

## Part IV) The BAAL System

As we studied in the previous lessons, the ten plagues of Egypt were attempts by God to not only free the people of Israel from bondage of slavery, but also to the bondage of idolatry. As Israel departed Egypt, they were to leave behind four centuries of false god worship, the very gods they had grown to love.

**No sooner did the Israelites leave Egypt, crossing the sea and watching the Egyptian army drown, they began their grumbling.** They were still trying to adjust to a God that would actually take care of their needs, unlike the gods of Egypt. Before they had over eighty different gods that “provided” hundreds of different needs, but now they have one true God, the “*no other gods before Me*” God, He wanted them to trust Him only. They grumbled about water; they grumbled about food; God gave them water and Manna; they began to grumble about not having meat; God gave them quail and they grumbled some more. They were having difficulty trying to connect to Him in a spiritual way.

The Israelites were having a hard time with this concept of one God. Only 50 days after the crossing of the sea, Moses went up to Mount Sinai to receive the terms and condition of this covenant. While there, the people decided to bring back some of that “Old Time Religion” by holding the annual feast of “Apis”, the Egyptian cattle god. They made a golden calf and sacrificed burnt offerings to it. As this Egyptian tradition approaches the end, they danced and held an orgy. They had been desensitized to this for centuries and simply would not trust the one True God. Before the people would finally reach the Promised Land, **Num 14:22 records that the nation "...put Me to the test these ten times and have not listened to My voice..."**

God is in the business of delivering people from idolatry, not to it. Because of this, He instructed the Israelites as they were coming into the Promised Land (Deut 12:2-3) **"You shall utterly destroy all the places where the nations whom you shall dispossess serve their gods, on the high mountains and on the hills and under every green tree. 3 "And you shall tear down their altars and smash their {sacred} pillars and burn their Asherim with fire, and you shall cut down the engraved images of their gods, and you shall obliterate their name from that place.** They were now facing a whole new set of gods and the One True God did not want them falling in love with them as well.

The Israelites took their Promised Land, destroying the gods and idols over the course of seven years. Joshua closes the deal with a speech in Joshua 24. Listen to some of the excerpts from this final speech of Joshua.

- Josh 24:2 And Joshua said to all the people, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'From ancient times your fathers lived beyond the River, {namely,} Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, and they served other gods.
- Josh 24:14-15 "Now, therefore, fear the LORD and serve Him in sincerity and truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. 15 "And if it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods

which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.

- Josh 24:19-21 Then Joshua said to the people, "You will not be able to serve the LORD, for He is a holy God. He is a jealous God; He will not forgive your transgression or your sins. 20 "If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, then He will turn and do you harm and consume you after He has done good to you." 21 And the people said to Joshua, "No, but we will serve the LORD."
- Josh 24:23 "Now therefore, put away the foreign gods which are in your midst, and incline your hearts to the LORD, the God of Israel."

It is quite simple; they are a people prone to idolatry. There is one true God and that is Jehovah, the jealous God. **The plan was clear: One True God! Don't forget it!** For more than four decades as they waited in the desert, they became less-attached to Egyptian gods everyday. The new danger is the gods of Canaan and the surrounding area. Three centuries after Joshua made that wonderful speech, the Israelites were back to their old idolatrous tricks. **Judg 21:25 In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.** Let us study the primary "god system" of Canaan and the surrounding area so we can better understand what they were in love with. This god-system of Canaan is BAAL.

### GODS, PAGAN

The Canaanite god most often referred to is Baal, which means "lord" or "master". The word could be used as a title for any person who owned something, or any god considered to be a lord or master. But the word Baal soon became identified with various regional gods that were thought to provide fertility for crops and livestock. As a god who symbolized the productive forces of nature, Baal was worshiped with much sensuality <Num. 22:41; Judg. 2:13; 1 Kin. 16:31-32>.

### Baal's Women

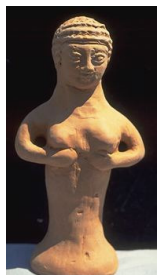
#### ASHERAH (mother and wife of Baal)

Baal's father was supposedly EL, the father of all gods. He married Asherah and they had 70 children, one of which is BAAL. She is referred to as the "MOTHER OF ALL LIVING" and "LADY ATHIRIT OF THE SEA". By the time of the kings of Israel, Asherah decided to hitch up with her son Baal.



- 1King 15:13 And he also removed Maacah his mother from {being} queen mother, because she had made a horrid image as an Asherah; and Asa cut down her horrid image and burned {it} at the brook Kidron.
- Judg 3:7 And the sons of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, and forgot the LORD their God, and served the Baals and the Asheroth.

Asherah was a favorite deity of women. Some of the wives of Solomon worshiped her <1 Kin. 15:13>, as did Ahab's wife, Jezebel <1 Kin. 16:31-33>. King Asa suppressed the worship of Asherah <1 Kin. 15:13>, and King Josiah destroyed *"the articles that*



were made for Baal, for Asherah, and for all the host of heaven" <2 Kin. 23:4>. So as you can see the children of Israel were having some god problems. In fact the word asherah also refers to the wooden pole, or cult pillar, that stood at Canaanite places of worship-- perhaps the trunk of a tree with the branches chopped off-- and associated with the worship of the goddess Asherah.

- II Ki 18:4 He (Hezekiah) removed the high places and broke down the {sacred} pillars (groves: KJV) and cut down the Asherah. He also broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made, for until those days the sons of Israel burned incense to it; and it was called Nehushtan.
- 2 Chr 34:3 For in the eighth year of his reign while he (Josiah) was still a youth, he began to seek the God of his father David; and in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of the high places, the Asherim, the carved images, and the molten images.
- Jer 10:3-5 For the customs of the peoples are delusion; because it is wood cut from the forest, the work of the hands of a craftsman with a cutting tool. 4 "They decorate {it} with silver and with gold; they fasten it with nails and with hammers so that it will not totter. 5 "Like a scarecrow in a cucumber field are they, and they cannot speak; they must be carried, because they cannot walk!"



### ANAT (sister and mistress of Baal)



Baal's primary mistress or lover was Anat (or Anath), the goddess of war, love, and fertility. She was also his sister. Anat was the virgin goddess who conceives and was also the victor over Baal's enemies. With the help of Shapash, the sun or luminary, Anat rescued Baal from Mot (the god of death). Her victories in battle were vicious; she is described as up to her hips in gore with heads and hands from the enemies stacked high. Her thirst for violence and her macabre trappings—a necklace of human heads, a belt of human hands—Anat has been compared to the Hindu goddess Kali.



Thus, Anat was the driving force in the annual fertility cycle of Baal. She was sometimes identified with the queen of heaven, to whom the idolatrous Jews offered incense in Jeremiah's day .

- Jer. 7:18 "The children gather wood, and the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead dough to make cakes for the queen of heaven; and {they} pour out libations to other gods in order to spite Me.

Anat was the patroness of sex and passion, lewd figurines of this nude goddess have been discovered at various archaeological sites in Palestine.

### Denominational BAAL

Just like in every other religion, Baalism had its different denominations. Each area of the country had their own local and regional Baals. Some are as follows:

- Baal of Peor <Deut 4:3 "Your eyes have seen what the LORD has done in the case of Baal-peor, for all the men who followed Baal-peor, the LORD your God has destroyed them from among you.> Peor was the name of a mountain in Moab. Baal of Peor was an idol of Moab (probably to be identified with Chemosh) which Israel was enticed to worship with immoral practices.
- Baal-Berith, which means "lord of the covenant," <Judg 8:33 Then it came about, as soon as Gideon was dead, that the sons of Israel again played the harlot with the Baals, and made Baal-berith their god.>. He was considered the protector in battles.
- Baal-Zebub, which means "lord of the flies" was "the god of Ekron" <2 Kin. 1:2-3,6, 16>-- the name under which Baal was worshiped at the Philistine city of Ekron. This god was worshiped as the producer of flies, and consequently as the god that was able to defend against this pest. In the New Testament, reference is made to Beelzebub, a heathen god considered the chief evil spirit by the Jewish people <Matt. 10:25; 12:27; Luke 11:18-19>. The Pharisees called him "the ruler of the demons" <Matt. 12:24; Mark 3:22; Luke 11:15>, and Jesus identified him with Satan.

- The Largest Baal Denomination: Zebel Baal

The Canaanite god Baal was known as Zebel Baal ("prince Baal") or Aliyan Baal ("Baal the strong"), as well as by a number of other titles. Baal was considered the god who brought rain and fertility (especially good harvests and animal reproduction).

Archaeologists have discovered rock carvings that show Baal holding a club in his right hand and a lightning flash with a spearhead in his left. These symbols identify him as the god of rain and storm. Baal is also known as the "rider of the clouds," a term showing his power over the heavens. This would seem to place significant importance on verses like the following:

- Job 22:14 'Clouds are a hiding place for Him, so that He cannot see; and He walks on the vault of heaven.'
- Ps 68:4 Sing to God, sing praise to his name, extol him who rides on the clouds-- his name is the LORD-- and rejoice before him. (NIV)
- Ps 147:8 Who covers the heavens with clouds, who provides rain for the earth, who makes grass to grow on the mountains. (NAS)

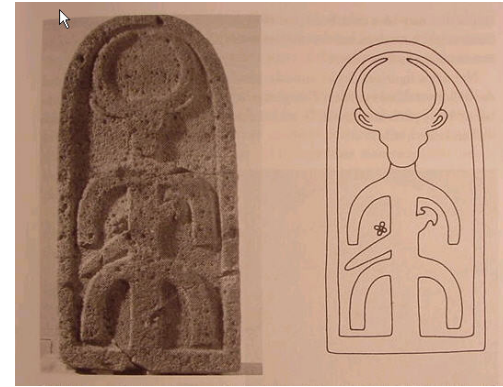


Baal and related deities are also portrayed as a mating bull, symbolizing fertility. Jeroboam I, king of Israel, acted in accordance with this pagan idea by making two calves of gold, setting up one at Bethel and the other at Dan <1 Kin. 12:26-30>. This is why he is the one to whom the phrase "the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which he made Israel sin" became a continuous comparison for generations to come.

During the history of the Israelites, a rivalry developed between Baalism and the true worship of the Lord. Jer 23:27 ...who intend to make My people forget My name by their dreams which they relate to one another, just as their fathers forgot My name because of Baal?

### The Basic Core History of BAAL

As the legend goes, Baal had a victorious great battle with the god of the sea, YAM. As a result, he became the King of the gods. With that challenge out of the way, the greatest remaining threat was from Mot, the god of death and of the dry season. Baal banished Mot to the desert where he would eat dust the rest of eternity. Mot then issues a dual, which he knows prideful BAAL will not refuse. Baal, being primarily the Canaanite god of rain and storms, marched to the desert with thunderbolts in hand and riding on the back of a bull. This is why he is often pictured in archaeology with thunderbolts in hand and standing on the back of a bull. The battle proved fatal for Baal, taking him under the power of Mot. Anat, Baal's sister and lover, resurrects him by slashing herself with knives as a sign of mourning. The mourning and weeping is too much for Mot, therefore he must let Baal go. With this in mind, let us close this section from 1 Kings 17-18. It is here that we find a rivalry was the conflict between Elijah and Ahab and the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel <1 Kings 17 and 18>.



- 1 Kings 17:1 Now Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the settlers of Gilead, said to Ahab, "As the LORD, the God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, surely there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word."

For the next 3 ½ years, there was no rain in the region of Ahab's reign. Elijah fled to Brook Cherith on the other side of the Jordan and was fed by the ravens. When the brook dried up, God told Elijah to go to Zarapheth, the back yard home place of Jezebel, the queen who wanted him dead. It was there that a widow woman sustained him.

- 1 Kings 18:19 "Now then send {and} gather to me all Israel at Mount Carmel, {together} with 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of the Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table."
- 1 Kings 18:24 "Then you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the LORD, and the God who answers by fire, He is God." And all the people answered and said, "That is a good idea."
- 1 Kings 18:26-29 Then they took the ox which was given them and they prepared it and called on the name of Baal from morning until noon saying, "O Baal, answer us." But there was no voice and no one answered. And they leaped about the altar which they made. 27 And it came about at noon, that Elijah mocked them and said, "Call out with a loud voice, for he is a god; either he is occupied or gone aside, or is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and needs to be awakened." 28 So they cried with a loud voice and cut themselves according to their custom with swords and lances until the blood gushed out on them. 29 And it came about when

- midday was past, that they raved until the time of the offering of the {evening} sacrifice; but there was no voice, no one answered, and no one paid attention.
- IKing 18:37-39 "Answer me, O LORD, answer me, that this people may know that Thou, O LORD, art God, and {that} Thou hast turned their heart back again." 38 Then the fire of the LORD fell, and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. 39 And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, "The LORD, He is God; the LORD, He is God."
  - IKing 18:41 Now Elijah said to Ahab, "Go up, eat and drink; for there is the sound of the roar of a {heavy} shower."

Baal is dead and JEHOVAH, He is God! He shut down his rain and killed all his prophets; therefore He is the King o Baal! Can we say that? THE LORD, HE IS GOD; THE LORD, HE IS GOD! Is this not the conclusion that God wanted the people of Israel to have? Do you think the people of Israel look at God as the true and living God and not Baal? If the heathen, Baal loving people of Israel can admit it, can we not also proclaim "THE LORD, HE IS GOD; THE LORD, HE IS GOD!"