

## Chapter Three—A Golden Age Arises & Disintegrates

The story of Israel's rise to a Golden Age during the United Monarchy of David and Solomon and then its disintegration into two hostile, rival kingdoms is one of human weakness, prophesied consequences, and divine intervention.

After crossing the Jordan River into Canaan, the Israelites did a so-so job in carrying out the divine orders to dispossess the various nations who were already occupying the land.

From the Almighty's perspective, He owned during antiquity and continues to own all the earth. He determines, who shall live where, according to His criteria. God had previously explained to Abraham that He was timing the eviction of the Canaanites from the Promised Land according to the level of that society's degeneracy (cf. Genesis 15:16). It bears repeating that God is not a respecter of persons. He would eventually judge all the tribes of Jacob according to the same high standards and punish them with eviction as well!

### *God isn't Politically Correct*

Today, such a mass expulsion of native peoples and resettlement by new settlers, as the one that occurred when Israel entered the Promised Land, would be considered "politically incorrect" and culturally intolerant

The "politically correct" perspective, which is espoused by many of the intellectual elite today throughout the Western world, is usually labeled "post-nationalism." The post-nationalist doctrine equates morality with universalism. It advocates the elimination of both nation-state and religion, which are condemned as the prime sources of "original sin."

This intellectual movement is alive and

well among some Israeli intellectuals and is known there as post-Zionism and post-Judaism. The post-Zionists argue that the state of Israel is immoral because they believe it was established to disinherit the people already living in Palestine and steal their land. Such post-Zionist Israelis are repulsed by their own history and identity. The intellectuals pushing post-Judaism ideology in the media or at the university hold that Jewish particularism—the belief that the people of Israel were chosen to live in covenant relationship with God and have faith in His promises—is a dysfunctional, obsolete relic that is now "unfashionable, dark, and narrow-minded."

But obviously, the LORD God of Israel doesn't see things that way.

The first chapter in the book of Judges recounts that the tribes of Israel did not pursue the divinely ordained expulsion of the Canaanites with adequate thoroughness. Perhaps they got tired of continuing a difficult struggle after they had achieved a measure of success? Certainly

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their zeal and faith flagged. God is never impressed with half-hearted obedience accompanied by compromise and self-serving rationalization on the part of his human covenant partners. There were to be consequences.

Then the Angel [Messenger] of the LORD came up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said: "I led you up from Egypt and brought you to the land of which I swore to your fathers; and I said, 'I will never break My covenant with you. And you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall tear down their altars.' But you have not obeyed My voice. Why have you done this? Therefore I also said, 'I will not drive them out before you; but they shall be thorns in your side, and their gods shall be a snare to you'" (Judges 2:1-3, NKJV).

And what a snare those Canaanites became! For 400 or 200 years, depending on whose chronology you care to believe, the tribal confederation of Israel would cycle between faithfulness and apostasy to their covenant with God. This time was called "Judges."

Whenever a significant portion of the people of God became multicultural in their religious appetites—participating with their neighbors in the worship of Baal and the Ashoreths, the chief Canaanite deities—God would allow Israel to fall into the hands of an enemy who would oppress and plunder them. When the Hebrews hit bottom, they would cry to their fathers' God for help. Ever patient and faithful, God would raise up a "judge," usually a charismatic individual with some combination of military, religious and civil authority, to deliver them. As long as he or *she* (cf. Judges 4) was alive, the Israelites would ostensibly serve God.

But it seemed that as soon as the judge was dead, discipline relaxed and the younger generation once again became enticed by the Canaanite fertility rituals, a hedonistic mix of myth, sex and partying. The Hebrews naturally seemed to accept a "do your own thing" philosophy during this era. The Scriptures sum up the period of Judges this way:

In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes (Judges 21:25).

### **A United Monarchy, A Golden Era**

During the lifetime of the last judge, Samuel, the tribal elders of Israel decided that national stability and security would be better served if they had a continuous human bureaucracy "like all the nations" (1 Samuel 8:5). But Samuel was displeased when the elders asked him to make a king for them. After all, God was already their king! He might be invisible, but then His tax bite was also relatively light; and it mostly went to advance a family's own religious education, or to help out local people in need (cf. Genesis 28:22; Deuteronomy 14:22-38).

Nevertheless, God told Samuel to fulfill the desires of the people. Such a development had been foreseen since the time of Moses and there were rules designed to regulate a king's conduct that "his heart may not be lifted above his brethren, that he may not turn aside from the commandment" (cf. Deuteronomy 17:14-20). Still God warned Israel that there would be high costs associated with the dubious privilege of having a fallible human with that much power and authority ruling over them (cf. 1 Samuel 8:11-18). Thousands of years later, those of us in the Western world who pay high taxes and complain about bureaucratic red tape and the behavior of our government leaders understand this point all too well!

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The first king selected, a man named Saul, ultimately failed the test. He turned out to be more concerned about being popular with the people than pleasing to God. But, David the son of Jesse, Saul's replacement, proved to be a man after God's own heart (cf. Acts 13:22). David, a descendant of the patriarch Judah, had a life that was both rough and sublime. David experienced the comfort of close friendships, the ecstasy of victory over enemies, and private pleasures at home. Yet his life was also filled with turmoil, disappointments, and dangers. Through it all, David's faith in the goodness and love of God sustained him. His turbulent life as shepherd-musician-military hero-faithful friend-guerrilla warrior-king prompted him to write some of the most inspiring and inspired sections of the Scriptures we know today as the Psalms.

Oh, give thanks to the LORD! Call upon His name; make know His deeds among the peoples! Sing to Him, sing psalms to Him; talk of all His wondrous works!.... He is the LORD our God; His judgments are in all the earth. Remember His covenant always. The word which He commanded, for a thousand generations, the covenant which He made with Abraham, and His oath to Isaac, and confirmed it to Jacob for a statute, to Israel for an everlasting covenant (1 Chronicles 16: 8-9, 14-17, NKJV).



United Kingdoms Period

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David was established as king over the tribes of Israel in two stages. First the tribe of Judah anointed him king, and David reigned in Hebron for about seven years. Then the rest of the tribes of Israel made a covenant with him and anointed him king over them thus restoring unity. This coronation ceremony was attended by approximately 350,000 armed warriors from all the tribes of Jacob (1 Chronicles 12:23-40)! David's effective military soon subdued Israel's unfriendly neighbours. Reigning a total of 40 years, 33 of them from Jerusalem, David's rule signalled the kingdom of Israel's ascent to regional military and economic preeminence.

Part of the reason for Israel's growing prosperity came from the trading relationship with King Hiram and the Phoenicians begun during David's reign (cf. 1 Chronicles 14:1). From the Phoenician point of view, a cooperative alliance with Jerusalem was of vital geopolitical interest because of David's conquests of Edom, Moab, Ammon and Aram.

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A united and strong Israel controlled vital land caravan trade routes and produced large quantities of valuable agricultural exports such as wine, olive oil, and wheat.

From the Israelite point of view the Phoenicians were useful economic allies because they provided markets and contacts through their trading colonies established all over the Mediterranean, along the African and northwestern European coasts, and the British Isles.

The question of manpower also figured prominently in the Israel and Phoenicia equation. The Phoenicians could provide experienced navigators for joint maritime enterprises. However, the Israelites were not strictly landlubbers themselves. They, too, had sailors. The Scriptures note that the tribes of Asher and Dan had maritime expertise (cf. Judges 5:17). And, of course, Israel's much greater manpower resources could help supply labourers, tradesmen, and suppliers for the Phoenician marketing and transportation empire. They could work together relatively easily because they shared a common Semitic dialect and alphabet. As it would turn out, the history of Israel and Phoenicia was intertwined. In general they would prosper together in good times, and suffer together during bad times from the attacks of common enemies.

During the reign of David's successor, Solomon, the partnership with the Phoenicians expanded dramatically. It seems that a covenant of kinship was formally made between the two nations during this time period (literally a "covenant of brothers," cf. Amos 1:9, NRSV).

Solomon built many merchant ships manned by Israelite and Phoenician sailors. The wealth accumulated by this maritime traffic is still astounding. From one voyage of Solomon's fleet of ships that sailed out of the port of Eilat, that gave access to the Indian Ocean and beyond, Solomon's profit is recorded as amounting to 34,000 pounds of gold from Ophir (cf. 2 Chronicles 9:21)! Other valuable commodities such as silver, gem stones and ivory were also brought back along with exotic curiosities like apes, baboons, and peacocks. Where did those fleets go to amass such wealth? That we don't know. Wherever it was, the Phoenician and Israelite sailors required three years to make a round trip because the distance was so great.

The Bible notes that Solomon's yearly base revenues amounted to 50,000 pounds of gold not counting the gold he received from trading profits (v. 1). With this vast wealth Solomon furnished both his principle building projects, the Temple of God and his new palace complex, with such incredible magnificence that all the kings of the surrounding lands had to come see it (2 Chronicles 9:22).

The inside walls and even the floors of the Temple were covered with pure gold. Two 15-foot high cherubim, each having two almost eight-foot-long outstretched wings, overshadowed the mercy seat on the Ark of the Covenant. Those covering cherubim were overlaid with pure gold. The seven-branched menorah, table for the showbread, bowls, pans, other lamp stands, lamp trimmers and even the door hinges to the holy of holies were made of solid gold.

Solomon had a large throne made of ivory overlaid with gold. He supplied his guards with hundreds of golden ceremonial shields, the large ones being made with about seven and one-half pounds of hammered gold. His palace's dining service included solid gold cups and plates. The Scriptures note that nothing was made of silver during Solomon's time because it was just considered too ordinary (1 Kings 10:21).





Artist's Rendering of Solomon's temple

It was truly a golden era. But that time of unprecedented prosperity, overflowing abundance and massive building projects came to an abrupt end because Solomon and many of his people forgot the basis of their wealth.

At the beginning of Solomon's reign, the Bible notes that he loved the LORD and followed in the footsteps of his father David. At that time God appeared to Solomon and said, "Ask! What shall I give you?" (1 Kings 3:5, NKJV). Solomon made a wise choice. He asked for an understanding heart so that he could properly fulfill his kingly responsibility to rendered just judgment for his people. God was pleased with this unselfish attitude. He promised to not only give what was requested, but also riches, honour, and long life— if he, Solomon, continued to live within the covenant.

Shortly after the Temple was completed and dedicated, God appeared a second time to Solomon, saying,

I have heard your prayer and your supplication that you have made before Me; I have sanctified this house which you have built to put My name there forever, and My eyes and My heart will be there perpetually (1 Kings 9:3, NKJV).

God then conditionally promised to Solomon to establish the throne of his dynasty over the people of Israel living in their Promised Land forever. However, if Solomon failed to follow God with integrity, there were prophesied consequences:

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If you or your sons at all turn from following Me, and do not keep My commandments and My statutes which I have set before you, but go and serve other gods and worship them, **then I will cut off Israel from the land which I have given them;** and this house which I have sanctified for My name I will cast out of My sight. Israel will be a proverb and a byword among all peoples (vv. 6-7).

Back in Deuteronomy 17, God had specifically instructed the future kings of His people not to “multiply wives” as was customary among the Gentile kingdoms. He understood the potentially negative consequences of the political alliances such liaisons were meant to establish. Solomon unwisely made the mistake of ignoring divine instruction. He could surely find his place in the Guinness’ Book of Records for the number of wives he married (cf. 1 Kings 11:3).

For it was so, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned his heart after other gods.... Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites.... Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab... and for Molech the abomination of the people of Ammon. And he did likewise for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and sacrificed to their gods. So the LORD became angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned from the LORD God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice.... Therefore the LORD said to Solomon, **“Because you have done this, and have not kept My covenant and My statutes, which I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom away from you and give it to your servant.** Nevertheless I will not do it in your days, for the sake of your father David; but I will tear it out of the hand of your son. However I will not tear away the whole kingdom, **but I will give one tribe to your son for the sake of my servant David,** and for the sake of Jerusalem which I have chosen” (1 Kings 11:4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 11-13, NKJV).

### **A Divided Monarchy, Disintegration**

By the time Solomon died, about 922 B.C., the tribes occupying the northern part of the nation were discontented with Solomon’s heavy taxation and forced labor practices (cf. 1 Kings 4:7, 22, 26-28; 5:13, 15). When Solomon’s son Rehoboam came to the throne, the northern tribes petitioned for relief.

Rehoboam asked his counsellors for advice. The older men suggested that he adopt the attitude of being a servant-leader to God’s people by responding to them positively, relieving the tax burden and making life better for the ordinary citizens of Israel’s commonwealth. However, the younger counsellors argued that Rehoboam should exercise strong control as an absolutist monarch over his kingdom. He should demand even greater tax revenues in order to maintain the lifestyle to which the royal household had grown accustomed. Rehoboam decided to follow the advice of the younger, spoiled generation.

The result was predictable—the northern 10 tribes seceded from the Union and installed Jeroboam, a former servant of Solomon, as their new king, as the prophet Ahijah the Shilonite had foretold some years earlier (1 Kings 11:29-40). Only Judah joined by Benjamin and Levi remained loyal to the House of David.

After he got over his shock, Rehoboam’s first reaction to being given ousted from power was to invade the northern tribes with an army of 180,000 soldiers from Judah and Benjamin in order to teach the northern tribes a lesson. But God had no interest in seeing a civil war break out among His people, so He sent this word to Judah’s leadership:

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Thus says the LORD, You shall not go up or fight against your kindred the people of Israel. Let everyone go home, for this thing is from me (1 Kings 12:22).

Surprisingly, Rehoboam and all his people listened. The invasion was called off. The era of the Divided Monarchy began.

### Bringing Our Worst Fears Upon Ourselves

In order to secure his hold over the whole territory of his new kingdom, Jeroboam immediately built two capitals for his government. Both were located at traditionally significant tribal rendezvous points. One was at Shechem in the West Bank region while the other was at Peniel east of the Jordan River. Jeroboam's thoughts then turned to the other big "problem" that, he thought, might wrest *his* kingdom out of *his* hands. This was the question of Jerusalem with its Temple dedicated to God.

Then Jeroboam said to himself, "Now the kingdom may well revert to the house of David. If this people continues to go up to offer sacrifices in the house of the LORD at Jerusalem, the heart of this people will turn again to their master, King Rehoboam of Judah; they will kill me and return to King Rehoboam of Judah" (1 Kings 12:26-27, NRSV).



Kingdom of the Northern Ten Tribes — Israel

By acting out of fear and having confidence in what could be seen rather than in the One who is unseen (cf. 2 Corinthians 4:18), Jeroboam decided that the solution to his problem was to set up closer, more convenient centres of worship located within the territory of the northern Ten Tribes. To lure the people to come to these new festival sites rather than Jerusalem, he needed a credible religious attraction. Since securing the Ark of the Covenant or any of the symbolically important religious furnishings at Jerusalem's Temple seemed impossible, Jeroboam decided on the next best thing. Why not resurrect the good old time religion, with its golden calf and competing festivals (cf. 1 Kings 12:33)?

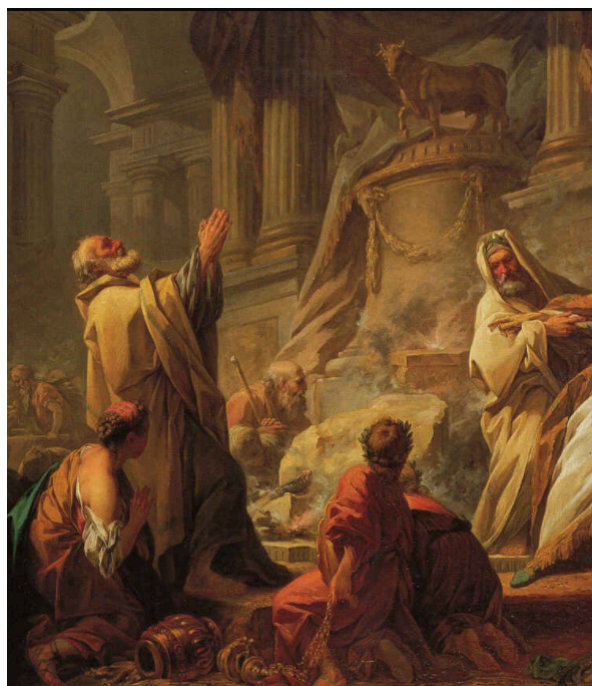
So the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold. He said to the people, "You have gone up to Jerusalem long enough. Here are your gods O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt. He set one in Bethel and the other he put in Dan (1 Kings 12:28-29).

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Practicality and innovation are usually perceived in modern North American culture as positive values. However, when it comes to our worship of the Almighty, God wants us to neither add nor take away from what *He specifically says* (cf. Deuteronomy 4:2; Revelation 22:18). In essence what Jeroboam was doing is called religious syncretism. He was trying to combine the religion of Israel's God as defined by the Scriptures with pagan beliefs and human rationalization. The Society for Biblical Literature elaborates:

The two calves may have been bull images, traditional ancient Near Eastern symbols of power and fertility. In Canaan they were associated both with the god, El, the head of the pantheon, and with the storm god Baal. The worship of the bull or calf in Israel had ancient roots (see e.g. Exodus 32) and Jeroboam may have thought that he was reinstating an older and more authentic form of the worship of the Lord. In any case, his actions violate Israel's traditional prohibition against making images of the deity.<sup>1</sup>

The Levitical priesthood established during the time of Moses had been scattered throughout all the tribes of Jacob because their function was to educate and serve all the people according to the written word of God of which they were custodians. The Levites would have been obvious impediments to Jeroboam's syncretism. Consequently, Jeroboam ousted the Levitical priesthood and created a new priesthood to offer sacrifices at his new religious centres. These new priests were allowed to come from any of Israel's tribes, not just the Levites. As a result most of the Levites gave up their houses and garden plots among the northern Ten Tribes and moved to Judah where they could continue to perform their divine functions (cf. 2 Chronicles 11:13-15).



Artist's Rendering of Golden Calf

The unforeseen consequences that Jeroboam unleashed due to his religious “reforms” were disastrous for his family—eventually. Strange isn't it? By trying to use pragmatism and human reasoning to maintain his grip on power instead of exercising faith in the unseen God, Jeroboam brought upon himself exactly the opposite of what he wanted. Instead of a blessing he secured for his family what he feared —annihilation. However, Jeroboam's family wouldn't be the only ones affected by his wrong-headed choices. As is often the case, bad leadership means everyone in the community suffers, as the northern Ten Tribes were soon to discover.

Shortly after the inauguration of the newly revised religious services at Bethel and Dan, Ahijah the Shilonite, who had originally prophesied to Jeroboam that he would become king, was inspired to give this prophecy:

<sup>1</sup> Annotated notes by Society of Biblical Literature, *The HarperCollins Study Bible*, NRSV version, 1993, pp. 538-539.



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Go tell Jeroboam, “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Because I exalted you from among the people, made you leader over my people Israel, and tore the kingdom away from the house of David to give it to you; yet you have not been like my servant David, who kept my commandments and followed me with all his heart, doing only that which was right in my sight, but you have done evil above all those who were before you and have gone and made for yourself other gods, and cast images, provoking me to anger, and have thrust me behind your back; therefore, I will bring evil upon the house of Jeroboam. I will cut off from Jeroboam every male, both bond and free in Israel, and will consume the house of Jeroboam, just as one burns up dung until it is all gone....

The LORD will strike Israel, as a reed is shaken in the water; **he will root up Israel out of this good land that he gave to their ancestors, and scatter them beyond the Euphrates**, because they have made their sacred poles [Asherim], provoking the LORD to anger. He will give Israel up because of the sins of Jeroboam, which he sinned and which he caused Israel to commit” (1 Kings 14:7-10, 15-16).

Sadly, Jeroboam’s actions were merely in tune with the times. In Judah, Rehoboam, whose mother was an Ammonite, did little or nothing to correct the idolatrous example his father set in his old age. Many people became ensnared in apostasy. Like their northern brothers, the leadership and citizenry of the southern kingdom of Judah also built high places in which to offer sacrifices, ignoring Solomon’s magnificent Temple and their ancestral covenant with God. They erected sacred poles or Asherim. Male and female prostitutes connected with Canaanite fertility rituals reappeared in the land (cf. 1 Kings 14:24). How easy it is for humans to take their blessings for granted. How quickly thankfulness, appreciation, and glory fade.

In the fifth year of King Rehoboam, Pharaoh Shishak invaded the Promised Land with 1,200 chariots, 60,000 cavalry and large numbers of infantry. Unprepared after so many years of easy living, both Judah and Israel panicked. The prophet Shemaiah appeared in Rehoboam’s court at Jerusalem and spoke God’s verdict:

You abandoned me, so I have abandoned you to the hand of Shishak (2 Chronicles 12:5, NRSV).

The Scriptures note that when Judah’s leadership heard this they admitted their guilt and humbled themselves before the LORD. Such an event never happened among the dynasties that ruled the northern Ten Tribes. However, because of Rehoboam’s change of heart, God decided to reduce the impact of the disaster. Instead of complete destruction, Judah would receive measured discipline. God explained to Shemaiah:

**They have humbled themselves; I will not destroy them, but I will grant them some deliverance**, and my wrath shall not be poured out on Jerusalem by the hand of Shishak. Nevertheless they shall be his servants so that they may know the difference between serving me and serving the kingdoms of other lands (2 Chronicles 12:7-8).

This is an important point to remember concerning the LORD God of Israel and how He deals with His people who anger Him. Despite repentance, God might not take away all the consequences of rebellion against Him. But, to those who sincerely humble themselves, He may grant partial deliverance, carefully measuring the punishment and the relief. God does not throw a fit when angry and just blot out the human object of His anger — if there is a hope of redemption. Even after His stiff-necked covenant people severely anger Him, God deals with them in ways to teach them rather than to completely destroy them.

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The Bible records that the Egyptians were able to demand as tribute most of the golden treasures Solomon had made for the Temple and his palace, including the golden shields. Shishak's own account of this invasion was preserved on the walls of the temple that he built with his Solomonic plunder to honour his god, Amun-Re, in Karnak. He boasts taking some 150 towns mostly in Judah's Negev region and Israel's north. In this manner a golden age vanished.

### The Tempting Worship of a Counterfeit "Lord"

Why was Baalism such a strong competitor to the pure "Yahwehistic" worship of ancient Israel's God? What was Baalism after all? Listen to several quotes by several dry, scholarly types who were not known for getting carried away with exaggeration: Canaanite religion, however, presents us with no pretty picture. It was, in fact, an extraordinarily debasing form of paganism, specifically of the fertility cult.

Baal worship was the most degrading aspect of Canaanite civilization. Devotees brought wine, oil, first fruits, and firstlings of the flocks to the "high places." Near the rock altar was a *mazzebah* or sacred pillar which represented the male element [an erect phallic symbol in stone] in the fertility cult, corresponding to the Asherah, or female element [carved wooden tree trunks usually translated "groves" in many versions].

Chambers were maintained for sacred prostitution by *kedeshim* ("male prostitutes") and *kedeshoth* ("sacred harlots") (cf. 1 Kings 14:23, 24; 2 Kings 23:7). It should be noted that the language of the prophets who

describe unfaithfulness to the Lord as adultery, and speak of those who forget the God of Israel as going "whoring after idols," is more than a figure of speech.

The chief god Baal is usually portrayed as the fertility-storm god and is represented on his idols with a phallic helmet on his head and a lightning bolt in his hand. The sister and spouse of Baal was known by various names such as Asherah, Astarte or Anat. Her somewhat sardonic nickname was "the virgin" but others called her "the queen of heaven (cf. Jeremiah 44:29). Her two sons according to the Phoenicians were "Pothos ("sexual desire") and Eros ("sexual love"). But this sexual partner of Baal could also be a goddess of war who fights Baal's enemies washing her hands in their blood.

In cult services to the seventy or so gods who were part of the Baal pantheon, the worshippers reenacted various myths of these gods in an effort to stimulate them into providing agricultural and human fertility. The most important of these myths was the annual celebrations of the death and resurrection of Baal, which corresponded to the drying up of nature at the end of summer and the beginning of new life in spring.

The religious idea behind ritualistic prostitution, homosexuality, and bestiality was to seek union with the god who might be female or male and who could come in human or animal form. The cult ceremonies were wild berserk frenzies. The priests and worshippers enflamed themselves with alcohol and sex orgies into the highest pitch of enthusiasm, shouting and screaming to wild clashing music as they sought to be united with the objects of their worship. In their delirium of excitement the priests of Baal would lacerate themselves with knives or whips until the blood would freely flow.

During the reign of Israel's King Ahab and Queen Jezebel, a Phoenician princess from Tyre, in the mid-ninth century B.C., the government of the northern Ten Tribes officially adopted the worship of the Baals. It was a challenge that Israel's God did not leave unanswered. As Abraham Heschel noted:

*The confrontation of Elijah with the prophets of Baal dramatized not only the issue: Who is the true God? but also the issue: How does one approach Him? Elijah employs neither swords nor lances; he does not mutilate his body, nor go into frenzy. He repairs the altar of the Lord, which was broken down, arranges the offering of the sacrifice and utters a prayer which, far from being an ecstatic ejaculation, contains an invocation as well as a declaration of purpose:*

*"Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that Thou art God in Israel, and that I am Thy servant and that I have done all these things at Thy word" (1 Kings 18:36).*

Elijah won that contest and had the priests of Baal slaughtered. Was he justified in such an action? The Baal of Tyre that Elijah challenged was also called Melcharth. The scholar Charles Pfeiffer points out the

worship of Molech by the Ammonites was merely a derivative or at least a close relative of the worship of Tyre's Baal Melcharth. Molech was seen as the guarantor of solemn vows. Children were sacrificed to insure the sanctity of a promise. Solomon built an altar to Molech (cf. 1 Kings 11:7). Both kings Ahaz and Manasseh of Judah sacrificed sons to this idol (cf. 2 Kings 16:3; 21:6). Hundreds of urns containing the bones of children who had been burned alive have been discovered by archaeologists in areas where the cult of Molech was practiced.

The Greeks, who were commercial rivals of the Phoenicians, wrote of their disgust at the practice of child sacrifice that was carried on with enthusiasm by the Phoenician colony of Carthage. Who established Carthage and its culture in the first place? It is interesting to note the statement in Josephus that the grand niece of Jezebel, about 20 years after the death of Jezebel's father, founded the city of Carthage in Northern Africa, the forces of which, under Hannibal, nearly overwhelmed Rome...

Had Jezebel succeeded in Palestine and Hannibal in Italy, this faith (Baalism) might have overspread the world. The sword of Scipio Africanus and the faith of Elijah the Tishbite were strange allies, but the Lord used them both to save the world from such a fate.

The prophets of Israel's God tenaciously fought against the idolatrous worship of Baal for centuries because it led to the worst forms of human degeneracy.