

Baal and the Fertility Cults and Hosea 2 – Gomer Punished and Restored

Baal and the Fertility Cults

The worship of the Canaanite storm god Baal was an object of singular condemnation by Hosea and other prophets. The vehemence of the prophetic condemnation of the cult reflects just how extensive and pernicious the problem was. We learn about Baal first through Biblical texts. Examples include:



The storm god, Baal, was a West Semitic import to Egypt. Late Bronze Age texts discovered at Ras Shamra (ancient Ugarit) on the Levantine coast, from which his cult spread, indicate that by 1400 BC, Baal had displaced the god El to become the most important god in the local pantheon.

Numbers 25 – the narrative of Baal of Peor, showing the prominence of sacred prostitution within the cult.

First Kings 18 – the contest involving [Elijah](#) and the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel, illustrating the popularity of the Baal cult and its use of self-laceration for demonstrating devotion to Baal.

Hosea 2 – v. 8 indicates that the people associated Baal with prosperity, and **vv. 16-17** suggest that many people identified **Baal and Yahweh almost as one and the same.**

We also learn a great deal about Baal from ancient texts in the form of cuneiform tablets, especially those from Ugarit and from Phoenician inscriptions. The hymns and epic poems of Ugarit provide us with something of the “theology” of the Baal cult.

The basic meaning of the word baal is “lord,” and this appropriately suggests Baal’s importance in Canaanite religion. He was called “prince Baal (Lord) of the earth.”

Although the god El was nominally the supreme deity in Ugaritic mythology, Baal purportedly exercised a direct role in ruling the pantheon and effectively supplanted El.



Ancient Baal

Baal (or more properly Ba'al) was worshipped as far back as three and a half thousand years ago among ancient Semitic tribes, such as the descendants of Shem (for those with a Biblical bent, he's believed by some religious scholars to be the oldest son of Biblical Noah) and as late as the Punic wars of the third century BCE. Some say that there are elements of Baal worship which can still be seen today in various cultures of the Middle East.

Baal's consort (partner) is usually identified as the goddess Anat, although sometimes another goddess, Asherah, assumes that role. Baal was declared king after having supposedly defeated the god Yam ("sea") in battle, in another myth he was slain by the god Mot ("Death"), but with the aid of Anat he revived and defeated Mot.

Not only was Baal exalted as a chief deity, but he also functioned specifically as the Canaanite storm god, the "rider of the clouds."

The birth of healthy offspring and the staving off of famine were major concerns in the ancient Near East, and consequently fertility took on religious significance.

In Egypt the god Osiris was identified with the Nile and its perennial flooding – the basis of Egypt's agricultural life. In Mesopotamia the cult of Tammuz and his consort, Inanna, represented the power of fertility and included the practice of sacred prostitution.

For Israel – an agrarian society situated in a dry climate – the veneration of a god who could send rain proved to be an irresistible enticement. One Canaanite myth attributed agricultural fertility to the "rain of Baal."

Hosea 2:5 indicates the acceptance of Baal's role at every level of life: "food" and "water" for sustenance, "wool" and "linen" for material goods and "oil" and "drink" for cultic rituals or personal luxury.

Although sacred prostitution was not a part of every fertility cult, Israel incorporated this aspect as well (4:10-14), and the sexual temptation of the cult proved too much for many Israelites to withstand.



Asherah was the Mother Goddess of Israel, the Wife of God, according to William Dever, who has unearthed many clues to her identity. She was worshiped, apparently throughout the time Israel stood as a nation. In many homes, images like the one above decorated household shrines.

The situation was exacerbated by an enormous number of local shrines where “the Baals” were worshiped under various titles (such as Baal Peor, Baal Hammon, Baal Zaphon, Baal of Lebanon or Baal of Sidon; see 2:13,17). This phenomenon is attested by the wide variety of representations of Baal in Phoenician inscriptions.

The fact that the Israelites identified Baal with Yahweh is telling. Although Baal worship, viewed from a distance, was obviously horrendous, those who were involved in it were so influenced by the dominant culture that they remained convinced that they were devout and orthodox followers of the Lord – when they were all the while worshipping Baal.

Why would someone want so many gods? What happens if they move, do they have to change gods’ too?

I look at it this way, for example when I signed up with Road Runner as my internet server, if I use their email address then if I move and get a different server then I have to change my email address. Yet, I don’t use Road Runner for my email, I use Gmail (I know Google is evil, but which one’s aren’t?) so then it doesn’t matter who my internet server is, I can still keep my email address. in a sense, You are Gmail and Baal is Road Runner. I know that no matter where I am, no matter what happens, You are always there with me. But the main thing is that Baal and them are not even real, You are the only true God.

Since we’re talking about these pagan gods, I want to look at another one of Ancient Man’s ridiculous beliefs, so if you don’t mind I want to check out...

Hosea 2

Gomer Punished and Restored

1 Say ye unto your brethren, Ammi; and to your sisters, Ruhamah.



Mt. Carmel

Also known as Antelope-Nose, Har Karmel, Holy Headland, Jebel Kurmul, Mar Elyas, Mount of User, Rosh-Kedesh
Geographical Significance

Here the southern side of Mt. Carmel near the coast can be seen. Mt. Carmel was most significant in ancient times as a barrier to traffic along the coastal plain. The 1500-foot high limestone mountain impeded armies and merchants traveling to the Jezreel Valley.

“Ammi...Ruhamah” – the negatives associated with the names of Hosea’s children.

2 Plead with your mother, plead: for she is not my wife, neither am I her husband: let her therefore put away her whoredoms out of her sight, and her adulteries from between her breasts;

“Not my wife” – the marriage was broken by unfaithfulness, but reconciliation, not divorce, was sought.

3 Lest I strip her naked, and set her as in the day that she was born, and make her as a wilderness, and set her like a dry land, and slay her with thirst.

4 And I will not have mercy upon her children; for they be the children of whoredoms.

5 For their mother hath played the harlot: she that conceived them hath done shamefully: for she said, I will go after my lovers, that give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, mine oil and my drink.

“Go after” – the wife was chasing other men.

“Lovers” – the reference is to Canaanite deities, such as Baal, whose worshipers hoped to gain agricultural fertility.

6 Therefore, behold, I will hedge up thy way with thorns, and make a wall, that she shall not find her paths.



Ugarit was an ancient port city on the eastern Mediterranean at the Ras Shamra headland some 7 miles north of Latakia in northern Syria near modern Burj al-Qasab.

Ugarit sent tribute to Egypt and maintained trade and diplomatic connections with Cyprus (then called Alashiya), documented in the archives recovered from the site and corroborated by Mycenaean and Cypriot pottery found there.

The polity was at its height from ca. 1450 B.C. until 1200 B.C.

“Hedge up thy way” – rather than punish Israel with death, the Lord would isolate her.

7 And she shall follow after her lovers, but she shall not overtake them; and she shall seek them, but shall not find them: then shall she say, I will go and return to my first husband; for then was it better with me than now.

8 For she did not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold, which they prepared for Baal.

“Baal” – the Canaanite god who was believed to control the weather and the fertility of crops, animals and man.

9 Therefore will I return, and take away my corn in the time thereof, and my wine in the season thereof, and will recover my wool and my flax given to cover her nakedness.

10 And now will I discover her lewdness in the sight of her lovers, and none shall deliver her out of mine hand.

“Discover her lewdness” – the unfaithful wife was exposed to public shame.

“None shall deliver her” – Baal had no power.

11 I will also cause all her mirth to cease, her feast days, her new moons, and her Sabbaths, and all her solemn feasts.

“Cause...mirth...cease” – in exile these joyous seasons would be only a memory.

12 And I will destroy her vines and her fig trees, whereof she hath said, These are my rewards that my lovers have given me: and I will make them a forest, and the beasts of the field shall eat them.



Ancient ruins of Jericho

“Rewards...my lovers have given” – the harlot’s pay (see 9:1; Deut 23:18; Eze 16:33; Mic 1:7). Israel attributed her agricultural products to the false gods she worshiped, rather than to the Lord (see Deut 11:13-14).

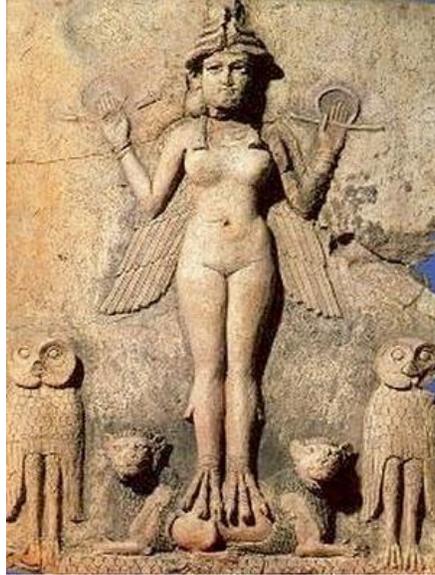
13 And I will visit upon her the days of Baalim, wherein she burned incense to them, and she decked herself with her earrings and her jewels, and she went after her lovers, and forgot me, saith the LORD.

14 Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her.

“Into the wilderness” – for a second betrothal. It refers back to the days of Israel’s wilderness wandering before she was tempted by the Baals in Canaan.

15 And I will give her her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope: and she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt.

“Valley of Achor” – near Jericho. As the prophet reversed the meaning of the names of his children, so also the meaning of Achor (“trouble”) – where God first judged His people in the promised land – became a symbol of new opportunity.



And I is for Inanna or Ishtar, the most important goddesses on the Sumerian pantheon, is the Goddess of love and war, daughter of the moon Goddess Nanna. Like Persephone, she went to the Underworld where she was detained because she was killed. After killing her, the Underworld God Ereshkigal hung Inanna on the wall. The God of wisdom Enki intervenes to save her life, which then results in a stand-in for Inanna, her husband Dumazi and his sister Geshtinanna, each spending half the year in the Underworld, causing the change of seasons.

16 And it shall be at that day, saith the LORD that thou shalt call me Ishi; and shalt call me no more Baali.

17 For I will take away the names of Baalim out of her mouth, and they shall no more be remembered by their name.

18 And in that day will I make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of heaven, and with the creeping things of the ground: and I will break the bow and the sword and the battle out of the earth, and will make them to lie down safely.

19 And I will betroth thee unto me forever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving kindness, and in mercies.

20 I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness: and thou shalt know the LORD.

21 And it shall come to pass in that day, I will hear, saith the LORD, I will hear the heavens, and they shall hear the earth;

22 And the earth shall hear the corn, and the wine, and the oil; and they shall hear Jezreel.

23 And I will sow her unto me in the earth; and I will have mercy upon her that had not obtained mercy; and I will say to them which were not my people, Thou art my people; and they shall say, Thou art my God.