

Draft 1
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Introduction

As one studies the nature of religions today and in the ancient past, one discovers that while a certain religion is different from another, each show the influences of interaction with others.

After reading a book on Canaanite Mythology, I was amazed to discover the correlation between mourning practices of the Canaanite chief god, El, and Orthodox Judaism today.¹

El, the father god, mourns the defeat (death) of his son Baal in a cosmic battle. El descends from his throne to "sit low" on a footstool.² Sitting low in mourning is, indeed, an Orthodox Jewish practice today. El, we are told, dons a special "mourning dress", "and performs the ritual of self-mutilation". In Judaism, there is no mutilation of the body, but there is a substitution of tearing one's garment or even a black ribbon. Apparently, these Jewish mourning practices are a variation of ancient procedures observed 4,000 years ago.

The influence of Judaism on Christianity is generally conceded. For example, Christians usually read ^{two} ~~two~~ portions of scripture in their worship service, one from the Hebrew Scripture and another reading from the New Testament. In the Jewish worship service, the practice is to read a portion of the Torah (the first five books of the Hebrew Scriptures) and a second reading from the Prophetic section of their scriptures. The Jewish procedure is, of course, the much older practice.

The Catholic Service also incorporates the influence of other religions in certain rituals. In Rome, where Christianity further developed, there were religions where the drinking of the blood of the god was an important part of their ritual. Eating of the "body" of the god by the use of a totem animal was common. Of course, Christianity altered the more ancient practices, but there seems to have been some influence from the older religions. Then again, the concept of the death and resurrection of the god was a key part of ancient Near Eastern religions from the Canaanites (Ba'al) to the Egyptians (Horus) and many other peoples.

In Judaism, it is clear that certain parts of the Mosaic Code are derived from the older Hammurabi Code of the Babylonians, but the changes, additions and

¹ The Divine Council in Canaanite and Early Hebrew Literature, E. Theodore Mullen Jr., Scholars Press. 1980, Chico, California.

² Ibid, 79ff

subtractions made by the Israelites demonstrate the distinctiveness of their religion. ✓
Further, the Babylonians had nothing like the Israelite "Holiness Code" with emphasis on morality found in the 19th chapter of Leviticus. ^{as} ITS

The flood story in the Book of Genesis is common to many cultures in the Ancient Near East, but the Hebrew version makes changes in the beginning and ending of the story. For example, some Semitic versions tell us that the gods sent the flood because they were drunk and wanted to destroy humans for sport. The Hebrew version tells us that God sent the flood because humans had been immoral. Further, the Hebrew version has a superior ending, God sends the rainbow as a sign that He will never send such a flood again, and He makes a covenant with human kind to assure the certainty and security of their existence. The higher religions ^{may} borrow much from older religions, but they sublimate or change the older practices. ✓