



Baal

Baal was the name used for the principal male god of the Phoenicians. It is found in several places in the plural BAALIM (Judg. 2:11; 10:10; 1 Kings 18:18; Jer. 2:23; Hos. Baal is identified with Molech (Jer. 19:5). It was known to the Israelites as Baal-peor (Num. 25:3; Deut. 4:3), was worshipped till the time of Samuel (1 Sam 7:4), and was afterwards the religion of the ten tribes in the time of Ahab (1 Kings 16:31-33; 18:19,22). It prevailed also for a time in the kingdom of Judah (2 Kings 8:27; compare 11:18; 16:3; 2 Chr. 28:2), till finally put an end to by the severe discipline of the Captivity (Zeph. 1:4-6).

The priests of Baal were in great numbers (1 Kings 18:19), and of various classes (2 Kings 10:19). Their mode of offering sacrifices is described in 1 Kings 18:25-29. The sun-god, under the general title of Baal, or "lord," was the chief object of worship of the Canaanites. Each locality had its special Baal, and the various local Baals were summed up under the name of Baalim, or "lords." Each Baal had a wife, who was a colourless reflection of himself. There were several Baals in the ancient world:

- Baal-berith, the lord and the guardian of the covenants, Jdg 8:33, 9:46.
- Baal-gad, the lord of good luck or fortune, Isa 65:11.
- Baal-hamon, possessor of abundance (the god of materialism), SOS 8:11.
- Baal-hermon, the mountain god, Jdg 3:3, 1Ch 5:23, Deu 3:9; this was the worship of feelings and emotions.
- Baal-peor, the god of prostitution and sex, Num 25:1-3.
- Baal-zebub, the "fly god," or the god of counterfeit, in 2Ki.

The worship of the gods of Baal extends back to the 14th century BC among the ancient Semitic peoples, the descendants of Shem, the oldest son of Biblical Noah. Semitic is more of a linguistic classification than a racial one. Thus, people speaking the same or similar languages first worshiped Baal in his many forms.

The word Baal literally means "master", "lord" or "owner". In ancient religions the name denoted sun, lord or god. Baal was common a name of small Syrian and Persian deities. Baal is still principally thought of as a Canaanite fertility deity. The Great Baal was of Canaan. He was the son of El, the high god of Canaan. The cult of Baal celebrated annually his death and resurrection as a part of the Canaanite fertility rituals. These ceremonies often included human sacrifice and temple prostitution.

Baal, in the Canaanite pantheon was the local title of fertility gods. Baal never emerged as a rain god until later times when he assumed the special functions of each. Although there is no equivalent in Canaan of the sterile summer drought that occurs in Mesopotamia, the season cycle was marked enough to have caused a concentration on the disappearing fertility god, who took with him the autumn rain clouds into the neither world.

Baal was the son of El, or Dagon, an obscure deity linked by the Hebrews with the

Philistine city of Ashdod. Dagon was perhaps associated with the sea, as a coin found in the vicinity portrays a god having a fish tail. Although Baal personally overcame Yam, it is uncertain whether or not he fought Lotan, the Leviathan of the Old Testament, but it is known that Anat "crushed the writhing serpent, the accused one of the seven heads."

Another echo of the Mesopotamian thought patterns are nestled in these reasons advanced by Baal for needing a "house." His food offerings were too meager for a god "that rides on the clouds." As far apart as Carthage and Palmyra were temples dedicated to Baal-Hammon, "the lord of the altar of incense," whom the Greeks identified with Cronos.

The worship of Baal extended from the Canaanites to the Phoenicians who also were partially an agricultural people. Both Baal and his cohort Ashtoreth, or Astarte, who is equivalent to the Greek goddess Aphrodite, were both Phoenician fertility symbols. Baal, the sun god, was fervently prayed to for the protection of livestock and crops. Priests instructed the people that Baal was responsible for droughts, plagues, and other calamities. People were often worked up into great frenzies at the prospects of displeasing Baal. In times of great turbulence human sacrifices, particularly children, were made to the great god Moloch.

Since the Phoenicians also were superb ship builders the religion and cults of Baal spread throughout the Mediterranean world. The worship of Baal was found among the Moabites and their allies Midinites during Moses' time. It was also introduced to the Israelites.

The religion of the god Baal was widely accepted among the ancient Jews, and although it was put down at times, it was never permanently stamped out. Kings and other royalty of the ten Biblical tribes worshiped the god. The ordinary people ardently worshipped this sun god too because their prosperity depended on the productivity of their crops and livestock. The god's images were erected on many buildings. Within the religion there appeared to be numerous priests and various classes of devotees. During the ceremonies they wore appropriate robes. The ceremonies included burning incense, and offering burnt sacrifices, occasionally consisting of human victims. The officiating priests danced around the altars, chanting frantically and cutting themselves with knives to inspire the attention and compassion of the god.

Ashtoreth was the moon goddess of the Phoenicians, representing the passive principle in nature, their principal female deity; frequently associated with the name of Baal, the sun-god, their chief male deity (Judg. 10:6; 1 Sam. 7:4; 12:10) These names often occur in the plural (Ashtaroth, Baalim), probably as indicating either different statues or different modifications of the deities. This deity is spoken of as Ashtoreth of the Zidonians. She was the Ishtar of the Accadians and the Astarte of the Greeks (Jer. 44:17; 1 Kings 11:5, 33; 2 Kings 23:13).

There was a temple of this goddess among the Philistines in the time of Saul (1 Sam. 31:10). Under the name of Ishtar, she was one of the great deities of the Assyrians. The Phoenicians called her Astarte. Solomon introduced the worship of this idol (1 Kings 11:33). Jezebel's 400 priests were probably employed in its service (1 Kings 18:19). It was called the "queen of heaven" (Jer. 44:25).

The Old Testament abounds with warnings against Baal worship. According to the

Apostle Paul those warnings "are there for our admonition on which the ends of the world are come" (1 Cor.10:11). But who is Baal? And what is Baal worship? Were you to walk into any church and ask the audience 'What is Baal worship?' you would probably not find many believers who knew. To be sure most Bible students know that the god Baal is mentioned over and over again in the Bible: but what Baal worship is, few have any idea.

1 Kings 18:17-18 And it came to pass, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said unto him, *Art thou he that troubleth Israel?* And he answered, I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the LORD, and thou hast followed Baalim.

The word Baalim is the Hebrew plural for BAAL, the pagan god of nature and fertility. Baal worship apparently had its origin in the belief that every tract of ground owed its productivity to a supernatural being, or baal, that dwelt there. The farmers probably thought that from the Baalim, or fertility gods, of various regions came the increase of crops, fruit and cattle. The worship of Baal was accompanied with lascivious rites (1 Kings 14:24), the sacrifice of children in the fire by parents (Jer.19:5), and kissing the image (1 Kings 19:18; Hos 13:2). Baal was often associated with the goddess Astoreth (Judg.2:13), and in the vicinity of his altar there was often an Asherah. (Judg.6:30; 1 Kings 16:32-33)"

The goddess ASTORETH was the goddess of sexual love, maternity and fertility. Prostitution as a religious rite in the service of this goddess under various names is widely attested. The identification of 'Ashtart with Aphrodite is evidence of her sexual character." "Ashtaroth (plural of Astoreth). In connection with the plural of Baal, a general designation for the female divinities of the Canaanites."

"Asherah refers to a wooden pole or mast which stood at Canaanite places of worship (Exo.34:13); originally it was, perhaps, the trunk of a tree with branches chopped off, and was regarded as the wooden symbol of the goddess Asherah, who like Ashtoreth, was a type of fertility ... It was erected beside the altar of Baal. (Judg 6:25, 28)" the Baal and Ashtaroth worship incorporated illegal sexual acts and that the Asherah was nothing but a phallic symbol. That word lascivious means lewd, lustful, licentious, lecherous, bawdy. In other words Baal worship was accompanied with sinful sexual acts.

Judgement of Baal Worshipers.

Baal worshippers are scheduled for a terrible end; as prefigured in the following two accounts about Jehu and Josiah.

2 Kings 10:18-25 Then Jehu brought all the people together. He said, "Ahab served Baal a little, but Jehu will serve him a lot. Summon all the prophets, servants, and priests of Baal. Make sure no one is missing because I have a great sacrifice to offer Baal. Whoever is missing will not live." (Jehu was deceiving them. He actually wanted to destroy those who worshiped Baal.) Jehu said, "Call a holy assembly to honor Baal." So they did. Jehu sent messengers to all the Israelites. All the worshipers of Baal came, and there wasn't one who didn't come. They went into the temple of Baal and filled it from one end to the other. Then Jehu told the man in charge of the priests' robes, "Bring out the robes for all the worshipers of Baal." So he brought out robes for them. Jehu and Jehonadab, son of Rechab, went into the temple of Baal and said to the worshipers of

Baal, "Make sure that there are no worshipers of the LORD here with you. Only the worshipers of Baal should be here." So they went in to offer sacrifices and burnt offerings. But Jehu had stationed 80 of his men outside. He said to them, "If any of the people I'm putting in your hands escape, you will pay for their lives with yours." When the burnt offerings had been made, Jehu said to the guards and attendants, "Kill them. Don't let anyone get away." So they used swords to kill the Baal worshipers and threw out the bodies until the guards and attendants came to the stronghold in the temple of Baal. Then they brought out the large sacred stone of the temple of Baal and burned it. They destroyed the sacred stone of Baal and the temple of Baal and made it into a latrine. It is still a latrine today. So Jehu got rid of Baal worship throughout Israel.

2 Kings 23:1-15 Then the king sent for all the respected leaders of Judah and Jerusalem to join him. The king, everyone in Judah, everyone living in Jerusalem, the priests, the prophets, and all the people (young and old) went to the LORD'S temple. Josiah read everything written in the Book of the Promise found in the LORD'S temple so that they could hear it. The king stood beside the pillar and made a promise to the LORD that he would follow the LORD and obey his commands, instructions, and laws with all his heart and soul. He confirmed the terms of the promise written in this book. And all the people joined in the promise. Then the king ordered the chief priest Hilkiah, the priests who served under Hilkiah, and the doorkeepers to take out of the LORD'S temple all the utensils that had been made for Baal, Asherah, and the entire army of heaven. Josiah burned the utensils outside Jerusalem in an open field near the Kidron Brook. Then he carried their ashes to Bethel. He got rid of the pagan priests whom the kings of Judah had appointed to sacrifice at the illegal places of worship in the cities of Judah and all around Jerusalem. They had been sacrificing to Baal, the sun god, the moon god, the zodiac, and the entire army of heaven. He took the pole dedicated to the goddess Asherah from the temple to the Kidron Valley outside Jerusalem. He burned it in the Kidron Valley, ground it to dust, and threw its ashes on the tombs of the common people. He tore down the houses of the male temple prostitutes who were in the LORD'S temple, where women did weaving for Asherah. He brought all the priests out of the cities of Judah from Geba to Beersheba and made the places where those priests sacrificed unclean. He tore down the worship site at the entrance of the Gate of Joshua, the gate named after the mayor of the city. (The worship site was to the left of anyone going through the city gate.)

2 Kings 22:9-15 The priests of the illegal worship sites had never gone to the LORD'S altar in Jerusalem. Instead, they ate their unleavened bread among the other worshipers. Josiah also made Topheth in the valley of Ben Hinnom unclean so that people would never again sacrifice their sons or daughters by burning them to the god Molech. He removed the horses that Judah's kings had dedicated to the sun god at the entrance of the LORD'S temple. They were in the temple courtyard near the room of the eunuch Nathan Melech. He also burned the chariots of the sun god, the altars that Judah's kings had made and placed on the roof of Ahaz's upstairs room, and the altars Manasseh had made in the two courtyards of the LORD'S temple. The king tore them down from there, crushed them, and dumped their rubble in the Kidron Valley. The king made the illegal places of worship east of Jerusalem unclean. They were on the southern part of the Hill of Destruction. King Solomon of Israel had built them for Astarte (the disgusting goddess of the Sidonians), Chemosh (the disgusting god of Moab), and Milcom (the disgusting god of the Ammonites). Josiah crushed the sacred stones, cut down the poles dedicated to Asherah, and filled their places with human bones. He also tore down the altar at Bethel—the place of worship made by Jeroboam (Nebat's son), who had made Israel sin.

He tore down both the altar and the place of worship. They burned the worship site, crushing it to powder and burning the pole dedicated to Asherah.

Summary

- Baal worship is not a bygone phenomenon. It is widespread in these last days.
- Baal worship is giving free-reign to the carnal nature. It expresses itself in gluttony, drunkenness and sinful sexual acts.
- Though the vast majority of mankind will continue to worship Baal, there will be many 'overcomers,' believers who keep Bible doctrine in their souls.
- The Baal worshippers are found in cultic Christian churches, pseudo-Christian churches and true Christian churches lead by women pastors or Baal priests.

