

Baal

For other uses, see [Baal \(disambiguation\)](#).

Baal (/ˈbeɪəl/),^{[1][n 1]} properly **Baʿal** (Ugaritic: 𐎠𐎢𐎡𐎠;^[5] Phoenician: 𐤁𐤏𐤏; Biblical Hebrew: בעל, pronounced [ˈbaʕal]),^[6] was a title and honorific meaning "lord" in the Northwest Semitic languages spoken in the Levant during antiquity. From its use among people, it came to be applied to gods.^[7] Scholars previously associated the theonym with solar cults and with a variety of unrelated patron deities, but inscriptions have shown that the name Baʿal was particularly associated with the storm and fertility god Hadad and his local manifestations.^[8]

The Hebrew Bible, compiled and curated over a span of centuries, includes early use of the term in reference to their God Yahweh, generic use in reference to various Levantine deities, and finally pointed application towards Hadad, who was decried as a false god. This use was taken over into Christianity and Islam, sometimes under the opprobrious form Beelzebub.

1 Word

The spelling “Baal” derives from the Greek *Báal* (Βάαλ), which appears in the New Testament^[9] and Septuagint,^[10] and from its Latinized form *Baal*, which appears in the Vulgate.^[10] The word’s Biblical senses as a Phoenician deity and false gods generally were extended during the Protestant Reformation to denote any idols, icons of the saints, or the Catholic Church generally.^[11] In such contexts, it follows the anglicized pronunciation and usually omits any mark between its two As.^[1] In modern scholarship, the half ring ⟨ ʿ ⟩ or apostrophe ⟨ ’ ⟩ in the name Baʿal marks the word’s original glottal stop, a vocalization which appears in the middle of the English word “uh-oh”.^[12]

The Northwest Semitic languages—Ugaritic, Phoenician, Hebrew, Amorite, and Aramaic—were all abjads, typically written without vowels.^[n 2] As such, the word *baʿal* was usually written as BʿL (bet-ayin-lamedh); its vowels have been reconstructed. In these languages, *baʿal* signified "owner" and, by extension, “lord”,^[10] a "master", or "husband".^{[13][14]} It also appears as Baʿali or Baʿaly, “my Lord”.^[14] Cognates include the Akkadian *Bēlu* (𒂗),^[n 3] Amharic *bal* (ባል),^[15] and Arabic *baʿl* (بعل). *Báʿal* (בַּעַל) and *baʿl* still serve as the words for “husband” in modern Hebrew and Arabic respectively. They also appear in some contexts concerning the ownership of things or pos-

session of traits. In Levantine Arabic, *baʿl* also serves as an adjective describing farming that relies on rainwater alone.

The feminine form is *baʿalah* (Hebrew: בַּעְלָה,^[16] Arabic: بعلة), meaning “mistress” in the sense of a female owner or lady of the house^[16] and still serving as a rare word for "wife".^[17] The plural form is *baʿalim*.

2 Semitic religion

See also: Religions of the ancient Near East, Ancient Semitic religion, Canaanite religion, and Carthaginian religion

2.1 Generic

See also: Bel, Zeus Belos, and other figures named Belus

Like EN in Sumerian, the Akkadian *bēlu* and Northwest Semitic *baʿal* (as well as its feminine form *baʿalah*) was used as a title of various deities in the Mesopotamian and Semitic pantheons. Only a definitive article, genitive or epithet, or context could establish which particular god was meant.^[18]

2.2 Hadad

Main articles: [Hadad](#) and [Adad](#)

Baʿal was also used as a proper name by the third millennium BCE, when he appears in a list of deities at Abu Salabikh.^[10] Most modern scholarship asserts that this Baʿal—usually distinguished as “The Lord” (הבעל, *Ha Baʿal*)—was identical with the storm and fertility god Hadad;^{[10][19][13]} it also appears in the form *Baʿal Haddu*.^{[14][20]} Scholars propose that, as the cult of Hadad increased in importance, his true name came to be seen as too holy for any but the high priest to speak aloud and the alias “Lord” (“Baʿal”) was used instead, as “Bel” was used for Marduk and “Adonai” for Yahweh. A minority propose that Baʿal was a native Canaanite deity whose cult was identified with or absorbed aspects of Adad’s.^[10] Regardless of their original relationship, by the 1st millennium BCE, the two were distinct: Hadad was worshipped



Bronze figurine of a Baal, 14th x 12th century BCE, found at Ras Shamra (ancient Ugarit) near the Phoenician coast. Musée du Louvre.

by the Aramaeans and Ba'al by the Phoenicians and other Canaanites.^[10]

2.3 El

Main: El

The Phoenician Ba'al is generally identified with either El or Dagan.^[21]

2.4 Ba'al

See also: Baal cycle

Ba'al is well-attested in surviving inscriptions and was popular in theophoric names throughout the Levant^[22] but he is usually mentioned along with other gods, "his

own field of action being seldom defined".^[23] Nonetheless, Ugaritic records show him as a weather god, with particular power over lightning, wind, rain, and fertility.^{[23][n 4]} The dry summers of the area were explained as Ba'al's time in the underworld and his return in autumn was said to cause the storms which revived the land.^[23] Thus, the worship of Ba'al in Canaan—where he eventually supplanted El as the leader of the gods and patron of kingship—was connected to the regions' dependence on rainfall for its agriculture, unlike Egypt and Mesopotamia, which focused on irrigation from their major rivers. Anxiety about the availability of water for crops and trees increased the importance of his cult, which focused attention on his role as a rain god.^[13] He was also called upon during battle, showing that he was thought to intervene actively in the world of man,^[23] unlike the more aloof El. The Lebanese city of Baalbeck was named after Baal.^[26]

The Ba'al of Ugarit was the epithet of Hadad but as the time passed, the epithet became the god's name while Hadad became the epithet.^[27] Ba'al was usually said to be the son of Dagan, but appears as one of the sons of El in Ugaritic sources.^{[22][14][n 5]} Both Ba'al and El were associated with the bull in Ugaritic texts, as it symbolized both strength and fertility.^[28] The virgin goddess 'Anat was his sister and sometimes credited with a child through him. He held special enmity against snakes, both on their own and as representatives of Yammu (lit. "Sea"), the Canaanite sea god and river god.^[29] He fought the Tannin (*Tunnanu*), the "Twisted Serpent" (*Bṯn 'qltn*), "Litan the Fugitive Serpent" (*Ltn Bṯn Brḥ*, the Biblical Leviathan),^[29] and the "Mighty One with Seven Heads" (*Šlyṯ D.šb 't Rašm*).^{[30][n 6]} Ba'al's conflict with Yammu is now generally regarded as the prototype of the vision recorded in the 7th chapter of the Biblical Book of Daniel.^[32] As vanquisher of the sea, Ba'al was regarded by the Canaanites and Phoenicians as the patron of sailors and sea-going merchants.^[29] As vanquisher of Mot, the Canaanite death god, he was known as Ba'al Rāpi'uma (*B'l Rpu*) and regarded as the leader of the Rephaim (*Rpum*), the ancestral spirits, particularly those of ruling dynasties.^[29]

From Canaan, worship of Ba'al spread to Egypt by the Middle Kingdom and throughout the Mediterranean following the waves of Phoenician colonization in the early 1st millennium BCE.^[22] He was described with diverse epithets and, prior to the rediscovery of Ugarit, it was supposed that these referred to distinct local gods. However, as explained by Day, the texts at Ugarit revealed that they were considered "local manifestations of this particular deity, analogous to the local manifestations of the Virgin Mary in the Roman Catholic Church."^[19] In those inscriptions, he is frequently described as "Victorious Ba'al" (*Aliyn* or *Állyn Ba'al*),^{[14][10]} "Mightiest one" (*Aliy* or *'Aly*)^{[14][n 7]} or "Mightiest of the Heroes" (*Aliy Qrdm*), "The Powerful One" (*Dmrn*), and in his role as patron of the city "Ba'al of Ugarit" (*Ba'al Ugarit*).^[38] As

Ba'al Zaphon (*Ba'al Şapunu*), he was particularly associated with his palace atop **Jebel Aqra** (the ancient Mount Şapānu and classical Mons Casius).^[38] He is also mentioned as “Winged Ba'al” (*B'l Knp*) and “Ba'al of the Arrows” (*B'l Hż*).^[14] Phoenician and Aramaic inscriptions describe *B'l Krntryš*, “Ba'al of the Lebanon” (*B'l Lbnn*), “Ba'al of Sidon” (*B'l Şdn*), *B'l Şmd*, “Ba'al of the Heavens” (*Ba'al Shamem* or *Şamayin*), Ba'al 'Addir (*B'l 'dr*), Ba'al Hammon (*Ba'al Hāmon*), *B'l Mgnm*.^[22]

2.5 Ba'al Hammon

Main article: Ba'al Hammon

Ba'al Hammon was worshipped in the Tyrian colony of Carthage as their supreme god. It is believed that this position developed in the 5th century BCE following the severing of its ties to Tyre following the 480 BCE **Battle of Himera**.^[39] Like Hadad, Ba'al Hammon was a fertility god.^[40] Inscriptions about Punic deities tend to be rather uninformative, though, and he has been variously identified as a moon god^[41] and as Dagan, the grain god.^[42] Rather than the bull, Ba'al Hammon was associated with the ram and depicted with his horns. The archaeological record seems to bear out accusations in Roman sources that the Carthaginians burned their children as human sacrifices to him. He was worshipped as Ba'al Karnaim (“Lord of the Two Horns”), particularly at an open-air sanctuary at **Jebel Bu Kornein** (“Two-Horn Hill”) across the bay from Carthage. His consort was the goddess Tanit.^[43]

The epithet Hammon is obscure. Most often, it is connected with the NW Semitic *hammān* (“brazier”) and associated with a role as a sun god.^[44] Renan and Gibson linked it to Hammon (modern Umm el-'Amed between Tyre in Lebanon and Acre in Israel)^[45] and Cross and Lipiński to Haman or Khamōn, the classical **Mount Amanus** and modern Nur Mountains, which separate northern Syria from southeastern Cilicia.^{[46][47]}

3 Judaism

Ba'al appears about 90 times in the **Hebrew Scriptures** in reference to various gods.^[10] The priests of the Canaanite Ba'al are mentioned numerous times, most prominently in the **First Book of Kings**. Many scholars believe that this describes Jezebel's attempt to introduce the worship of the Ba'al of Tyre, Melqart,^[48] to the Israeli capital Samaria in the 9th century BCE.^[49] Against this, Day argues that Jezebel's Ba'al was more probably Ba'al Shamem, the Lord of the Heavens, a title most often applied to Hadad, who is also often titled just Ba'al.^[50] The Hebrew Scriptures record an account of a contest between the prophet Elijah and Jezebel's priests. Both sides offered a sacrifice to their respective gods: Ba'al failed to

light his followers' sacrifice while Yahweh's heavenly fire burnt Elijah's altar to ashes, even after it had been soaked with water. The observers then followed Elijah's instructions to slay the priests of Ba'al, after which it began to rain,^[51] showing Yahweh's mastery over the weather. Other mentions of the priests of Ba'al describe their burning of incense in prayer^[52] and their offering of sacrifice while adorned in special vestments.^[53]

3.1 Yahweh

Main articles: Yahweh and Names of God in Judaism

The title *ba'al* was a synonym in some contexts of the Hebrew *adon* (“Lord”) and *adonai* (“My Lord”) still used as aliases of the Lord of Israel Yahweh. According to some scholars, the early Hebrews did use the names Ba'al (“Lord”) and Ba'ali (“My Lord”) in reference to the Lord of Israel, just as Ba'al farther north designated the Lord of Ugarit or Lebanon.^{[49][7]} This occurred both directly and as the divine element of some Hebrew theophoric names. However, according to others it is not certain that the name Baal was definitely applied to Yahweh in early Israelite history. The component Baal in proper names is mostly applied to worshippers of Baal, or descendants of the worshippers of Baal.^[54] Names including the element Ba'al presumably in reference to Yahweh^{[55][7]} include the judge Gideon (also known as Jeruba'al, lit. “The Lord Strives”), Saul's son Eshba'al (“The Lord is Great”), and David's son Beeliada (“The Lord Knows”). The name Bealiah (“The Lord is Jah”; “Yahweh is Ba'al”)^[8] combined the two.^{[56][57]} However John Day states that as far as the names Eshba'al, Meriba'al, and Beeliada (that is Baaliada), are concerned it is not certain whether they simply allude to the Canaanite god Ba'al, or are intended to equate Yahweh with Ba'al, or have no connection to Ba'al.^[58]

It was the program of Jezebel, in the 9th century BCE, to introduce into Israel's capital city of Samaria her Phoenician worship of Baal as opposed to the worship of Yahweh that made the name anathema to the Israelites.^[49]

At first the name Baal was used by the Jews for their God without discrimination, but as the struggle between the two religions developed, the name Baal was given up by the Israelites as a thing of shame, and even names like Jerubbaal were changed to Jerubbosheth: Hebrew *bosheth* means “shame”.^[59]

Eshba'al became Ish-bosheth and Meriba'al became Mephibosheth,^[60] but other possibilities also occurred. Beeliada is mentioned renamed as Eliada and Gideon's name Jeruba'al was mentioned intact but glossed as a mockery of the Canaanite god, implying that he strove in vain.^[61] Direct use of Ba'ali continued at least as late

as the time of the prophet Hosea, who reproached the Israelites for doing so.^[62]

Brad E. Kelle has suggested that references to cultic sexual practices in the worship of Baal, in Hosea 2, are evidence of an historical situation in which Israelites were either giving up Yahweh worship for Baal, or blending the two. Hosea's references to sexual acts being metaphors for Israelite 'apostasy'.^[63]

3.2 Ba'al Berith

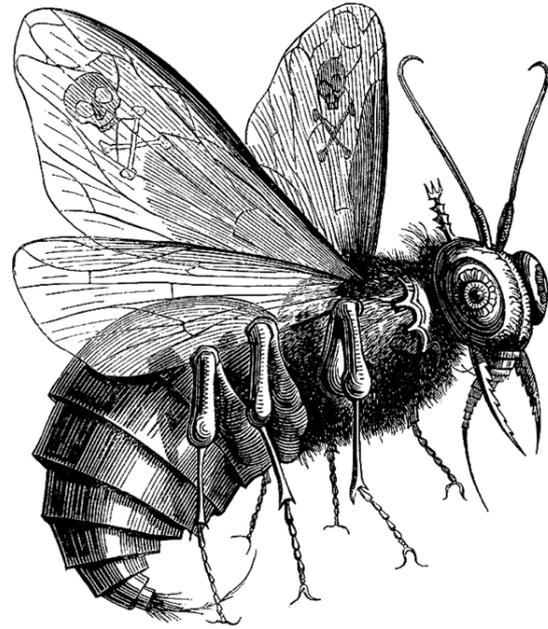
Main article: Ba'al Berith

Ba'al Berith ("Lord of the Covenant") was a god worshipped by the Israelites when they "went astray" after the death of Gideon according to the Hebrew Scriptures.^[64] The same source relates that Gideon's son Abimelech went to his mother's kin at Shechem and received 70 shekels of silver "from the House of Ba'al Berith" to assist in killing his 70 brothers from Gideon's other wives.^[65] An earlier passage had made Shechem the scene of Joshua's covenant between all the tribes of Israel and "El Yahweh, our god of Israel"^[66] and a later one describes it as the location of the "House of El Berith".^[67] It is thus unclear whether the false worship of the "Ba'alim" being decried^[64] is the worship of a new idol or the continued worship of Yahweh, but by means of rites and teachings taking him to be a mere local god within a larger pantheon. The Hebrew Scriptures record the worship of Ba'al threatening Israel from the time of the Judges until the monarchy.^[68] The Deuteronomist^[69] and the present form of Jeremiah^[70] seem to phrase the struggle as monolatry or monotheism against polytheism. However, Yahweh is firmly identified in the Hebrew Scriptures with El, whose Canaanite figure appears hostile to the cult of Ba'al even in the polytheistic accounts of Ugarit and the Phoenician cities.^[71]

3.3 Beelzebub

Main article: Beelzebub

Ba'al Zebub (Hebrew: בעל זבוב, lit. "Fly Lord")^{[72][73][n 8]} occurs in the first chapter of the Second Book of Kings as the supposed name of the Philistine god of Ekron. In it, Ahaziah, king of Israel, is said to have consulted the priests of Ba'al Zebub as to whether he would survive the injuries from his recent fall. The prophet Elijah, incensed at this impiety, then foretold that he would die quickly, raining heavenly fire on the soldiers sent to punish him for doing so.^[75] Jewish scholars have interpreted the title of "Lord of the Flies" as the Hebrew way of calling Ba'al a pile of dung and his followers vermin,^{[76][77][78]} although others argue for a link to power over causing and curing pestilence and thus suitable for Ahaziah's



"Beelzebub" in *De Plancy's 1825 Dictionnaire Infernal*.

question.^[79] The Septuagint renders the name as *Baälzeboûb* (βααλζεβούβ) and as "Ba'al of Flies" (βααλ μυιαν, *Baäl muian*). Symmachus the Ebionite rendered it as *Beëlzeboûl* (Βεελζεβούλ), possibly reflecting its original sense.^{[80][n 9]} This has been proposed to have been *B'l Zbl*, Ugaritic for "Lord of the Home" or "Lord of the Heavens".^{[81][n 10][n 11][n 12]}

4 Classical sources

Outside of Jewish and Christian contexts, the various forms of Ba'al were indifferently rendered in classical sources as Belus (Greek: Βῆλος, *Bēlos*). An example is Josephus, who states that Jezebel "built a temple to the god of the Tyrians, which they call Belus";^[48] this describes the Ba'al of Tyre, Melqart. In the *interpretatio graeca*, Ba'al was usually associated with Jupiter Belus but sometimes connected with Hercules. Herrmann identifies the Demarus or Demarous mentioned by Philo Byblius as Ba'al.^[29]

Ba'al Hammon, however, was identified with the Greek Cronos and the Roman Saturn (as the "African Saturn"). He was probably never equated with Melqart, although this assertion appears in older scholarship.

5 Christianity

Beelzebub or Beelzebul was identified by the writers of the New Testament as Satan, "prince" (i.e., king) of the demons.^{[n 13][n 14]}

John Milton's 1667 epic *Paradise Lost* describes the fallen angels collecting around Satan, stating that, though their heavenly names had been “blotted out and ras’d”, they would acquire new ones “wandring ore the Earth” as false gods. The “Baalim” and “Ashtaroth” are given as the collective names of the male and female demons (respectively) who came from between the “bordring flood of old Euphrates” and “the Brook that parts Egypt from Syrian ground”.^[84] Similarly, “Baal” and derived epithets like “Baalist” were used as slurs during the English Reformation for the Catholic saints and their devotees.

6 Islam

The Quran mentions the contest between Jezebel's priests of Ba'al and the prophet Elijah^[51] (renamed Elias):

And Elias was most surely of the messengers. He asked his people: 'Do you not fear [God]? Will ye call upon Baal and forsake the best of creators? God is your Lord and the Lord of your fathers, the ancients' But they rejected him, and they will certainly be called up [for punishment], except the sincere and devoted servants of God [among them], and we left [this blessing] for him among generations [to come] in later times, peace be upon Elias.^[85]

The name Beelzebub also appears in Arabic sources as “the Lord of the Flies” (بعل الذباب, *Ba'al dhubaab* or *zubaab*).

7 See also

- Adonis
- Other Baals
- Baal in popular culture
- Baal the demon
- Baalahs
- Ba'al Shamem (Lord of the Heavens)
- Ba'al Pe'or (Lord of Mt Pe'or)
- Ba'al Zaphon (Lord of Mt Zaphon)
- Baaltars
- Bel & Temple of Bel
- Beluses
- Belial

- Canaanite religion
- Elagabalus
- Set
- Teshub & Theispas
- Adad & Hadad

8 Notes

- [1] The American pronunciation is usually the same^{[2][3]} but some speakers prefer variants closer to the original sound, such as /ba:'a:l/ or /'ba:l/.^{[3][4]}
- [2] The exceptions to this general rule developed over the first millennia BCE and are known as *mater lectionis*.
- [3] This cuneiform is identical to the ⟨𒂗⟩ which is taken as EN in Sumerian texts. There, it has the meaning “high priest” or “lord” and appears in the names of the gods Enki and Enlil.
- [4] In surviving accounts, Ba'al's power over fertility extends only over vegetation. Older scholarship claimed Ba'al controlled human fertility as well, but did so on the basis of misinterpretation or of inscriptions now regarded as dubious.^[24] Similarly, 19th-century scholarship treating Baal as a personification of the sun seems to have been badly taken. The astrotheology of Near Eastern deities was an Iron Age development long postdating the origin of religion and, following its development, Bel and Ba'al were associated with the planet Jupiter.^[25] The sun was worshipped in Canaan as either the goddess Shapash or the god Shamash.
- [5] Herrmann argues against seeing these separate lineages literally, instead proposing that they describe Ba'al's roles. As a god, he is understood as a child of El, “father of gods”, while his fertility aspects connect him to the grain god Dagan.^[22]
- [6] The account is patchy and obscure here. Some scholars take some or all of the terms to refer to Litan and in other passages ‘Anat takes credit for destroying the monsters on Ba'al's behalf. Herrmann takes “Šalyaṭu” as a proper name^[29] rather than translating it as the “powerful one” or “tyrant”.^[31]
- [7] This name appears twice in the Legend of Keret discovered at Ugarit. Prior to this discovery, Nyberg had restored it to the Hebrew texts of Deuteronomy,^[33] 1 & 2 Samuel,^{[34][35]} Isaiah,^[36] and Hosea.^[37] Following its verification, additional instances have been claimed in the Psalms and in Job.^[13]
- [8] “The etymology of Beelzebub has proceeded in several directions. The variant reading Beelzebub (Syriac translators and Jerome) reflects a long-standing tradition of equating Beelzebub with the Philistine deity of the city of Ekron mentioned in 2 Kgs 1:2, 3, 6, 16. Baalzebub (Heb ba.al zēbūb) seems to mean “lord of flies” (HALAT, 250, but cf. LXXB baal muian theon akkarōn, “Baal-Fly, god of Akkaron”; Ant 9:2, 1 theon muian).”^[74]

- [9] Arndt & al. reverse this, saying Symmachus transcribed *Baälzeboúb* for a more common *Beëlzeboúl*.^[72]
- [10] “It is more probable that b'l zbl, which can mean “lord of the (heavenly) dwelling” in Ugaritic, was changed to b'l zbb to make the divine name an opprobrious epithet. The reading Beelzebul in Mt. 10:25 would then reflect the right form of the name, a wordplay on “master of the house” (Gk oikodespótēs).”^[82]
- [11] “An alternative suggested by many is to connect zēbûl with a noun meaning ‘(exalted) abode.’”^[74]
- [12] “In contemporary Semitic speech it may have been understood as ‘the master of the house’; if so, this phrase could be used in a double sense in Mt. 10:25b.”^[83]
- [13] “In NT Gk. beelzeboul, beezeboul (Beelzebub in TR and AV) is the prince of the demons (Mt. 12:24, 27; Mk. 3:22; Lk. 11:15, 18f.), identified with Satan (Mt. 12:26; Mk. 3:23, 26; Lk. 11:18).”^[83]
- [14] “Besides, Matt 12:24; Mark 3:22; Luke 11:15 use the apposition ἄρχων τῶν δαιμονίων ‘head of the →Demons’.”^[79]
- [20] Ayali-Darshan (2013), p. 652.
- [21] Decker, Roy (2001), “Carthaginian Religion”, *Ancient/Classical History*, New York: About.com, p. 2.
- [22] Herrmann (1999a), p. 133.
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- [25] Smith & al. (1899).
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- [28] Miller (2000), p. 32.
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- [30] Uehlinger (1999), p. 512.
- [31] *DULAT* (2015), “šlyt”.
- [32] Collins (1984), p. 77.
- [33] Deut. 33:12.
- [34] 1 Sam. 2:10.
- [35] 2 Sam. 23:1.
- [36] Isa. 59:18 & 63:7.
- [37] Hos. 7:16.
- [38] Herrmann (1999a), pp. 132–133.
- [39] Moscati (2001), p. 132.
- [40] Lancel (1995), p. 197.
- [41] Yigael Yadin.
- [42] Lipiński (1992).
- [43] Lancel (1995), p. 195.
- [44] Walbank (1979), p. 47.
- [45] Gibson (1982), p. 39 & 118.
- [46] Cross (1973), p. 26–28.
- [47] Lipiński (1994), p. 207.
- [48] Josephus, *Antiquities*, 8.13.1.
- [49] *BEWR* (2006), “Baal”.
- [50] Day (2000), p. 75.
- [51] 1 Kings 18.
- [52] 2 Kings 23:5.
- [53] 2 Kings 10:22
- [54] Herrmann (1999a), p. 136.

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- [13] Pope (2006).
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- [16] Strong (1890), H1172.
- [17] Wehr & al. (1976), p. 67.
- [18] Halpern (2009), p. 64.
- [19] Day (2000), p. 68.

- [55] Ayles (1904), p. 103.
- [56] 1 Chron. 12:5.
- [57] Easton (1893), "Bealí'ah".
- [58] Day (2000), p. 72.
- [59] *ZPBD* (1963).
- [60] 1 Chron. 9:40.
- [61] Judges 6:32.
- [62] Hosea 2:16
- [63] title = Hosea 2: Metaphor and Rhetoric in Historical Perspective | author = Brad E. Kelle | pub = Society of Biblical Lit | year = 2005 | pg 137
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- [67] Jdg. 9:46.
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- [69] Deut. 4:1–40.
- [70] Jer. 11:12–13.
- [71] *Sanchuniathon*.
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- [73] Balz & al. (2004), p. 211.
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