

# **THE CONTRIBUTION ANCIENT NEAR EAST BACKGROUND MATERIAL MAKES TOWARD UNDERSTANDING AND INTERPRETING ISAIAH 14:12-15**

## **INTRODUCTION**

A passage of Scripture that provokes debate among interpreters is Isa 14:12-15. The identity of Lucifer son of the dawn or *hêlêl ben-šāhar* in verse 12 remains ambiguous. What makes this figure especially problematic is this phrase is a *hapax legomenon* appearing only here in the entire Old Testament. Traditionally, the church has interpreted this passage as a veiled reference to the fall of Satan. Although the leaders of the reformation questioned this interpretation, the Satan view finds its historical roots in the writings of some of the earliest church fathers. The Satan view has also been buttressed by the Latin Vulgate translation of the Old Testament, which renders Helel of verse 12 as Lucifer.

However, over the last couple of centuries, the Satan view began to wane among Old Testament scholars as more of them became aware of mythological material from the ancient Near East (ANE). Herder and Gunkel were among the first to acknowledge that these verses perhaps represented an extract from an ANE myth.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, many began to see Isa 14:12-15 in terms of the prophet utilizing an ancient myth for the purpose of illustrating the hubris of some historical ruler such as Nebuchadnezzar,<sup>2</sup> Darius, or Xerxes.<sup>3</sup> Childs offers a cogent explanation of how the prophet incorporated mythological material into his taunt song.

The prophetic writer has taken this old myth and reworked it into his taunt song. He compares the mighty king of Babylon to the upstart, Helel. He also had a brilliant start, but then Yahweh hurled him down to become the laughingstock of the nations...in spite of the highly mythical nature of the material, the framework into

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<sup>1</sup> John Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 265, ed. David J. A. Clines and Philip R. Davies (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 170.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 180-84.

<sup>3</sup> Julian Morgenstern, "The Mythological Background to Psalm 82," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 14 (1939): 110, n.14.

which it is now placed has had the effect of thoroughly mythologizing it. The myth of Helel has become merely a striking illustration dramatizing the splendour of the rise to fame and the shame of the fall which is sarcastically hurled at the king of Babylon. There is no tension whatever between the myth and its Old Testament framework since the myth carries only illustrative value as an extended figure of speech.<sup>4</sup>

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the main mythological sources that the prophet supposedly relied upon when he penned Isa 14:12-15. Only an investigation of this ANE background material in comparison to the biblical text can substantiate the claim that Isa 14:12-15 is rooted in a mythological source. For purposes of organization, this paper will survey these myths in the following three categories: astral myths, myths coming from a variety of ANE cultures, and parallels between the mythological material and the Helel account. After this survey is complete, a conclusion will then be offered that attempts to explain the similarities and differences between these myths and the Helel account.

### **ASTRAL MYTHS**

One source of myths that scholars have drawn from in an attempt to pin point the source of material found in Isa 14:12-15 involves mythology surrounding astral bodies or heavenly luminaries. However, most of these attempts to identify the “shining one, son of the dawn” (Isa 14:12) with a heavenly luminary are not persuasive.<sup>5</sup> This section will highlight the insufficiency of these attempts. To begin with, some contend that Helel should be identified with Jupiter.<sup>6</sup> The primary basis for this association is that only the royal star Jupiter-Marduk would furnish an appropriate object of comparison with the king of Babylon. However, three flaws

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<sup>4</sup> Brevard S. Childs, *Myth and Reality in the Old Testament* (Naperville: Alec R. Allenson, 1960), 69-70.

<sup>5</sup> Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*, 168-170.

<sup>6</sup> G. R. Driver, “Stars,” in *Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. J. Hastings (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1963), 936-37, S.H; Langdon, “The Star Helel, Jupiter?,” *Expository Times* 42 (1930-31): 172-74.

plague this option.<sup>7</sup> First, Marduk already occupied the heavenly throne due to the fact that he was already the king of the gods. Thus, unlike Helel of Isa 14:12-15, there was no need for Marduk to aspire to be like God. Second, because Jupiter regularly reaches the celestial zenith, it cannot be equated to a being that fails to ascend above the stars of God (Isa 14:13). Third, unlike Helel (Isa 14:12), Marduk was never the son of a dawn deity. His parents were Ea and Damkina according to *Enuma Elish* I 78-84.<sup>8</sup>

Others contend that Helel is comparable to the Mesopotamian god Enlil (Akkadian *illil*).<sup>9</sup> However, this view also represents three inadequacies.<sup>10</sup> First, Enlil never strove to reach the position of supremacy because he already was supreme. Second, it remains unclear as to why Enlil should be equated with the “the son of the dawn.” Third, most contemporary scholars believe that the imagery of Isa 14:12-15 suggests a Canaanite mythological origin rather than a Mesopotamian one. This third objection is equally applicable to the above-described Jupiter-Marduk option as well. Some maintain that Helel and Shahar denote varying components of the moon. Interestingly, the Arabs referred to the crescent moon as *hilal*. Moreover, *sahr* could express either the Moon or the Moon-god in Arabic, Aramaic, Syriac, and Ethiopic.<sup>11</sup> In order to translate the divine names in Isa 14:12 as “New Moon-god, son of the Moon-god,” Winckler emended *helel* (“shining one”) to *helal* (“new moon”) and  $\text{הַיָּרֵךְ}$  to  $\text{הַיָּרֵךְ}$ .<sup>12</sup> However, against this

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<sup>7</sup> J. W. McKay, “Helel and the Dawn Goddess: A Re-examination of the Myth in Isaiah XIV 12-15,” *Vetus Testamentum* 20 (1970): 453.

<sup>8</sup> James B. Pritchard, ed., *The Ancient Near East Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 3d ed. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1969), 62.

<sup>9</sup> W. R. Gallagher, “On the Identity of Hêlêl Ben Šahar of Is. 14:12-15,” *Ugarit-Forschungen* 26 (1994): 131-46.

<sup>10</sup> Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*, 168.

<sup>11</sup> McKay, “Helel and the Dawn Goddess: A Re-examination of the Myth in Isaiah XIV 12-15,” 452.

<sup>12</sup> H. Winckler, *Geschichte Israels*, 2 vols. (Leipzig: E. Pfeiffer, 1900), 2:24.

view, three weaknesses are found.<sup>13</sup> First, “these emendations are unsupported in any of the versions.”<sup>14</sup> Second, why would the frequently used word  $\text{לֵיל}$  be emended to  $\text{לֵיל}$  when the later is a *hapax legomenon* and is therefore unknown in biblical Hebrew? Third, no Semitic myth exists in which the moon god strives to seize the heavenly throne.

Others contend that Helel should be identified with the Ugaritic deity *hil* who arguably represents the crescent moon.<sup>15</sup> However, note the following two objections to this view.<sup>16</sup> First, as previously mentioned, no Semitic myth exists in which the moon god strives to seize the heavenly throne. Second, why would the moon be described as “the son of the dawn.”? Others have sought to equate Helel with the summer sun<sup>17</sup> and shahar with the winter sun. “Helel has been identified with Nergal, the fiery Sun-god of midsummer who departs into the underworld at the onset of winter, while Shahar, associated in Hos. vi 1-3 with the winter rains, has been compared with the winter sun.”<sup>18</sup> The primary objection to this view is that the normal meaning of *shahar* in the Old Testament is “dawn” rather than “winter sun.”<sup>19</sup>

Another option is to equate Helel with the sun. By referring to the Helel as the sun, Isa 14:12-15 reflects divine kingship ideology. Such ideology explains why Helel ultimately

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<sup>13</sup> McKay, “Helel and the Dawn Goddess: A Re-examination of the Myth in Isaiah XIV 12-15,” 452.

<sup>14</sup> Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*, 169.

<sup>15</sup> Klass Spronk, *Beatific Afterlife in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East* (Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker, 1986), 224.

<sup>16</sup> Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*, 169.

<sup>17</sup> H. G. May, “The Departure of the Glory of Yahweh,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 56 (1937): 311-12.

<sup>18</sup> McKay, “Helel and the Dawn Goddess: A Re-examination of the Myth in Isaiah XIV 12-15,” 452-53.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 453.

came into conflict with Yahweh.<sup>20</sup> However, this view is problematic on account of the fact that “the Mesopotamian rulers of the first millennium did not regard themselves as divine, let alone the sun.”<sup>21</sup> Another proposal compares Helel with Halley’s comet. The theory behind this view is that the appearance of Halley’s comet in 540 B.C. provided the stimulus for the reference to the “shining one” in Isaiah 14:12-15.<sup>22</sup> However, this theory is injured due to the fact that Isaiah 14 was in all probability written earlier than 540 B.C. According to Isaiah 13:17, it is the Medes who are the anticipated instrumentality that will bring about the downfall of Babylon. The Medes came to power in 550 B.C. Thus, it is best to date the oracle of Isaiah 13–14 in 550 B.C. rather than 540 B.C.<sup>23</sup>

However, equating Helel with Venus is the astral view that seems most probable.

McKay offers the following explanation of the view:

Venus, like Mercury, lies inside the earth’s orbit and appears in the west at evening following the sun to rest and in the east at or before dawn rising before the sun. Because of its orbital path it is never seen to attain the celestial zenith before it is blotted from sight by the light of the rising Sun. Instead it seems to the observer that it is unable to ascend “above the stars of El” and is compelled to descend from its highest point towards the morning horizon eventually disappearing from view, as it were “cut down from the ground” and brought down to Sheol, to the recesses of the pit” beneath the eastern horizon.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Klass Spronk, “Down with Helel,” in *Und Mose schrieb dieses Lied auf* : Studien zum Alten Testament und zum Alten Orient. Festschrift für Oswalt Loretz, ed. I. Kottsieper M. Dietrich, H. Schaudig, Alter Orient und Altes Testament (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1998), 717-26.

<sup>21</sup> Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*, 169.

<sup>22</sup> D. Etz, “Is Isaiah xiv 12-15 a Reference to Comet Halley?,” *Vetus Testamentum* 36 (1986): 289-301.

<sup>23</sup> Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*, 169-70.

<sup>24</sup> McKay, “Helel and the Dawn Goddess: A Re-examination of the Myth in Isaiah XIV 12-15,” 452-53.

Of all the previously discussed astral views, the Venus view is the one that has been embraced by the majority of scholars. The view also finds strong support in the ancient versions.<sup>25</sup>

### **MYTHS FROM VARIOUS ANCIENT NEAR EAST CULTURES**

In an attempt to specify the source for the material found in Isa 14:12-15, scholars have also taken note of the mythology coming from various ANE cultures. Such mythology emanates from the Sumerian, Akkadian, Hittite, Greek, and Ugartic cultures. The purpose of this section is to determine if any of these myths could be considered the source behind the Helel account. To this end, this section will briefly enumerate the various myths that have been equated with Isa 14:12-15. After describing each myth, its similarities and differences to Isa 14:12-15 will then be highlighted.

#### **Sumerian**

Some argue that the Sumerian myth of “Inanna’s Descent into the Netherworld”<sup>26</sup> was the source that the prophet drew from when he penned Isa 14:12-15. Boutflower seems to lean toward this position through his suggestion that the Isaianic passage was the product of an Assyro-Babylonian source featuring Ishtar and Nanna or Inanna.<sup>27</sup> In this myth, Inanna, who is the queen of heaven, decides to take a trip to the netherworld. Upon leaving, Inanna tells her messenger Ninshubur to plead with Enlil to protect her from harm. If Enlil refuses, then Ninshubur should make the same request to moon-god Nanna. If Nanna refuses then Ninshubur should make the same request before Enki, the Sumerian god of wisdom. Inanna then descends to the Netherworld and informs the gatekeeper of her reason for the visit. Inanna then passes

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<sup>25</sup> Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*, 168.

<sup>26</sup> Pritchard, *The Ancient Near East Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 52-57.

<sup>27</sup> Charles Boutflower, *The Book of Isaiah* (New York: Macmillan, 1930), 77-78.

through seven gates and is then brought before Ereshkigal and the Anunnaki judges who determine that Inanna must die. Inanna is then killed. After Inanna does not return, Ninshubur approaches the gods in accordance with Inanna's previous instructions. Although Enlil and Nanna deny help, Enki instructs Kurgarru and Kalaturru to go to the Netherworld to revive Inanna. After Inanna is revived, she ascends back to the earth. Inanna then goes from city to city in Sumer.

There are some elements in this myth that seem to correlate with Isaiah's Helel account.<sup>28</sup> For example, both accounts contain shifts in three different realms as the main character transitions from one realm to the next. In Isaiah's account, there is a movement from the earth (Isa 14:4b-8) to the netherworld (Isa 14:9-11) to heaven (Isa 14:1-15, 16-21). In the Inanna myth, there is a similar transition from heaven (lines 1-71) to the netherworld (72-272) to the earth (273-328). Furthermore, both accounts appear to share similar motifs such as descending to the netherworld or grave and characters that are displeasing to God or the god.

However, these similarities pale in comparison to the significant differences between the accounts.<sup>29</sup> For example, in the Inanna account, no overt act that displeased the gods is explicitly stated. By contrast, in the Isaianic account, the hubris of Helel as the reason for Yahweh casting him down is expressly communicated. Moreover, in the myth, Inanna returns from her descent. In the Isaianic account, Helel's descent is final. Furthermore, in the myth, Inanna descends as an act of her own free will. By contrast, Helel's descent is coerced. In addition, the Isaiah narrative is logical in sequence, clear, and objective. On the other hand, the Inanna myth seems repetitious at different junctures. In sum, although some similarities exist

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<sup>28</sup> José Maria Bertoluci, "The Son of the Morning and the Guardian Cherub in the Context of the Controversy Between Good and Evil," (Ph.D. diss., Andrews University, 1985), 63.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 62-63.

between the accounts, the vast differences between them make it unlikely that the prophet utilized the Sumerian myth as his source in Isa 14:12-15.

### **Akkadian**

Three Akkadian myths have been proposed as potential sources for the material found in Isa 14:12-15. Some contend that the Akkadian Myth of the “Descent of Ishtar into the Netherworld”<sup>30</sup> was the source of the Helel account. Boutflower also seems to suggest this as a possibility.<sup>31</sup> This myth appears to be an adapted version of the Inanna myth. Both accounts incorporate common elements.<sup>32</sup> In both instances, the goddess descends into the netherworld, passes through seven gates, is killed after the decree of Ereshkigal, is revived with the help of Enki, and ascends to the earth. However, the Ishtar myth contains many nuances not found in the Sumerian account.<sup>33</sup> The Ishtar account does not have the “abandoning” and “descending to the Netherworld” phrases that occur in the Inanna myth (lines 3-13). Also, the description of the goddess’ preparation for the trip differs between the accounts. The description of her preparation of her apparel as well as her instructions to her messenger in case she does not return seem to be lacking in the Akkadian myth (lines 14-20).

Moreover, unlike the Sumerian account, the Akkadian version depicts Ishtar’s violent attitude toward the gatekeeper of the Netherworld and gives a different reason for Ishtar’s journey to the Netherworld. The Akkadian version also is more specific in depicting the miseries Ereshkigal inflicted upon Ishtar (65-74) and the consequences of Ishtar’s departure from earth

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<sup>30</sup> Pritchard, *The Ancient Near East Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 106-09.

<sup>31</sup> Boutflower, *The Book of Isaiah*, 77-78.

<sup>32</sup> Bertoluci, “The Son of the Morning and the Guardian Cherub in the Context of the Controversy Between Good and Evil,” 65.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 66-67.

(1-10, 75-80). In addition, unlike the Sumerian version, the Akkadian version does not specifically refer to Ishtar's death. The Ishtar myth also discusses the creation of Asushunamir who is sent to the netherworld to retrieve Ishtar. The Inanna myth also features the messenger's long interaction before the gods while this is absent in the Akkadian account. The Akkadian account also includes a dialogue between Asushunamir and Ereshkigal, the devaluation of Ishtar's apparel as she returns back through the gates (11-46), and the restoration back to life of Ishtar's lover Tammuz (47-59). These incidents are lacking in the Sumerian version.

Regarding the Ishtar myth's similarities and differences to the Helel account, the same observations made above when comparing the Helel account to the Inanna myth are equally applicable here. In other words, essentially the same similarities and differences exist between the Sumerian version and Isa 14:12-15 that exist between the Akkadian version and Isa 14:12-15. The differences are even more apparent upon considering the style and tone between the two accounts. Perhaps these differences can be explained in terms of the "more passionate and emotional nature" of the Akkadian version.<sup>34</sup> In sum, although some similarities exist between the accounts, these similarities are outweighed by their significant differences.

The Akkadian "Myth of Anzu"<sup>35</sup> is also seen by some as a potential source of material for the Helel account. Gowan notes that this myth seems to be the only clear example from the ANE of a rebel who fails in his attempt to usurp the authority of a god.<sup>36</sup> In this myth, Anzu, a lion/bird creature, sets out to steal the Tablet of Destinies from the chief god Enlil. Because the gods used these tablets to rule the world, possession of the tablets would allow Anzu to exercise authority over the world. The intent of Anzu is made evident in the account through

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>35</sup> Pritchard, *The Ancient Near East Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 111-13.

<sup>36</sup> Donald E. Gowan, *When Man Becomes God*, Monograph Series, 6 (Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1975), 60.

his utterance of a series of heart felt “I will” statements. Anzu says, “I myself will take the gods’ tablet of destinies. The responsibilities of the gods I will seize for myself. I will establish myself on the throne and wield the decrees. I will take command over all the Igigi-gods” (lines 12-15).<sup>37</sup> Anzu then flees to a mountain after stealing the Tablet of Destinies (line 22).

Certain similarities are detectable upon comparing the Isaiah 14:12-15 with the Anzu myth.<sup>38</sup> For example, just as Anzu desires Enlil’s position, Helel desires to be like Elyon. Moreover, the process of envy is depicted as taking place in the main character’s heart before the final act of transgression occurs (lines 12-16; Isa 14:13-14). Furthermore, both accounts feature the “I will” statements of the main character. In fact, Anzu’s statement “I will establish myself on the throne” (line 14) is almost identical to the Helel’s statement “I will sit enthroned” (Isa 14:13). In addition, both accounts feature a mountain. Anzu flees to a mountain after having stolen the Tablet of Destinies. Similarly, Helel desires to sit enthroned on the “Mount of the Assembly” (Isa 14:13). Finally, both Anzu<sup>39</sup> and Helel are depicted as doers of evil or rebellious subjects attempting to grasp authority in an illegitimate manner.

However, despite the impressive similarities between the accounts, the differences appear even more striking.<sup>40</sup> For example, the Tablet of Destinies plays a central role in the Anzu account while the Isaianic passage features no similar tablet. Also, after Anzu’s rebellion, he became the ruler of the world for a season. By contrast, Helel is immediately banished to the pit following his act of rebellion (Isa 14:15). In addition, Anzu was originally part of the

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<sup>37</sup> John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, and Mark W. Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 603-604.

<sup>38</sup> Bertoluci, “The Son of the Morning and the Guardian Cherub in the Context of the Controversy Between Good and Evil,” 70-71.

<sup>39</sup> T. Fish, “The Zu Bird,” *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 31 (1948): 166.

<sup>40</sup> Bertoluci, “The Son of the Morning and the Guardian Cherub in the Context of the Controversy Between Good and Evil,” 71.

underworld. By contrast, although Helel was thrown into the underworld after his rebellion, he was not originally an inhabitant of the underworld. Moreover, the Anzu myth is polytheistic. Such polytheism is evident through the following references: “gods’ tablet of destinies”, “all the Igigi-gods”, and “the responsibilities of the gods.” In fact, after Anzu steals the tablets, several gods are eventually dispatched in order to retrieve them. By contrast, the Helel account is strictly monotheistic. Yahweh alone thwarts Helel’s plans.

In sum, because of these vast differences, it is difficult to prove that the concepts of Isa 14:12-15 are taken directly from the Anzu Myth. Although the “I will” statements provide an interesting similarity between the accounts, it must be remembered that “boastful arrogance was typical of the antagonist in this type of account.”<sup>41</sup> Such a hybris attitude was common in the ANE. Gowan discusses numerous biblical and extra-biblical examples of this attitude.<sup>42</sup>

A final Akkadian myth that is sometimes seen as the source of the ideas found in the Helel account is the “Etana Myth.”<sup>43</sup> König was one of the first to propose that Isa 14:12-15 was an allusion to the Etana Myth.<sup>44</sup> According to this myth, Etana was the ruler of the post-flood dynasty known as Kish. Because his wife was childless, Etana opted to bring down from heaven the plant of birth. Through the assistance of a solar deity, he perceived that he should be transported to heaven by an eagle in order to bring back to earth the plant of birth. Etana first rescued the eagle that had been thrown into a pit by the serpent. After the eagle had been rescued, it agreed to transport Etana into heaven. The eagle and Etana then ascended to the second level of heaven

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<sup>41</sup> Walton, Matthews, and Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*, 604.

<sup>42</sup> Gowan, *When Man Becomes God*, 75-92.

<sup>43</sup> Pritchard, *The Ancient Near East Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 114-18.

<sup>44</sup> Edward König, *Das Buch Jesaja* (Gütersloh: Verla C. Bertelsmann, 1926), 181-82.

in search of the plant of birth. However, at one point, Etana looked down and was filled with fear. Consequently, Etana and the Eagle plunged downward.

Several points of correspondence exist between the Etana Myth and the Helel account.<sup>45</sup> Both accounts involve a distinction between the terrestrial and celestial spheres. In the Etana Myth, we find the distinction of the realms of heaven and the earth as Etana ascends through two layers of heaven and then plummets back to the earth. Although the Helel account does not deal with precisely the same distinction, it does manifest a heavenly-netherworld distinction as Helel is cast from heaven to the pit. Moreover, both accounts speak of an ascending into heaven, a failure to reach the desired goal, and a subsequent descent.

On the other hand, the dissimilarities between the accounts are striking.<sup>46</sup> In the Isaian account, Helel ascends into heaven in order to establish his own throne. In the Etana account, Etana ascends into heaven in order to retrieve the plant of birth. In addition, the Etana account makes reference to Helel as an oppressor (Isa 14:4-6, 16-17) while the Etana account never refers to Etana as an oppressor. Moreover, the Etana account is polytheistic while the Helel account is monotheistic. Also, the Helel account is logical in sequence and the Etana account is repetitious. These differences leads Childs to conclude that “the Etana myth has only a vague connection” with Isaiah 14:12-15.<sup>47</sup> In sum, these differences make it unlikely that the Etana myth furnished the primary source of material for the Helel account.

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<sup>45</sup> Bertoluci, “The Son of the Morning and the Guardian Cherub in the Context of the Controversy Between Good and Evil,” 73.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 73-74.

<sup>47</sup> Childs, *Myth and Reality in the Old Testament*, 69.

## Hittite

Some have maintained that the primary source of material for the Helel account comes from the Kumarbi and Ullikumi Hittite myths.<sup>48</sup> Pope<sup>49</sup> and Hanson<sup>50</sup> are proponents of this position. According to these myths, there was a heavenly dynasty that was comprised of various gods. One of the gods, Allalu, was driven away by another god, Anu. Anu then reigned in heaven. Then Kumarbi, who was the servant of Anu, revolted against Anu causing him to flee. Anu was cast out of heaven. Kumarbi then begat a son named Teshub who was a storm god. After prolonged rivalry between Anu, Kumarbi, and Teshub, the latter eventually gained control of heaven. Kumarbi then created a sea monster named Ullikumi. Ullkumi posed a threat to Teshub and Teshub devised plans to destroy Ullkumi.

We see some similarities between the Helel account and this Hittite myth.<sup>51</sup> For example, the authority of one of the gods is challenged. Also, the defeat one of the gods results in him being cast out of heaven. However, the differences are even more apparent.<sup>52</sup> First, unlike the biblical passage where a created being challenges the most high God, the Hittite myth is polytheistic involving many gods embroiled in an intense conflict. Second, the biblical material is clear and logical in sequence. However, the Hittite myth involves a complex sequence. Third, the biblical material is not grotesque in comparison to the Hittite myth, which includes an

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<sup>48</sup> Pritchard, *The Ancient Near East Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 121-25.

<sup>49</sup> Marvin H. Pope, *El in the Ugaritic Texts*, Supplements to Vetus Testamentum II (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1955), 97-98.

<sup>50</sup> Paul D. Hanson, "Rebellion in Heaven, Azazel, and Euhemeristic Heroes in 1 Enoch 6-11," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 96 (1977): 207-09.

<sup>51</sup> Bertoluci, "The Son of the Morning and the Guardian Cherub in the Context of the Controversy Between Good and Evil," 76.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 76-77.

incident where Kumarbi swallowed Anu's manhood. These differences make it difficult to argue for Isaiah's literary dependence upon the Hittite myth.

### Greek

Grelot<sup>53</sup> and McKay<sup>54</sup> have suggested Phaeton from Greek mythology<sup>55</sup> as the source behind the Helel account. According to this myth, Phaeton had an argument with Epaphus and Io who made fun of his origin. After complaining to his mother, she sent Phaeton to Helios to obtain verification of his divine origin. Helios confirmed that he was Phaeton's father. Phaeton made Helios promise to publicly identify Phaeton as his son and Helios agreed. Phaeton then demanded to drive Helios' chariot. Helios attempted to discourage Phaeton from this endeavor on account of its inherent danger. Because of his oath, Helios finally gave in to Phaeton's demand. When Phaeton began to drive the chariot, the steeds recognized that a weaker being was driving them. Taking advantage of the situation, they rushed madly through space. Recognizing the danger of the earth catching on fire, Zeus struck Phaeton with a thunderbolt causing him to fall into a river.

Some similarities exist in between the biblical material and this Greek myth.<sup>56</sup> The theme of ascending and descending is similar in both accounts. Both accounts also seem to make use of astral phenomenon. However, the differences are far more impressive. Helel was cast out of heaven for desiring to usurp God's throne. By contrast, Phaeton was cast out of heaven by

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<sup>53</sup> P. Grelot, "Isaie 14:12-15 et son Arriere-plan Mythologique," *Revue d'histoire des religions* 149 (1956): 18-48.

<sup>54</sup> McKay, "Helel and the Dawn Goddess: A Re-examination of the Myth in Isaiah XIV 12-15," 451-64.

<sup>55</sup> Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Frank Justus Miller, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1914-1924), 2:1-400.

<sup>56</sup> Bertoluci, "The Son of the Morning and the Guardian Cherub in the Context of the Controversy Between Good and Evil," 81.

Zeus' thunderbolt in order to prevent greater destruction to the universe. Moreover, Helel's motive for ascending was to usurp the role of God. By contrast, Phaeton's motive for ascending into heaven was for the purpose of verifying his origin.<sup>57</sup> "Nothing is said of Phaethon's wishing to set up his throne above the stars or to usurp the position of the chief deity."<sup>58</sup> In sum, because of these differences, "the myth of Isa 14:12-15 seems unconnected with the Greek Phaethon myth."<sup>59</sup>

### Ugaritic

Most modern Old Testament scholars believe that source of the Helel account is found in Ugaritic mythology. The discovery of the Ras Shamra texts has strengthened the view that the source of the material of Isa 14:12-15 originally came from a Canaanite-Israelite setting.<sup>60</sup> Craige observes, "Since the discovery of the Ras Shamra-Ugaritic texts, the mythological allusions in Jes 14 12-15 have been taken to be an adaption of certain themes associated with the Caananite god Athtar."<sup>61</sup> A Canaanite source also seems to harmonize well with the previously described association of Helel with Venus. Day explains:

Is it possible to identify the morning star Venus with a figure in Canaanite mythology? It is very probable that this role was filled by the god Athtar, even though this is nowhere explicitly stated. In South Arabia the god Athtar was certainly identified with Venus, and in Mesopotamia the cognate deity, the goddess Ishtar (sometimes represented as male) likewise represented the planet Venus. Similarly, the Canaanite equivalent of Athatr, Astarte (Athtart), was equated with the Greek goddess Aphrodite (= Venus). It is probable with Athtar and Astarte represent Venus as the morning and evening star respectively. Interestingly, Athtar was equated in the

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 82.

<sup>58</sup> Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*, 175.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 179.

<sup>60</sup> McKay, "Helel and the Dawn Goddess: A Re-examination of the Myth in Isaiah XIV 12-15," 451-52.

<sup>61</sup> P. C. Craige, "Helel, Athtar, and Phaethon (Isa 14:12-15)," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 85 (1973): 223.

Ugaritic pantheon list with the Hurrian war god Ashtabi, which fits the warlike context of Isaiah 14.<sup>62</sup>

Perhaps the most important Ugaritic text that is seen as the prototype of the Helel account is known as the “Ba’al and Anath” cycle.<sup>63</sup> Craige<sup>64</sup> appears to be an example among the plethora of scholars who see the Baal and Anath cycle as the mythological source behind Isaiah 14:12-15. According to this myth, after Baal’s death and subsequent descent into the netherworld, the god Athtar succeeded Baal as the king on Mount Zaphon. Athtar was appointed to this position by El upon the request of intermediaries Anath and Asherah. However, upon ascending to the throne, Athtar discovered that he was not physically large enough to occupy Baal’s throne. Athtar then descended to the earth and ruled from there.

Similarities are apparent when comparing the Baal and Anath cycle to the Helel account.<sup>65</sup> For example, just as Ashtar is called a tyrant (line 55),<sup>66</sup> Helel is arguably referred to with the similar term “oppressor” (𐎗𐎎) in Isa 14:4-6, 12, 16-17. Moreover, just as Ashtar aspired to be king (lines 6, 55, 64, 68), Helel also aspired to set up his throne (Isa 14:13). Also, just as Ashtar goes “to the fastness of Zaphon” (line 55), Helel desires to be enthroned in Zaphon (Isa 14:13). In addition, El appears in the Baal and Anath cycle as the god of the Ugaritic pantheon (line 37). Similarly, the Isaianic passage also employs the term el (Isa 14:13). It is also worth noting that the names Athtar and Helel Ben Shahar appear to have the same general semantic range. Page concludes that on this basis Helel Ben Shahar and Athtar appear to be related

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<sup>62</sup> Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*, 171-72.

<sup>63</sup> Pritchard, *The Ancient Near East Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 139-40.

<sup>64</sup> Craige, “Helel, Athtar, and Phaethon (Isa 14:12-15),” 223-25.

<sup>65</sup> Bertoluci, “The Son of the Morning and the Guardian Cherub in the Context of the Controversy Between Good and Evil,” 86-87.

<sup>66</sup> Pritchard, *The Ancient Near East Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 140.

entities.<sup>67</sup> These similarities are impressive and cause Day to conclude, “However, although the two myths manifest certain differences, they do both provide variations on the theme of Athtar’s inability to ascend to the divine throne on Mt. Zaphon, and so there is probably some ultimate connection between them.”<sup>68</sup>

However, the differences between the Anath Baal cycle and the Helel account seem to outweigh any parallels between the two.<sup>69</sup> For example, Ashtar strives to replace Baal who legally vacated his throne through death. By contrast, Helel does not strive to replace a god who died but rather to usurp the authority of an entity that is currently reigning. Furthermore, Ashtar is legally appointed to his office. Thus, his enthronement cannot be deemed an act of rebellion. By contrast, Helel’s activity is portrayed as rebellious. Helel attempts to unlawfully usurp authority. In fact, there does not seem to be any Ugaritic evidence of a revolt by Ashtar against El. Also, Anaht and Asherah serve as intermediaries in between Athtar and El. By contrast, no similar intermediaries exist in between Helel and Elyon.

In addition, the reason for Ashtar’s descent has to do with his physical limitations. According to the myth, ‘his feet reach not down to the footstool, nor his head reaches up to the top’ (lines 59-60). By contrast, the reason for Helel’s descent pertains to his hubris attitude of arrogance and self-sufficiency. Furthermore, Ashtar relinquishes power voluntarily while Helel’s expulsion from heaven is coerced and contrary to his will. Moreover, subsequent to Ashtar’s descent, he goes to reign on the earth (lines 60-65). By contrast, Helel experiences no similar rulership following his descent. Rather, he is brought down to Sheol, to the depths of the pit (Isa

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<sup>67</sup> Hugh R. Page, *The Myth Cosmic Rebellion* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996), 139.

<sup>68</sup> Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*, 174.

<sup>69</sup> Walton, Matthews, and Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*, 603-04; Page, *The Myth Cosmic Rebellion*, 139; Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*, 173-74; Bertoluci, “The Son of the Morning and the Guardian Cherub in the Context of the Controversy Between Good and Evil”, 87-88.

14:15). Finally, “though Ashtar’s name may have a similar meaning to Helel, he is not the son of Shahar (as Helel is described).”<sup>70</sup> In sum, these differences make it unlikely that the Baal and Anath Cycle is the primary source of material for the Helel account. In fact, these differences have caused some scholars to reject Athtar in this Baal text as the source behind Isa 14:12-15.<sup>71</sup>

In yet another attempt to compare Ashtar with Helel, Grelot<sup>72</sup> presents another portion of the Baal poems.<sup>73</sup> In this text, El asks Kothar-wa-kha to build a palace for his children Yamm and Nahar. Ashtar evidences his displeasure with this request and decision on El’s part by presenting his complaints. The parallel between Helel and Ashtar can be seen in Ashtar’s ambition, impetuous nature, and aversion to advice. This text also evidences divine rivalry.<sup>74</sup> However, the text is quite different from the Helel account in that it lacks the motifs of ascent and descent as well as usurpation of power. Regarding Grelot’s point concerning divine rivalry, Bertoluci notes that Grelot’s “argument concerning the rivalry among the gods has small weight, since this is a common situation in many mythical materials. It pervades almost the whole Ugaritic mythology and it would be difficult to present only the texts related to Ashtar as having that identifying characteristic.”<sup>75</sup>

Many scholars identify the Shahar in Isaiah 14 with the Shachar in the Ugaritic poem of the birth of the Dawn and the Dusk.<sup>76</sup> Wildberger explains this connection:

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<sup>70</sup> Walton, Matthews, and Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*, 603.

<sup>71</sup> McKay, “Helel and the Dawn Goddess: A Re-examination of the Myth in Isaiah XIV 12-15,” 451-64. See Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*, 174, n. 86.

<sup>72</sup> Grelot, “Isaie 14:12-15 et son Arriere-plan Mythologique,” 34-35.

<sup>73</sup> Pritchard, *The Ancient Near East Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 129.

<sup>74</sup> Bertoluci, “The Son of the Morning and the Guardian Cherub in the Context of the Controversy Between Good and Evil,” 89.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> J. C. L. Gibson, *Canaanite Myths and Legends*, 2d ed. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1978), 123-27.

One of the Ugaritic texts (SS) portrays the procreation of Shachar by El and his birth from one of El's consorts, at which point comparisons have been made with Shalim, the god of the evening dusk. The way Shachar is used in personal names in Ugarit provides further evidence that it was considered a deity.<sup>77</sup>

Chisholm advocates this view. While referencing a translation of the Dawn and Dusk poem,<sup>78</sup> Chisholm notes, "The birth of the deity Shachar (translated 'dawn' by the NIV), identified in verse 12 as the father 'morning star' (Heb. 'Helel,' a proper name or title meaning 'shining one'), is described in an Ugaritic myth."<sup>79</sup> However, not everyone is satisfied that the birth of Shachar in the Dawn and Dusk poem and the Shachar of Isa 14:12-15 can be so closely connected. Bertoluci observes: "However the identification of the figure found in Isa 14:12-15—set in a single context free of so many names and the complicated situation so frequent in Ugaritic material—with any one of the figures of the Ugaritic mythology—is a task which has not yet been successfully accomplished."<sup>80</sup>

Other scholars argue that the Helel account appears to allude to an Ugaritic myth that is yet to be discovered. For example, Pope maintains that Isa 14:12-15 echoes the efforts of El along with other cohorts to retake from Baal the throne on the "mount of the assembly" (Zaphon).<sup>81</sup> However, Day remains skeptical of this position. He notes, "However, it is dubious whether El or Baal were in opposition to one another or that El was dethroned, so that this understanding of Isa. 14:12-15 is to be rejected."<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Hans Wildberger, *Isaiah 13–27: A Commentary*, trans. Thomas H. Trapp, A Continental Commentary (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1997), 63.

<sup>78</sup> Robert B. Chisholm, *Handbook on the Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 55, n. 76.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>80</sup> Bertoluci, "The Son of the Morning and the Guardian Cherub in the Context of the Controversy Between Good and Evil," 90.

<sup>81</sup> Pope, *El in the Ugaritic Texts*, 97, 102-03.

<sup>82</sup> Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*, 179.

Others similarly argue that the source of Isa 14:12-15 is a revolt led by the minor god Helel. For example, Chisholm contends, “These verses appear to allude to a myth about the minor god Helel’s attempt to dethrone the high god El or the storm god Baal. His attempt failed, and he was thrown down into the underworld.” The NET Bible reflects this understanding as well when it says:

Apparently these verses allude to a mythological story about a minor god (Helel son of Shachar) who tried to take over Zaphon, the mountain of the gods. His attempted coup failed and he was hurled down to the underworld. The king of Babylon is taunted for having similar unrealized delusions of grandeur.”<sup>83</sup>

Wildberger similarly postulates:

Some background needs to be furnished for this: Helel, son of Shachar, was a powerfully valiant warrior, who had the audacity, in his arrogance, to place himself on an equal level with Elyon. He wanted to ascend, on the heights of the clouds, into heaven higher than all the other stars of God, on the mountains of assembly in the far north, so that he could take the throne as king over the universe. But the final end of this sacrilegious grasping for the stars was a downfall into Sheol. We are able to tell more; a battle took place; he was challenged by the one whose power and majesty he sought to appropriate for himself, El Elyon.<sup>84</sup>

Watts also theorizes:

A suggested summary of the story would be: *Helel son of Schachar* was a great hero who determined to make himself the equal of a god, *El Elyon*. His ambition was to raise himself above the clouds, above all *the stars of god*, to the very *mountain in the farthest north* where gods gather and there to reign as king over the universe, including the gods. But the conclusion of this ill-advised ambition was his precipitous *fall into Sheol*, perhaps after the battle with El Elyon himself.<sup>85</sup>

Yet, the primary problem with these mythological accounts is their lack of historical validation. Day candidly acknowledges, “no attempt by a god to usurp El’s throne is known.”<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> *The Net Bible, New English Translation*, B. 911 (Biblical Studies, 2001), 1254, n. 7.

<sup>84</sup> Wildberger, *Isaiah 13–27: A Commentary*, 63.

<sup>85</sup> John D. Watts, *Isaiah 1–33*, Word Biblical Commentary, ed. G. W. Barker, D. A. Hubbard, J. D. Watts. (Waco, TX: Word Books Publisher, 1985), 209.

<sup>86</sup> Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*, 171.

Interestingly, many of those who advocate that the mythical source of Isa 14:12-15 is the minor god Helel's revolt against a major god also admit that there is no historical validation for such a myth. For example, Chisholm indicates, "Though the general parallels cited indicate the imagery originates in West Semitic myth, scholars have yet to pin down the precise mythological background of the text."<sup>87</sup> Wildberger similarly notes, "A broad, general consensus has been reached that this myth has its roots outside Israel, but it cannot be found in any form, neither in Canaanite materials nor in those from Israel's wider circle of neighbors."<sup>88</sup> Watts also observes, "It is generally thought that this myth must have come from a culture outside Israel, but as yet no such myth has been found in Canaan or among other peoples."<sup>89</sup> Along these same lines, after theorizing that the source of the Helel account is a myth of Athatr's revolt against El, Page makes an interesting admission. He says, "The fact that there is no Ugaritic evidence of a revolt by Athtar against El is troublesome, though not devastating, datum. The mythological allusions in the poem are of Canaanite origin. It could very well be that Isaiah 14 is...reflective of a tradition whose Canaanite prototype has yet to be discovered."<sup>90</sup>

### **PARALLELS WITH THE MYTHOLOGICAL MATERIAL**

Many claim that the Helel account has been influenced by mythological sources because of alleged parallels between Isa 14:12-15 and the mythological material. Most of these parallels become evident by comparing the Helel account with the Ugaritic material provided in the Ras Shamra texts. The following phrases or concepts from the Helel account parallel material found in the Ugaritic material or other mythological sources: "Helel" (vs. 12), "El" (vs. 13),

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<sup>87</sup> Chisholm, *Handbook on the Prophets*, 51, n.79.

<sup>88</sup> Wildberger, *Isaiah 13-27: A Commentary*, 63.

<sup>89</sup> Watts, *Isaiah 1-33*, 209.

<sup>90</sup> Page, *The Myth Cosmic Rebellion*, 139-40.

“stars of El” (vs. 13), “the mount of the assembly” (vs. 13), “Zaphon” (vs. 13), hubris attitude (vss. 13-14), “Elyon” (vs. 14), “heights of the clouds” (vs. 14), and the “depths of the pit” (vs. 15). The purpose of this section will be to scrutinize these parallels in order to determine if they were derived from a mythological source or if another explanation is possible.

Some have noticed a connection between Helel (vs. 12) and the Ugaritic deity Hil.<sup>91</sup> Day observes that Ugaritic god Hil “seems to represent the crescent moon.”<sup>92</sup> However, as noted earlier, it seems strained to identify Helel with the crescent moon associated with Ugaritic deity Hil because “it is somewhat odd for the moon to be described as the ‘son of dawn.’”<sup>93</sup> Others connect the name “El”, which is used for God in Isa 14:13, with the name El that is commonly used in Ugaritic material “as the name of the chief god in the Canaanite pantheon.”<sup>94</sup> However, this association is not a forgone conclusion due to the fact that the name El is frequently employed in the Old Testament to identify the God of Israel.<sup>95</sup> Cross observes, “El is rarely if ever used in the Bible as the proper name of a non-Israelite Canaanite deity in the full consciousness of a distinction between El and Yahweh, God of Israel.”<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> W. F. Albright, “The Old Testament and Canaanite Language and Literature,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 7 (1945): 30, n. 87; Spronk, *Beatific Afterlife in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East*, 224.

<sup>92</sup> Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*, 169.

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

<sup>94</sup> Walton, Matthews, and Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*, 604; Umberto Cassuto, *The Goddess Anath*, trans. I. Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1971), 57; Pope, *El in the Ugaritic Texts*, 6; F. M. Cross, “Yahweh and the God of the Patriarchs,” *Harvard Theological Review* 55 (1962): 234.

<sup>95</sup> Otto Eissfeldt, “El and Yahweh,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 1 (1956): 25-37; Walton, Matthews, and Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*, 604.

<sup>96</sup> F. M. Cross, “El,” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 1:253.

Many have also seen a parallel between the “stars of El” in Isa 14:13 and the Ugaritic material.<sup>97</sup> A similar expression also appears in Ugaritic texts.<sup>98</sup> Interestingly, the form  $\text{𐎗𐎎𐎗}$  has been retrieved from a Phoenician Inscription of Pyrgi.<sup>99</sup> It is possible that this inscription could have originated from Canaanite language.<sup>100</sup> However, others are not convinced that the phrase “stars of El” found in the Helel account was derived from the Ugaritic material. “Because of the interchange in use in the OT of El and Yahweh to identify the true God, and the use, by Daniel, of expressions such as ‘host of heaven’ and ‘host of stars’ in an Israelite context, it is not necessary to think that the Isaianic expression ‘the stars of El’ is an allusion to the Canaanite myth.”<sup>101</sup> Moreover, the use of “stars” in Isa 14:13 could be taken from the way the term is used in Job 38:7. There, the word is used as a generic reference to angelic beings or the divine assembly. Interestingly, in Job 38:7, the phrase “stars of the morning” stands in a parallel relationship to the phrase “sons of God.” This latter phrase is used elsewhere in the Book of Job to describe angelic beings or the divine assembly (Job 1:6; 2:1).<sup>102</sup> Thus, there appear to be other interpretive options besides automatically concluding the phrase “stars of El” in Isa 14:13 was derived from Ugaritic myth.

It is also contended that the phrase “mount of the assembly” in Isa 14:13 is drawn from Ugaritic material. Day notes that this phrase parallels the similar concept of the Mount of

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<sup>97</sup> Chisholm, *Handbook on the Prophets*, 50.

<sup>98</sup> A. Herdner, ed., *Corpus des tablettes en cunéiformes alphabétiques*, 2 vols., Mission de Ras Shamra 10 (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1963), 1:10.1.3-4.

<sup>99</sup> Joseph Fitzmeyer, “The Phoenician Inscription from Pyrgi,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 86 (1966): 286-87.

<sup>100</sup> Cross, “El,” 1:254.

<sup>101</sup> Bertoluci, “The Son of the Morning and the Guardian Cherub in the Context of the Controversy Between Good and Evil,” 92-93.

<sup>102</sup> Richard Clifford, *The Cosmic Mountain in Canaan and the Old Testament*, Harvard Semitic Monographs, 4 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), 161, n. 84.

the Divine Assembly found in the Ugaritic material.<sup>103</sup> In Ugaritic myth, the Mount of the Divine Assembly was the locale where the gods met and issued decrees affecting the universe.<sup>104</sup> This meeting of the gods was superintended by El who was the leader of the Ugaritic pantheon.<sup>105</sup> However, even with this similarity it is not a forgone conclusion that the mount of the assembly in the Isaianic passage was taken from Ugaritic myth. For instance, Walton, Matthews, and Chavalas point out that the identical term “mount of the assembly” has never been found among the Ugaritic material.<sup>106</sup> Moreover, the concept of a mount of divine assembly of gods is not unique to the Ugaritic material but rather is a common religious motif in numerous surrounding culture of the ANE.<sup>107</sup> Thus, it seems too narrow to argue that the phrase comes exclusively from the Ugaritic material. Therefore, it is far more likely that the phrase “mountain of the assembly” represents the background of the ANE culture at large rather than simply one particular myth. Furthermore, Bertoluci observes fundamental differences between the mount of divine assembly concept in the Ugaritic material in comparison to the biblical material. He observes:

In Ugarit the assembly is formed by gods presided over by El, the head of the Ugaritic pantheon; in Israel Yahweh presides over the council formed by the angels...In Ugarit and Israel earthly holy mountains are connected with the holy mountains in the heavenly sphere. A major difference here, however, is that El is frightened by the attacks from lesser gods, and Baal has periodical defeat on their mountains, but Yahweh is never afraid or defeated on His holy mountain without His personal agreement. It thus becomes a symbol of the secure place.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*, 170.

<sup>104</sup> Pritchard, *The Ancient Near East Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 130.

<sup>105</sup> Bertoluci, “The Son of the Morning and the Guardian Cherub in the Context of the Controversy Between Good and Evil,” 95.

<sup>106</sup> Walton, Matthews, and Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*, 604.

<sup>107</sup> Bertoluci, “The Son of the Morning and the Guardian Cherub in the Context of the Controversy Between Good and Evil,” 93.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

The reference to Zaphon in Isa 14:13 is also seen as a direct connection to the Ugaritic material.<sup>109</sup> Day observes “Zaphon (Isa. 14.13) is well known from the Ugaritic texts as the mountain which constituted Baal’s throne.”<sup>110</sup> Chisholm notes, “NIV’s ‘sacred mountain’ translates the Hebrew ‘Zaphon,’ the name of a mountain specifically associated with the god Baal in the Ugaritic myths.”<sup>111</sup> It is generally acknowledged that Zaphon is associated with Mt Casius,<sup>112</sup> which is the highest mountain in Syria. The mountain is located north of Israel. Zaphon means north in the Hebrew, Phoenician, Aramaic, and Semitic languages. One of the interesting features of this mountain is its transferability to other sites. For example, the title Zaphon is applied to Jerusalem in Ps 48:2. Perhaps this identification is made in order to draw a deliberate parallel with the Ugaritic material. Just as Baal’s dwelling had to be defended against the attacks of enemies, Jerusalem was in need of similar defense at the time the Psalm was written. Without this comparison, the designation of Jerusalem as in the north in Ps 48:2 makes little geographic sense.<sup>113</sup> Thus, many conclude that Zaphon in Isa 14:13 is also speaking of Jerusalem of Mount Zion in contrast to Mount Casius.<sup>114</sup>

However, despite this interesting parallel, the context in which the term “Zaphon” is used is completely different upon comparing the Ugaritic and biblical accounts. In Isaiah 14:13, Zaphon does not pertain to an earthly mountain such as the mountain of Baal, Cassius, Zion, or Jerusalem. Rather, Isaiah uses the term in a heavenly, Yahwistic context. In the Isaianic passage,

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<sup>109</sup> Herdner, *Corpus des tablettes en cunéiformes alphabétiques*, 1.5.I.11; 1.6.I.57-59.

<sup>110</sup> Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*, 170.

<sup>111</sup> Chisholm, *Handbook on the Prophets*, 50.

<sup>112</sup> Otto Eissfeldt, *Baal Zaphon, Zeus Kasios und der Durchzug der Israeliten* (Halle: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1932), 1-30.

<sup>113</sup> Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*, 107-09.

<sup>114</sup> Chisholm, *Handbook on the Prophets*, 51.

Zaphon seems to be juxtaposed against Sheol or the depths of the pit (Isa 14:15). Helel is expelled from Zaphon and hurled to Sheol. Thus, Sheol and Zaphon stand in contrast to one another as two polarizing extremes. Ginsberg observes, “*ירכתהּ הפּוֹן*” stands in antithesis to *ירכתהּ יִבּוֹר*, and the polar opposite of the nether world is the sky; Amos 9:2; Ps 139:8.”<sup>115</sup> Thus, it is best to conclude that Zaphon pertains to the heavenly abode of Yahweh rather than an earthly mountain such as Cassius or Zion (Ps 48:2).<sup>116</sup>

Interestingly, a number of commentators translate Zaphon in Isa 14:13 as having a heavenly nuance. Ginsberg translate the expression as “in highest heaven” and concludes that the term has the same heavenly meaning as found in Job 26:7.<sup>117</sup> Clifford interprets Zaphon as parallel to “the heights of the clouds” (Isa 14:14) and thus concludes, “Zaphon’s meaning seems to be practically ‘heavens.’”<sup>118</sup> Barth equates Zaphon in Isa 14:13 with the “cosmic polar point” while observing that “Paul obviously had this in mind when he speaks in 2 Cor 12:2 of his rapture to the ‘third heaven.’”<sup>119</sup>

Moreover, the phrase *ירכתהּ הפּוֹן* appears four other places in the Old Testament (Ps 48:2; Ezek 38:6, 15; 39:2). Although this phrase speaks of the earthly city of Jerusalem in Ps 48:2, it does not appear to carry this same nuance in the other references. The Ezekiel references refer to invasion against Israel by Gog located in the remote north (*ירכתהּ הפּוֹן*). Nothing in

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<sup>115</sup> H. L. Ginsberg, “Reflexes of Sargon in Isaiah after 715 B.C.E.,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 88 (1968): 51.

<sup>116</sup> Bertoluci, “The Son of the Morning and the Guardian Cherub in the Context of the Controversy Between Good and Evil,” 202.

<sup>117</sup> Ginsberg, “Reflexes of Sargon in Isaiah after 715 B.C.E.,” 51.

<sup>118</sup> Clifford, *The Cosmic Mountain in Canaan and the Old Testament*, 161-62.

<sup>119</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, 12 vols. (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1958-1969), 3.9 section 41.

these passages identifies the location of Gog with Mount Cassius. In fact, Ezek 39:2 indicates that God would instigate the attack by bringing Gog up (הָלַךְ) from the remote north (הַצִּפוֹן הַרְחֵק). If the remote north refers to Mount Cassius, the proper verb would be bring down (הָרַד) rather than bring up.<sup>120</sup>

It is also argued that Helel's hubris attitude as exemplified in Isa 13–14 is directly drawn from mythology. As indicated earlier, some note the parallel between Helel's "I will" and similar statements found in the Akkadian myth of Anzu.<sup>121</sup> However, in spite of this parallel, it remains difficult to equate Helel's hubris attitude with one particular ANE myth. Such a hubris attitude was typical throughout the ANE as a whole and therefore was not an exclusive phenomenon that could be uniquely identified with one particular culture of myth. Gowan discusses numerous biblical and extra-biblical examples of this attitude.<sup>122</sup>

It is also argued that the name Elyon in Isa 14:14 is also drawn from mythology.<sup>123</sup> Elyon is referred to as a Canaanite god in Philo of Byblos,<sup>124</sup> as a Jebusite god of Jerusalem sometimes in the Old Testament (Gen 14:18-20, 22), and as an Aramaean deity in the Sefire treaty.<sup>125</sup> Day observes that Elyon of Isa 14:14 has features like El and Baal. For example, Elyon dwells on the Mount of Assembly like El (Isa 14:13). Moreover, Elyon, like Baal, is enthroned (Ps 47:3; 97:9), dwells on Zaphon (Isa 14:13), and has a voice that thunders (Ps 18:13). Thus,

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<sup>120</sup> Bertoluci, "The Son of the Morning and the Guardian Cherub in the Context of the Controversy Between Good and Evil," 106.

<sup>121</sup> Walton, Matthews, and Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*, 603.

<sup>122</sup> Gowan, *When Man Becomes God*, 75-92.

<sup>123</sup> Walton, Matthews, and Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*, 604.

<sup>124</sup> Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* I.10.15. See Eusebius, *Preparation for the Gospel*, trans. Edwin Hamilton, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1903; reprint, Grand Rapids, Baker, 1981), 2:38.

<sup>125</sup> H. Donner and W. Röllig, *Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften*, 3 vols. (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1962-64), 2:239, 246.

Day concludes “the fact that Elyon has features of both El and Baal would indicate that the myth in Isa. 14: 12-15 derives ultimately from mythology of one of these gods.”<sup>126</sup> However, those that associate the name Elyon in Isa 14:14 with pagan mythology also readily admit that the name Elyon is also consistently equated with Yahweh throughout the Old Testament.<sup>127</sup> Therefore, it seems unwarranted to rush to the conclusion that Isa 14:12-15 emanates from a mythological source merely on the basis of its employment of the term Elyon.

Another parallel exists between the phrase “I will ascend above the heights of the clouds” (Isa 14:14) and references in the Ugaritic material to Baal as the “rider of the clouds.”<sup>128</sup> However, the references to the clouds in both the Ugaritic material and the Isaianic passage need not lead to the conclusion that Isa 14:14 has Ugaritic myth as its source. Cloud imagery is frequently utilized in the Old Testament to portray the presence of God. Moreover, God is often depicted as riding on a cloud (Ps 18:11; 68:4; 104:3; Isa 19:1). Thus, Isaiah could be drawing from this consistently used Old Testament motif rather than from Ugaritic myth. It is also worth noting that the one who desires to ultimately ride the clouds in Isa 14:12-15 is Helel. It is much easier to correlate Helel with a minor god in Ugaritic myth than it is to correlate Helel with the major god.<sup>129</sup>

Finally, the phrase “you are brought down to the depths of the pit” in Isa 14:15 is also seen as a parallel to ANE mythology. Walton, Matthews, and Chavalas offer the following explanation:

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<sup>126</sup> Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*, 171.

<sup>127</sup> Walton, Matthews, and Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*, 604. Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*, 170.

<sup>128</sup> Pritchard, *The Ancient Near East Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 132, 137; Herdner, *Corpus des tablettes en cunéiformes alphabétiques*, 1:2.4.8; 1:3.2.40; 1:3.3.35; 1:4.3.11; 1:4.5.122; 1:5.2.7.

<sup>129</sup> Bertoluci, “The Son of the Morning and the Guardian Cherub in the Context of the Controversy Between Good and Evil,” 97-98.

In a Sumerian myth that shares some material the *Anzu Myth*...the god Ninurta overcomes the creature Anzu but ambitiously wants to gain power himself. When Enki discovers his scheme, Ninurta is thrown into a pit, and Enki chides him as a bragging upstart who recklessly tried to seize power that did not belong to him.<sup>130</sup>

Chisholm also apparently associates the phrase of Isa 14:15 with mythology when he observes, “These verses appear to allude to a myth about the minor god Helel’s attempt to dethrone the high god El or the storm god Baal. His attempted revolt failed, and he was thrown into the underworld.”<sup>131</sup> However, like the above-discussed cloud imagery, the imagery of bringing down to the grave of the depths of the pit found in verse 15 also occurs repeatedly throughout the Old Testament (Ps 30:3; 88:4-6; 143:7). Therefore, despite this similarity, “the Hebrew material and prior biblical parallels may very well have been the source (if a source was necessary) for the prophet’s terminology or imagery.”<sup>132</sup>

## CONCLUSION

This paper has sought to determine if the Helel account is indeed the product of a mythological source. This paper has attempted to accomplish this goal by examining the various sources that are typically used to argue that the Helel account is the product of myth. These sources include the astral myths, the mythology from various ANE cultures, and alleged mythological phrases that parallel the Helel account. With the exception of the comparison to Venus, most of the astral myths bear little resemblance to the Helel account.

Moreover, an examination of the various existing myths from the Sumerian, Akkadian, Hittite, Greek, and Ugaritic regions and cultures has demonstrated that any

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<sup>130</sup> Walton, Matthews, and Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*, 604.

<sup>131</sup> Chisholm, *Handbook on the Prophets*, 51.

<sup>132</sup> Bertoluci, “The Son of the Morning and the Guardian Cherub in the Context of the Controversy Between Good and Evil,” 98, 105-106.

similarities between these myths and the Helel account are typically outweighed by vast differences. In those situations when a cited myth seems to be on point, a careful investigation demonstrates that the historicity of such a myth is in doubt. In essence, there is an absence of any single myth reflecting the totality of the Helel account in all of its elements. Interestingly, this absence has been recognized by a number of scholars. According to Chisholm, “Though the general parallels cited indicate the imagery originates in West Semitic myth, scholars have yet to pin down the precise mythological background of the text.”<sup>133</sup> Prinsloo similarly states, “Despite enormous interest in this aspect of Jes 14 12-15 and innumerable attempts, nobody has yet been able to reconstruct a convincing mythological torso or to determine its precise origin.”<sup>134</sup> Walton, Matthews, and Chavalas echo these sentiments when they say, “...no known literature matches the details matches of Helel’s rebellion.”<sup>135</sup> Gowan makes a similar remark when commenting on the lack of extra biblical ANE evidence conveying an unsuccessful rebel’s “attempt to grasp the kingship of the gods.” He observes, “remarkable as it may seem, we can find only one good example of this theme in the ancient near east (outside the Old Testament), the myth of Zu.”<sup>136</sup>

Furthermore, the phrases and concepts found in the Helel account paralleling mythological material are capable of being interpreted in alternative ways not necessarily requiring Isaiah’s dependence upon a mythical source. Thus, the existence of these parallels does not automatically lead to the conclusion that they were derived from mythical material. In many of these instances, the prophet could have just as well have drawn from Hebrew culture and prior biblical material rather than from the mythology of the surrounding culture. In other instances,

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<sup>133</sup> Chisholm, *Handbook on the Prophets*, 51, n. 79.

<sup>134</sup> W. S. Prinsloo, “Isaiah 14:12-15: Humiliation, Hubris, Humiliation,” *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 93 (1981): 436.

<sup>135</sup> Walton, Matthews, and Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*, 603.

<sup>136</sup> Gowan, *When Man Becomes God*, 60.

the similar concept is employed so differently than how it is used in a myth that it is difficult to argue for mythical dependence. Therefore, it is best to conclude that the Helel account is not necessarily the product of any particular mythological source. Thus, Isaiah was not necessarily dependent upon any particular myth.

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