Figure 1.1: Joshua's Early Victories and Failures (Joshua 6, 7, 8, 9)



Figure 1.2: Joshua's Southern Campaign to Defend Gibeon (Joshua 10)



Figure 1.3: Joshua's Northern Campaign (Joshua 11)

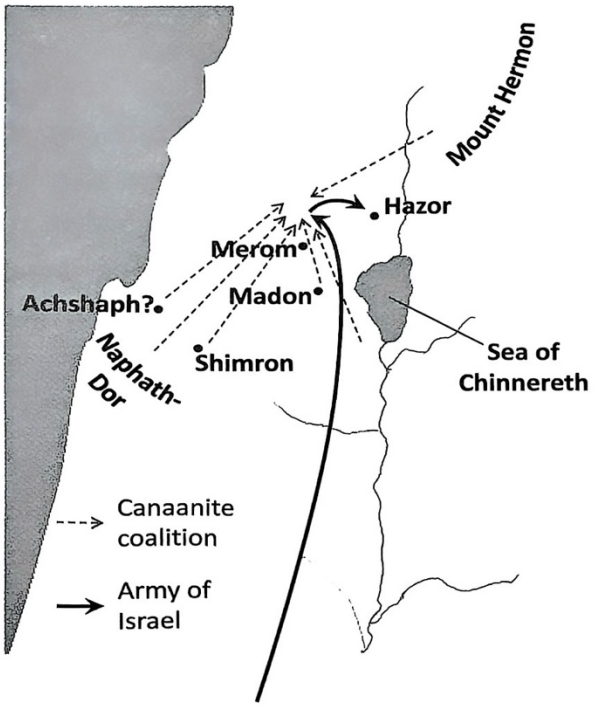


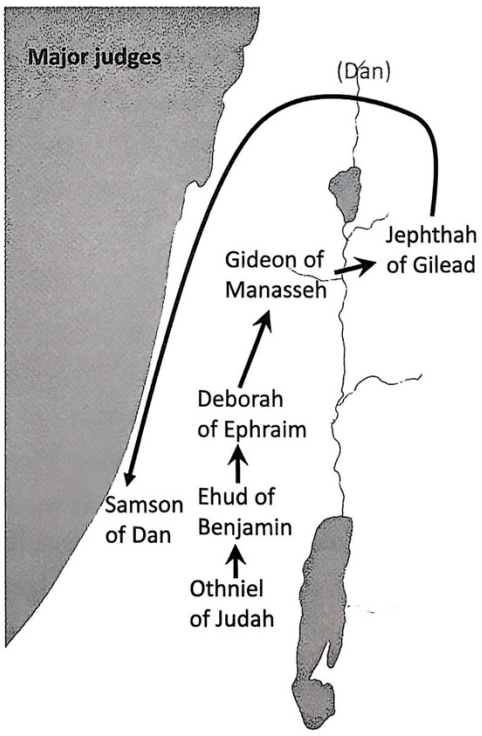
Figure 1.5: General Geographical Orientation of the Tribal Allotments



Figure 1.4: Literary Framework of Tribal Inheritance

Joshua's old age (13:1a)
Israel's incomplete conquest of the land (13:1b–6)
- **Transjordan tribal** inheritance by Moses (13:8–33)
- Land allotment by Eleazar and Joshua by casting lots (14:1–5)
  - Caleb inherits Hebron (14:13–15)
- **Judah's** inheritance (15:1–62), except settling Jebus/Jerusalem (15:63)
  - Caleb inherits Hebron (15:13–15)
  - Joseph's inheritance (16:1–4)
- **Ephraim's** inheritance (16:5–10), except settling Gezer (16:10)
- **Manasseh's** inheritance (17:1–11), except settling Canaanite towns (17:12–13)
  - Joseph needs more land (17:14–18)
  - Casting lots for the other seven tribes (18:1–10)
- **Benjamin's** inheritance (18:11–28)
- **Simeon's** inheritance within Judah (19:1–9)
- **Zebulun's** inheritance (19:10–16)
- **Issachar's** inheritance (19:17–23)
- **Asher's** inheritance (19:24–31)
- **Naphtali's** inheritance (19:32–39)
- **Dan's** inheritance (19:40–48)
  - Joshua's inheritance in Ephraim (19:49–50)
  - Conclusion of inheritance by casting lots (19:51)
- Towns of refuge (20:1–9)
- Towns for **Levites** including cities of refuge (21:1–42)

Yahweh's complete fulfillment to give rest from Israel's enemies (21:43–45)
Transjordan tribes' nearly catastrophic giant altar of witness (22:1–34)
Joshua's old age (23:1–2)



THE (TRUE) RIDER ON THE CLOUDS

Brock Larson

The historical books of the Hebrew bible recount the conquest of the nation of Israel in the land of Canaan. With this came a great deal of temptations to syncretism with the Canaanite deities, along with adopting their forms of worship. This temptation primarily manifested itself in the worship of the Canaanite god Baal, and the mythology that came along with it. This is largely because the religion of the land was based on the idea that the forces of nature are expressions of divine presence and activity.[1] Therefore, to earn the favor of the gods, one must identify the gods responsible for each natural phenomena, and perform the correct ritual to appease the gods.

The argument of this paper is that Isaiah 19:1 and Psalm 29[2] have this polemical use and emphasize that Yahweh, rather than Baal (and other gods of the Canaanite pantheon), is God over the natural forces. The main format of this paper will be to look at primarily, but not exclusively, at the Canaanite god Baal, along with the history and worship that corresponded to it. From there, I will unpack the relationship between Baal and Yahweh that we see in the sections of the OT.

Baal's Place in the Canaanite Pantheon

According to the Ugaritic myths, the head of the Canaanite Pantheon was El. He is considered the ruler of the gods and the cosmos, as his epithets "father of the gods" and "king"

[1] Eugene H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 178.

[2] All text quotations are taken from the New International Version.

testify.[3] El was also given the title "bull," which was also thought to have some connection with fertility but also may have a connection with power and strength.[4] El's principal consort was Asherah, who together with her were often considered "mother and father of other deities."[5]

A second tier of gods is called the "Assembled Body."[6] It is here that the god Baal fits. Baal was the most popular god among the Canaanites, and is mentioned several times throughout Israel's history. The son of Dagan (god of agriculture), Baal was the warrior/storm-god. As such, he became king among the deities after defeating Yam (god of the sea).[7] He was also the "Lord of the Earth" who brought about fertility in the earth. This is seen in one of Baal's epithets: "rider of the clouds," as he was considered the one who brings rain on the earth. His victory over the god of the sea would have assured the people that he had control over the waters, and thus the rain and storm. Pictures found in the temple of the ancient city of Ugarit depict Baal,

> in a striding pose, wearing a helmet decorated with horns, probably symbolizing his divinity (though there may also be a fertility connection), a skirt and a scabbard. In his right hand, raised above his head, is a club, and in his left hand he holds out in front of him an object that is pointed like a spear. These have been interpreted as

[3] John D. Currid, *Against the Gods: The Polemical Theology of the Old Testament* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013), 133.

[4] We see connections to this description in various parts of Israel's history. According to Curtis, "when Aaron (Ex. 32:4) and later Jeroboam (1 Kings 12:28) used the golden calf/bull to symbolize Yahweh, the Israelites were following this religious tradition of El." A. H. W. Curtis, "Canaanite Gods and Religion," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Historical Books*, ed. Bill T. Arnold and H. G. M. Williamson (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 134.

[5] Ibid., 135.

[6] Currid, *Against the Gods*, 133.

[7] D. T. Tsumura, "Canaan, Canaanites," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Historical Books*, ed. Bill T. Arnold and H. G. M. Williamson (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 134.

> symbols of thunder and lightning, respectively. Thus Baal appears as a warrior, armed with the weapons associated with the storm god.[8]

As the storm God, Baal fulfilled a major felt need of the people–rain (and therefore grain). But Baal was also paired with the fertility god Anath, called the "virgin," goddess of war and love.[9] She is emphasized in the story of Baal's encounter with Mot (god of death and the underworld). Baal is challenged by Mot and is defeated by him. But it is Anath that comes to avenge Baal by defeating Mot (an obvious picture of fertility over coming death). The rescuing of Baal by Anath meant that both rain and fertility would again come to the land.[10]

Again, the story of Baal and Anath would have answered the strong needs of the people of the land for rain and fertility. Being new members of this land, there was a great temptation for the Israelites to go after the these Canaanite gods. In them are pictured life and fertility battling death and infertility. For this reason the rituals for the worship of Baal were often extremely sensual and perverse, often centering on sexual activity, since the rainfall attributed to Baal was thought to represent his semen dropping to the earth to fertilize and impregnate the ground.[11] It is clear why Baal worship was such an abomination to Yahweh, the God of Israel.

The Ture Rider on the Clouds

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[8] Curtis, *Dictionary*, 133.

[9] Tsumura, *Dictionary*, 127.

[10] The story of Baal, Mot, and Anath is often paired with the seasons: Baal and Mot reflecting the fertile rainy season and the arid dry season, respectively. But according to Curtis, this view has not been widely accepted, see Curtis, *Dictionary*, 137. But it seems, to the present author, that there are plenty of parallels to make this connection plausible, if not highly probable.

[11] Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests,* 180.

As mentioned above, Baal is described as the "rider of the clouds;" the warrior storm god that has become chief among the deities by his victory over Yam. It is written of Baal,

> Listen to me, almighty Ba'al,
>
> Hear me out, *Rider of the Clouds*[12]

Baal is described as the "Rider of the Clouds" because of his control over the storms and weather. But we see in Isaiah 19:1 that it is Yahweh who is spoken of as the "Rider of the Clouds,"

> An prophecy against Egypt: See, the LORD *rides on a swift cloud* (רֹכֵב עַל־עָב קַל)
> and is coming to Egypt. The idols of Egypt tremble before him, and the hearts of the Egyptians melt with fear.[13]

Or again, in Psalm 68:4 (Heb. 68:5) we see similar language,

> Sing to God, sing in praise of his name, extol him *who rides on the clouds*
>
> (לָרֹכֵב בָּעֲרָבוֹת); rejoice before him– his name is the LORD.

The phrase "rider on the clouds" was attributed to Baal because of his power of bringing rain, fertility, and prosperity to the earth. The texts above show, as Willem VanGemeren points out, "the 'clouds' signify the chariot of God racing through the sky bringing blessing

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[12] Emphasis added. Victor Harold Matthews and Don C. Benjamin, *Old Testament Parallels: Laws and Stories From the Ancient Near East* (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), 250.

[13] What may be missed at times is the subtle Baal polemic in the book of Isaiah as a whole. As Larry Draskevich points out, "At first glance, the absence of direct reference to Baal in the book of Isaiah might make one assume that the ministry God assigned to Isaiah had nothing to do with decrying Baal worship. However, this would miss the creative approaches Isaiah used to penetrate through the hardness of rebellious Israeite hearts." Larry Draskevich , "Isaiah 14 and the Problem of Baal Worship," *Reformed Theological Review* 78, no. 1 (April 2019): 2.

and curse, vindication and vengeance."[14] This emphasizes that it is not Baal who rides on the clouds; Yahweh does!

Psalm 29

There has been considerable discussion around the relationship of Psalm 29 to Canaanite poetry. The Psalm's vocabulary, meter, and structure have strong parallels in Ugaritic literature.[15] Again, the structure itself is meant to demonstrate the superiority of Yahweh over Baal. There are two things showing this polemical relationship in Psalm 29: Firstly, the reference in verse 1 to the "heavenly beings" (בְּנֵי אֵלִים). This is probably a reference to El and Ashera being the father and mother of the Canaanite Pantheon.[16] But as out text makes clear, it is Yahweh who is God of all gods (vv.1–2).

Second is the reference to the "voice of Yahweh" (קוֹל יְהוָה), "thundering" (v. 3) and "flashing" (v. 7) to symbolize storm manifestations. Again, Baal is described as the one who carries the weapons of the storm due to his defeat of the Yam, as seen above. But it is Yahweh who truly wields these weapons; whose voice is "over the mighty waters" (v. 3). Verse 10 points out that "The LORD sits enthroned over the flood, the LORD is enthroned as king forever." Yahweh alone is Lord, not only over the chaotic sea, but he is the one enthroned over all the earth.

[14] Willem VanGemeren, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Psalms*, ed. Tremper Longman and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 516.

[15] Currid, Against the Gods, 136.

[16] Ibid.

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