

Appendix G: Canaanite Gods

Four Principal Canaanite Gods as Discovered at Ras Shamra

I. Introductory remarks about Ras Shamra

- A. Ras Shamra, Arabic name of the dandelion plant, provides the archeologist with tremendous insight into the Canaanite culture.
- B. A library between two great temples in the city contained hundreds of clay tablets with the cuneiform alphabet.
- C. This language, known as Ugaritic, flourished from the middle of the fifteenth and fourteenth centuries B.C., until the destruction of Ras Shamra.
- D. Most of these tablets were religious and show the nature of the Canaanite religion.

II. The four principal gods of Canaan were all important in the epic

- A. El was the head of the epic pantheon.
 - 1. He is known as the "Father of Years" and the begetter of all creation.
 - 2. El is depicted as a bull, thus signifying his strength and leadership.
 - 3. El is seldom active in mythology, and in his relationship with man he is silent.
- B. Asherah was the consort of El. She was a very complex goddess, extremely deceitful and used her sex appeal to get her own way.
 - 1. It was from her womb that the other gods came.
 - 2. This nude goddess possessed tremendous strength and enabled El to create the world by destroying the Sea Dragon.
 - 3. Asherah's overtures to seduce Baal were rejected.
- C. Baal, whose name means "Lord", was the most active of all the Canaanite gods.

1. Hadad, Baal's personal name, was the storm god, was king of heaven and earth and lived in Mount Casius.

2. This warrior god was victorious over the Sea and the River.

3. As El's prime minister, Baal was the chief agricultural deity in Canaan. He personified the march of the seasons. Winter came because Baal died, and spring brought fertility because Baal rose from the dead.

D. Anath was Baal's wife, and in other places she was called the sister-consort of Baal. To the Canaanites, the two titles meant the same thing.

1. As goddess of love and fertility, Anath was responsible for the productivity of animals and men.

2. She was also depicted as a blood-thirsty goddess of war who was not satisfied until she waded in blood up to her neck.

III. Startling conclusions from Canaanite polytheism

A. The deities, of course, were only reflections of man. One cannot attribute moral motivation to them.

B. The Canaanite priests did not urge their people to behave morally.

C. Sexual perversion was not only proper but was, in itself, a part of the rite of worship.

D. There was religious truth mingled with this complex system of polytheistic perversion.

E. The priests taught the people to be barbaric in their social relationships.

F. The God of Israel showed mercy to unborn children when He moved to exterminate this pagan idolatry.

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