sup>296</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>297</sup> Patterson, 23. Cf. Mowinkel, 296. He notes that “This heavenly chariotry is also meant by the 'horses and chariots of fire' sent to protect Elisha in Dotan” (2 Kgs 6:16).

<sup>298</sup> Allen, 48.

Hebrew Bible and the Ugaritic texts. Notes Miller, “There can be no doubt that in many respects the imagery associated with Yahweh is the same as that associated with “Ba’al, particularly with regard to Yahweh as warrior. He battles as the storm god, riding or driving the clouds. He sends forth his voice and the enemies flee. He battles the monsters of the deep who represent death and chaos, as does Ba’al.”<sup>299</sup> Since Israel entered Canaan where Baal had reigned as king for many years, it is likely that elements from the Baal myth assimilated into Scripture and became descriptions of Yahweh. Notes Goldingay, “The psalm’s picture of creation as requiring the subduing of dynamic forces embodied in the sea, and its reference to Leviathan, also suggest, an acquaintance with Canaanite and Babylonian stories reflected in other psalms.”<sup>300</sup> While the texts of Psalm 104 and the Epic of Baal are contrasted on various levels, the motif of cloud-rider is not a point of significant contrast. Both Yahweh and Baal possess a war chariot in the clouds that is connected to their kingship. Also, the dark storm-cloud and desert cloud theophanies of Yahweh intersect with the dark storm-clouds of Baal. As can be seen above, Baal is called the “cloud-rider” and reference is made to his ability to bring the rains.

The obvious question, however, is whether these descriptions of Yahweh were unintentional—as in the case of shared cultural meaning—or intentional, as a polemic.<sup>301</sup>

It is, of course, quite possible that both are true. Allen poses this possibility—“The

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<sup>299</sup> Miller, 60.

<sup>300</sup> Goldingay, 182.

<sup>301</sup> Cf. Chisholm, 283. “The polemic against Baalism inaugurated in Moses’ time gained momentum during the period of the Judges and the earth monarchy. Yahweh continued to reveal Himself as an incomparable Warrior-King who, like Baal, controls the elements of the storm (Josh. 10:11; Judg. 5:4-5; 1 Sam. 2:10; 12:16-18; Pss. 18:7-15; 29:3-9), defeats those who challenge his rule (Josh. 10; Judg 5), and exercises authority over the sea and death (Pss. 18:4-6, 15-19; 29:3, 10[?]). As the incomparable King (1 Sam. 2:2; Ps. 18:31) Yahweh alone possesses the right to Israel’s allegiance (cf. 1 Sam. 7 and 12).”

descriptions of theophany are derived from Baal imagery and were doubtless used for polemical purposes originally."<sup>302</sup> The fact that Yahweh is frequently described in Baal-like terms indicates that a polemic is present.<sup>303</sup> Merrill suggests the same:

The Image of Yahweh riding on the heavens and clouds (*šāmayîm* and *šēḥāqîm*) is mythopoetic anthropomorphism adapted, no doubt, from pagan epic sources but with intensely polemic overtones against the depravity of pagan religious conception. The point was that it was not really Baal (or any other god) who rode in triumph in the heavens above, but it was the Lord alone who did so, he who is unique and solitary (cf Pss 18:11; 68:34; 104:3).<sup>304</sup>

The cloud-rider theme and the theme of fertility throughout the psalm "polemically affirms that Yahweh, rather than Baal, is the true provider of rain."<sup>305</sup> Tate agrees that it is "not Baal who makes the rain clouds his chariot and rides across the heavens to aid the defenseless, but Yah (Yahweh)."<sup>306</sup> The motifs related to Baal—especially the cloud-rider motif—is apologetic in nature, as notes Craigie:

While the psalm is thoroughly Hebrew in its present form, it employs language reminiscent of both Egyptian and Ugaritic poetry; the Near Eastern parallels, however, have been adapted to fit their new context, but serve both to give cosmic significance to the context of the psalm's initial use, and perhaps also they have apologetic value *vis-à-vis* other Near Eastern religions.<sup>307</sup>

As stated earlier in this paper, the polemical approach is by far the least concrete since there is not a codified method by which a given text can be asserted to be an

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<sup>302</sup> Allen, 45.

<sup>303</sup> Chisholm, 268.

<sup>304</sup> Merrill, 447. Cf. F. M. Cross and D. N. Freedman, "A Note on Deuteronomy 33:26," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 108 (1947): 6-7.

<sup>305</sup> Allen, 46.

<sup>306</sup> Tate, 176.

<sup>307</sup> Craigie, "The Comparison of Hebrew Poetry," 21.

implied polemic. Regarding his theories concerning the use of this psalm in ancient Israel and its polemical nature, Craigie notes,

Thus although the Hebrew temple had many similarities to other Near Eastern temples and had been constructed with the help of Phoenician craftsmen, it was nevertheless made to become a distinctively Hebrew temple. And the psalm, which also contains many similarities to other Near Eastern poetry, was nevertheless distinctively Hebrew in the substance of its praise of Yahweh.<sup>308</sup>

To assert that a text is polemical is to assert that the differences it has with a compared text are such as to make the G/god of the first text appear greater. Such is the case in Psalm 104:3 and the Epic of Baal. In Psalm 104, Yahweh dominates the earth in ways never described of Baal in the Ugaritic texts. In Psalm 104, Yahweh is the creator of the universe—the same is not true of Baal. Yahweh raises the waters that he defeats—not so of Baal. Yahweh created and plays with Leviathan—Baal would not dream of playing with Lotan. Yahweh is the sovereign life-giver—Baal dies at the hands of Mot. Yahweh orders the sun and the moon—Baal is dependent upon the sun. Yahweh builds his palace autonomously—Baal requests permission, toils with obstacles, and has a friend build it for him. Yahweh makes the clouds his chariot and walks on the wings of the wind—Baal mourns when the wind dries up the earth and kills him.

### CONCLUSION

At the outset of this study, the goal of this paper was to uncover the meaning of the “cloud-rider” motif in its own contexts in Psalm 104 and the Epic of Baal in order to determine whether a parallel exists between the two and, if so, how such a relationship could be explained. In order to do this, a survey of literature in the field of comparative

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<sup>308</sup> *Ibid.*

studies is necessary. The guidelines for research had to be laid before embarking upon a study that frequently results in the problem of parallelomania.

Past methods for comparing texts from the school Frazer and others involved the use of sweeping generalizations about the nature of man and thus sought to find connections between texts that spoke to the "essential similarities" between all human beings. It was pointed out that the difficulty with this approach is that it tends to make conclusions about the nature of man rather than give good reasons why a particular text parallels another text in a specific way. It is not sufficient to say that the relationship between the Hebrew Bible and the Ugaritic texts is simply a result of man being man; rather, an in depth study that involves an analysis of language, culture, and theology is required to determine why parallel elements exist between texts. This is why it is necessary to provide an approach that synthesizes some of the best work on the comparative method as a more concrete way of approaching alleged parallels.

Upon surveying a broad range of writings on the comparative method, it was determined that historical, holistic, contextual, illuminative, and polemical approaches were to be applied to the motif in question in the Hebrew and Ugaritic texts. The historical approach asks if there is even a legitimate basis for addressing an alleged parallel since geographic, chronological, and linguistic connections need to be established. This is where an examination of the historical significance of the chariot became necessary—to determine whether or not the Hebrew and Ugaritic peoples had similar ideas about chariot riding in general. The chapters on the historical and mythological significances of the chariot assisted both in further demonstrating the

historical connection between the texts and in viewing the texts from a holistic (global "organic structures") standpoint. Seeing that a historical relationship does exist between Ugarit and Israel and their respective texts, it became appropriate to move to the second stage of inquiry.

Once a historical connection could be made between the texts, it was demonstrated through the holistic approach that the motif is not unique to either text but is part of a larger paradigm in ANE literature. The holistic approach sees mythological comparative elements within a larger organic structure, such as kingship. The atomistic or isolationist approach ignores the larger organic structures and essentially strips elements from their contexts in order to demonstrate a parallel.

From there the need arose to examine the texts in their own specific contexts (contextual approach), exploring important lexica that might shed light on the meaning of the phrase in Psalm 104, and discovering the contexts of the various instances in which the epithet occurs in the Baal texts. This is taking the holistic approach and moving in closer to the individual texts under discussion. This method was applied in an examination of the context of cloud-riding in Scripture, an examination of important lexica, and an examination of the sections dealing directly with the contexts of Psalm 104 and the Epic of Baal. Once it could be established that the contexts of both Psalm 104 and the instances where the epithet occurred in the Ugaritic texts were of kingship and divine warrior, the primary grounds for establishing a legitimate parallel were laid.

Throughout the paper, the illuminative approach has been employed to show how the cloud-riding motif in Scripture may have been influenced by or introduced by the Baal texts. It was determined that the Hebrew psalm had a "mediated connection" to the

cloud-riding motif in that the psalmist likely did not have the Baal texts before him during the composition of Psalm 104, but either heard the story from another person or variety of persons through common mythological knowledge. The illuminative approach is the final stage of comparison before interpretation is applied to the texts. The historical, holistic, contextual, and illuminative approaches have brought the connection of "cloud-rider" in Psalm 104 and the Baal texts from the status of "alleged parallel" to the place of "legitimate parallel." Now all that remains is interpretation.

Finally, the parallel was established and the polemical approach applied to the motif in an effort to explain the possible reason why the psalmist chose to include the language of the "cloud-rider" in his hymn. It was demonstrated that a host of scholars agree in viewing Psalm 104 as containing polemical elements against the Epic of Baal and the Egyptian Hymn of Akhenaten. Here contrasts were highlighted between the texts as a way of demonstrating how the author of Psalm 104 sought to compare Yahweh to Baal only in so much as it elevated Yahweh over Baal by adopting and expanding the powers of Baal while excluding his weaknesses and failures in application to Yahweh.

The ancient Hebrew worshipper who first sang the lines of this psalm understood the theological implications of his lyrics and likely intended for his larger audience to understand the same. The complications wrought by research have a way of entangling our understanding of how the ancients understood the LORD, but they also have a way of enlightening us to see God in a new way, so that when we describe the imagery of the Psalms our carefully chosen words are filled with meaning and, consequently, worship—

“the imagery here is that of the Lord, mounted on His royal chariot, overseeing affairs on earth as defender, protector, and provider...”<sup>309</sup>

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<sup>309</sup> Patterson, 23.

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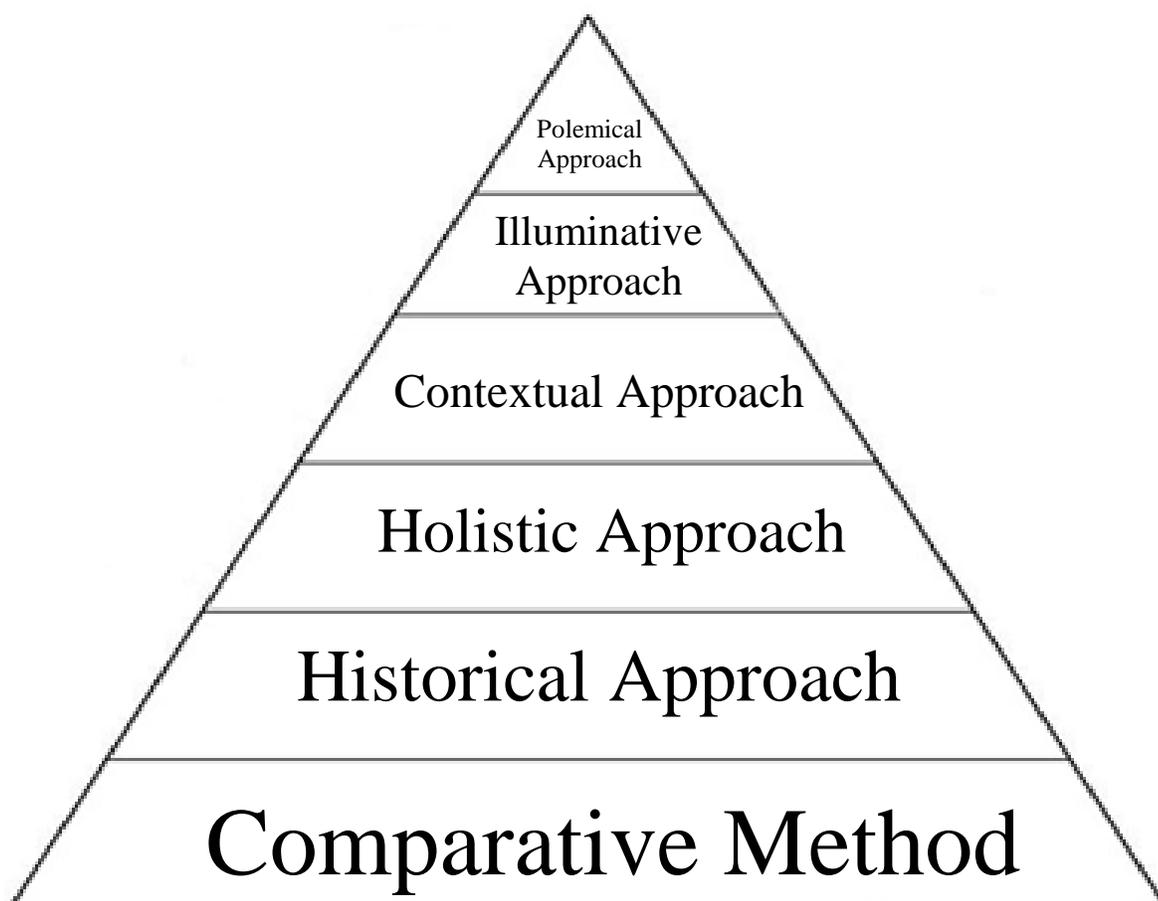
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APPENDIX A<sup>310</sup>

☆ = The Meaning of Ugaritic  
Parallels in Psalm 104



**Initial Research Question:** Does the motif of cloud-riding in the Hebrew Bible, more specifically in Psalm 104, have anything to do with the same/similar motif in the Epic of Baal?

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<sup>310</sup> Upon the foundation of the comparative method lie many approaches. This chart is a synthesis of these intimately connected approaches, demonstrating how they are employed in this paper. The historical approach comes first because without it, none of the others hold value since a historical connection must be established before any parallel can be said to exist. The holistic approach views motifs or themes within a given text in their larger mythological context in the ANE. The contextual approach focuses on the terminology of the motif and asks the question: what is the context and function of this motif? The illuminative approach encounters the problem of how this motif may have developed in the later or borrowing culture. The polemical approach addresses the question of whether the motif of the late text is intended to be a verbal attack on the parent culture.

## APPENDIX B

Rahmouni	Page	Context in which this Epithet Appears
<p>"KTU 1.2:IV:8  <i>l rgmt lk . l zbl . b'l .  tnt . l rkb . 'rpt.</i></p> <p>I have indeed said to you, O prince Ba'lu, // I have told (you), O rider of the clouds."</p>	288	<p>CML p. 5, 43 and CS I p. 248</p> <p>Baal is in the thick of battle with Yam-Nahar. Baal insults Yam-Nahar and claims that he will fall. Kothar-w-Kasis responds to Baal by challenging him to press on despite his imminent failure. Kothar-w-Kasis gives Baal two clubs with which he defeats Yam.</p> <p>Pardee's trans.: "I hereby announce to you, Prince Ba'lu, //and I repeat, Cloud-Rider:"</p> <p><b>Context: divine warrior</b></p>
<p>"KTU 1.2:IV:29  <i>bt l ál'yn . b[l']  bt . l rkb . 'rpt.</i></p> <p>Scatter (?), O Ba['lu] the mighty one!  Scatter (?), O rider of the clouds!"</p>	288	<p>CML p. 5-6, 44 and CS I p. 249</p> <p>Baal is dragging out Yam-Nahar after defeating him when Anat rebukes Baal for being too slow and exhorts him to scatter Yam, which harkens to other myths where the sea creature is scattered. Baal does so and the coming of Spring is not hindered. Anat proclaims Baal's kingship jubilantly.</p> <p>Pardee's trans.: "Scatter (him), O Mighty [Ba'lu], //scatter (him), O Cloud-Rider,"</p> <p><b>Context: divine warrior/kingship/fertility</b></p>
<p>"KTU 1.3:II:40  <i>tl . šmm . šmn . árš .  rbb [r]kb 'rpt.</i></p> <p>The dew of heaven, the fat of the earth, // The showers of the rider of the clouds."</p>	288	<p>CML p. 8-9, 48 and CS I p. 251</p> <p>Anat has just slaughtered the inhabitants dwelling in a valley. She is covered in gore and is hysterically elated with the work of her hands. The warriors and guards who escaped her the first time she slaughters in her own palace until she is basically swimming in blood. "Wiping the blood from the house and from her own person, Anat performs a rite at which a peace-offering is poured out; she replaces the furniture and scooping up dew, washes herself with it and remakes her toilet" (CML, 9).</p> <p>Pardee's translation: "She gathers water and washes, //dew of heavens, oil of earth, //the showers of the Cloud-Rider."</p> <p><b>Context: fertility</b></p>

<p>"KTU 1.3:III:38 (= 1.3:IV:4)  <i>mn . íb . yp' l b'l .</i>  <i>šrt . l rkb . 'rpt.</i></p> <p>What enemy has come forth against Ba'lu, // (What) foe, against the rider of the clouds?"</p>	288	<p>CML 9, 50 and CS I p. 252</p> <p>Baal begins to think about a particular performance/rite his sister Anat is known for and sends messengers to her so that she would meet him on "his holy hill Zephon" to perform this rite (playing the lyre and singing love songs to Baal). Anat hears from Baal's messengers and agrees to do it "only if Baal should first set his thunderbolt in the sky and flash forth his lightning" (9). In this quotation Baal is speaking to his messengers before he sends them off to deliver it to Anat.</p> <p>Pardee's trans.: "So, what enemy has arisen against Ba'lu, //(what) adversary against the Cloud-Rider?"</p> <p><b>Context: divine warrior</b></p>
<p>"KTU 1.3:IV:6  <i>l íb . yp' l b'l .</i>  <i>šrt . l rkb . 'rpt</i></p> <p>No enemy has come forth against Ba'lu, // (No) foe against the rider of the clouds."</p>	288	<p>CML p.9, 50-51 and CS I p. 252</p> <p>Same context as before (next line). Baal's messengers answer him:</p> <p>Pardee's trans.: "No enemy has arisen against Ba'lu, //(no) adversary against the Cloud-Rider."</p> <p><b>Context: divine warrior</b></p>
<p>"KTU 1.4:III:11  <i>y[<del>t</del>]b . álín . b'l</i>  <i>yt'dd . rkb . 'rpt</i></p> <p>Ba'lu the mighty one answers, // The rider of the clouds testifies.</p>	288	<p>CML p. 11, 58 and CS I p. 258</p> <p>"Anat, as they draw near to Athirat, is encouraging Baal with the prospect of an eternal kingdom; but Baal is himself still anxious and reminds his sister how because he has no house he has been treated with contumely in the assembly of the gods, where he has been served with foul and disgraceful food, though he hates all meanness and lewd conduct" (11). Baal is about to respond to Anat and announce his desire for a palace of his own.</p> <p>Pardee's trans.: "Again Mighty Ba'lu (speaks), //Cloud-Rider tells his story:"</p> <p><b>Context: kingship (desire for it)</b></p>
<p>"KTU 1.4:III:18  <i>dm . tn . dbhm . šn'a .</i>  <i>b'l . tlt rkb . 'rpt.</i></p> <p>Now there are two (kinds of) feasts (that)</p>	288	<p>CML p. 11, 58 and CSI p. 258</p> <p>Same context as above (a few lines down). Naming the types of sacrifices Baal hates.</p> <p>Pardee's trans.: "Now there are two (kinds of) feasts</p>

Ba'lu hates, //Three (that) the rider of the clouds (hates)."		(that) Ba'lu hates, //three (that) Cloud-Rider (hates):" <b>Context: kingship</b>
"KTU 1.4:V:60 <i>šm'. lálíyn . b'l bn . l rkb . 'rpt</i>  Hear, O Ba'lu the mighty one! // Understand, O rider of the clouds!"	288-289	CS I p. 261  Kothar-wa-Kasis has been invited over to eat before he begins building Baal's palace. Baal urges Kothar to hurry up and get started. Kothar suggests he build a latticed window in the palace but Baal says no. Here Kothar is responding to Baal's urges.  Pardee's trans.: "Listen, O Mighty Ba'lu, //understand, O Cloud-Rider:"  <b>Context: kingship/divine warrior</b>
"KTU 1.5:II:7 <i>yráún . álíyn . b'l tt'.nn . rkb . 'rpt</i>  Ba'lu the mighty one feared him, //the rider of the clouds was terrified of him."	289	CML p. 15, 69 and CS I p. 266  Baal is admittedly terrified of Mot whom he must soon battle. Either Baal is speaking here or someone on Baal's behalf.  Pardee's trans.: "Mighty Ba'lu will fear him, //Cloud-Rider will be frightened of him."  <b>Context: divine warrior</b>
"KTU 1.10:I:7 [ ál]íyn . b'l [ ] . rkb . 'rpt  [...] Ba'lu [the mig]hty one, // [...] the rider of the clouds."	289	CML p. 32, 132 and Wyatt p. 155.  Anat is seeking to make love with Baal.  Wyatt: "[V]aliant Baal / the Charioteer of the Clouds"  <b>Context: divine warrior?/fertility?</b>
"KTU 1.10:III:36 <i>k . íbr . l b'l [.] yld w rúm . l rkb [.] 'rpt</i>  For a bull has been born to Ba'lu, // A wild bull, to the rider of the clouds."	289	CML p. 32 and Wyatt p. 160  Anat gives birth to a bull some time after having copulated with Baal.  Wyatt: "for a bull is born to Baal, / and a wild ox to the Charioteer of the Clouds!"  <b>Context: fertility?</b>
"KTU 1.19:I:43-44 <i>šb'. šnt ysrk . b'l . tmn . rkb 'rpt .</i>	289	CML p. 25 and Wyatt p. 296  "Daniel, now as a result of her action in fear lest a prolonged drought may be imminent, prays that the dew

<p>Ba'lu will be absent seven years, // the rider of the clouds, eight."</p>		<p>and rains may come in their proper season." It appears that Baal is going to cause a draught for 8 years.</p> <p>Wyatt's Trans: "For seven years Baal shall fail, / for eight, the Charioteer of the clouds!"</p> <p><b>Context: fertility</b></p>
<p>"KTU 1.92:40 [p npš npš] <i>b'l thwyn</i> [hm brlt rk] <i>b 'rpt</i></p> <p>[...] Ba'lu....//[...] the rider of the clouds."</p>	289	<p>Wyatt p. 374</p> <p>Baal is seeking to make love with Astarte but she is reluctant (370).</p> <p>Wyatt's Trans: "[...] the Charioteer of the Clouds,"</p> <p><b>Context: fertility?</b></p>
<p>"KTU 1.92.40 [xxxxx] <i>l álíyn b'l</i> [xxxxx] <i>x . rkb 'rpt</i></p> <p>[...] for Ba'lu the mighty one, // [...] the rider of the clouds"</p>	289	<p>Wyatt p. 374</p> <p>A few lines down from the preceding instance.</p> <p>Wyatt's Trans: "[...] for Valiant Baal, / [...] for the Charioteer of the Clouds." p. 374.</p> <p><b>Context: fertility?</b></p>