

Baal in the Bible

Who is Baal?

What do you think of when you hear the name Baal?

Is Baal a word or a name?

Baal can also be spelled as Ba'al and is most commonly pronounced the same way the word "bell" is said. The word itself means "owner" or "lord" and was used as an honorific for people of power and various deities. This was also an honorific that was often used to refer to the god Hadad, but over time the word Baal became the proper name of Hadad.

It is believed that Baal Hadad began as a deity of the Amorites over four thousand years ago. He was mostly related to weather, particularly rain, and slowly evolved into a god of fertile land and crops and even was called upon in battle on occasions.

Baal became a popular god in Egypt from roughly 1400-1075 BC. The Aramaeans would also adopt Baal as a god where he evolved into the Greek "Belos," also known as Zeus.

There are numerous "Baals" mentioned in the bible and throughout other historical records. The Hebrews even used the word "baal" to refer to Yahweh but after the events in 1 Kings, this practice stopped and those with the honorific "baal" in their name replaced it with the honorific description "bosheth" which translates to "shame".

Biblical References

Read Numbers 25:3

The word "Baal" appears many times in the English translation of the Bible. It is often a name of people or places. One of the earliest accounts in the Bible is Baal Peor. This loosely translates to "lord of the holes".

Read Judges 2:11-15

The first appearance of Baal as a reference to the proper name occurs in Judges and appears 80 times in the Bible. In Judges 2:11, it says Israel served "the Baals" or "Baalim". In verse 13, it mentions Baal and Ashtaroath. In verse 11 the term "baalim" is the plural of the honorific. In verse 13 the same Hebrew word becomes the proper name of Baal and Ashtaroath, the two gods referred to in the plural form.

Read 1 Kings 16:31-34

This is the introduction of Baal worship via Jezebel. This would introduce Elijah's encounter with the prophets of Baal and their eventual destruction as Elijah called upon God to win a contest of deities. There is some dispute on whether this is the same Baal Hadan or whether this is another Phoenician god, but most scholars settle on Baal Hadan.

Read 1 Kings 18:20-40

Elijah has had enough of the Jews worshipping Baal, so he proposes a contest between Baal and the Hebrew God. God wins.

Read 2 Kings 1:2

In 2 Kings 1:2, the god Ba'al Zebub is mentioned. This is the god of Ekron, also known as "Lord of the Flies". This god is actually a reference to the same Baal Hadad, but with a Hebrew slant on the name. Elijah referred to Baal as Lord of the Flies as an insult, calling Baal "a pile of dung" and his follower's "vermin" or "insects". This name would eventually become the source of the name Beelzebub.

The Popularity of Baal with the Jews

The Old Testament Jews were very susceptible to the cultures around them and would often adopt practices from those cultures. The Canaanites, the Egyptians and the Phoenicians all interacted with the Jews on a regular basis and so their practices of worship would spill over to those Jews that were not strict followers of the Lord God. Various gods often referred to with the honorific "baal" as well as the god Baal Hadan would be prominent figures in the Jews disobedience to God.

Most scholars agree that the reason for the Jews multiple departures from God was the surface views of the cultures around them. If another country, region or kingdom appeared to be doing better than they were, then they would start to wonder why their own God wasn't treating them as well as those around them. This would lead to envy and eventually a belief that their opponents' god was more powerful. It is simply a case of the age-old belief that the grass is greener on the other side.

Baal in Modern Culture

Surprisingly, there are still references to Baal today. Comic books, TV shows, and various card and video games all contain references to Baal in some form.

- In Marvel Comics, Baal was the adopted father of the X-Men villain Apocalypse.
- In DC Comics, Baal Hadad is *the* Baal Hadad summoned by a warlock to fight Batman and Superman.
- Baal is the final boss in an expansion pack of the Diablo 2 video game.
- In the Yu-Gi-Oh! Zexal anime, the character Mr. Heartland briefly uses a card called "Number 1: Infection Baal Zebul"; the monster depicted in the card's art resembles a giant fly.
- Baal is also referenced in several other video games including Fire Emblem: Sacred Stones, Castlevania: Aria of Sorrow, and Devil May Cry 4.

References

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